

English Version



Manrique and his Lanzarote project Utopia actualized?

**An artist's programme
for the aesthetic-social transformation
of an island**

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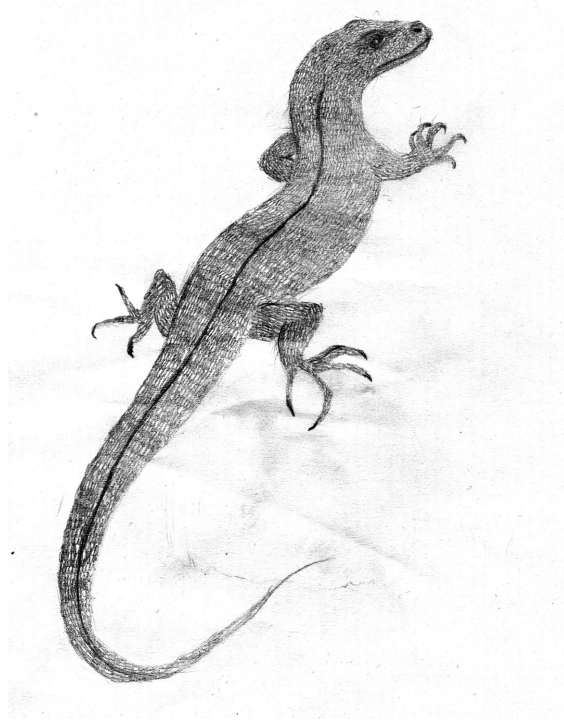


To my beloved family



Acknowledgements

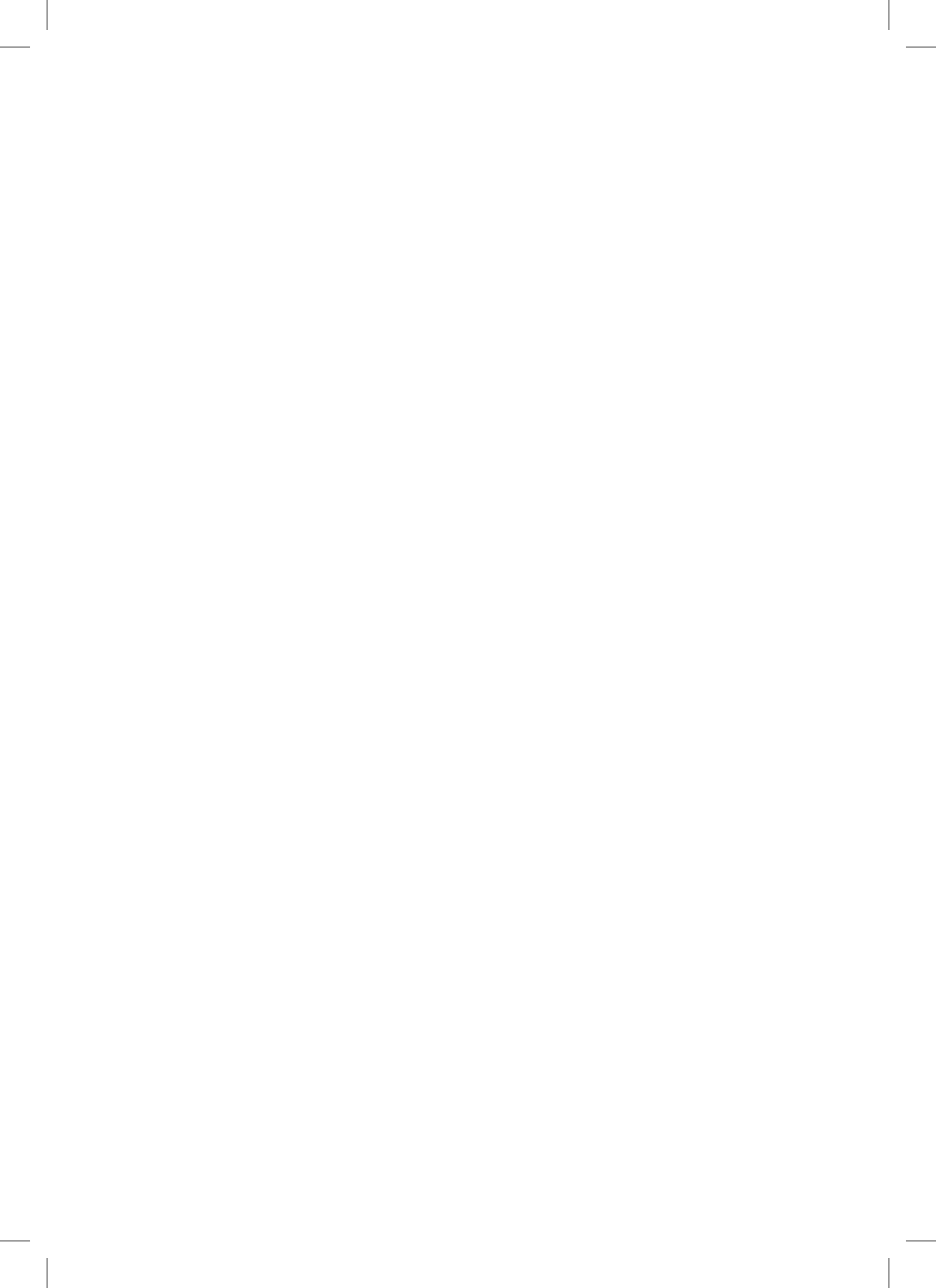
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Drawing of a lizard by Basia Kloc-Konkołowicz, aged 8, daughter of the author, during a visit to Lanzarote

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Introduction



The less important, somewhat philosophical introduction

Surrounded by the waves of the Atlantic Ocean, the volcanic island of Lanzarote – whose size does not exceed the human measure and whose climate is one of the mildest and most pleasant on Earth – appears as a place that is virtually predestined for the actualization of utopia. In recent history this island indeed underwent the unique attempt of actualizing such a utopia. We are not talking about one of those 'utopias' (or rather: 'dystopias') that in the process of failing miserably at the attempt to shape the human being in accordance with its ideological requirements ravaged large parts of the world in the 20th century. Rather, we are talking about an aesthetic utopia that was meant to transform this island into a suitable place for the unadulterated, free, and dignified human life. The Canary Island of Lanzarote owed this great attempt to one of its best and most original sons: the artist César Manrique. The present treatise undertakes the modest attempt to answer the question of whether this attempt succeeded or failed; or, to be more precise, what this success

or failure meant (and still means) for the island, for its inhabitants, and for the outside observer.

In this little book I would like to undertake the attempt to understand the phenomenon of the island of Lanzarote not primarily as a real place but as an artistic-social plan that acquired actual dimensions and thereby became, on the one hand, an actualized utopia and, on the other, one that possibly failed. "Manrique is Lanzarote and Lanzarote is Manrique" – this statement by Frei Otto¹ is the starting point of this little study that wants to be understood neither as an art-historical treatise on Manrique's works nor as a sociological study of the societal developments of this island in the Atlantic Ocean. Rather, this little book is a perspectively conceived reflection on the meaning, the execution, and the result of the original scenario that the artist Manrique devised under the name 'Lanzarote' and that he himself summarized as the unity of life, man, and art (*vida-hombre-arte*).

The following text is not constructed like a typical scholarly treatise. It is potentially too short and capricious to qualify as such a work. However, it is neither a literary sketch, for it relies too heavily on a somewhat orderly terminology and proceeds in accordance with a distinctive method. It is likely that neither a person interested in Manrique's works nor a lover of sophisticated art travel guides will be satisfied by this book. It would probably be most fitting to designate this text as an essay that is situated on the threshold of social philosophy and aesthetics. Whether this attempt to determine in advance the character of the following

¹ See Fernando Gómez Aguilera, *César Manrique: la escritura en, de, con, por la vida*, in: *César Manrique, La palabra encendida*, selección de textos e introducción de Fernando Gómez Aguilera (León: Universidad de León, 2005).

pages is successful or rather a manifestation of the helplessness of its author will be left to the reader to decide.

But even if the second option were true, I nevertheless consider it important to undertake the attempt to close a certain gap with my essay; namely the gap between two types of writings and two kinds of reflections that are encapsulated in these writings; the gap between social philosophy and aesthetics. It should be clear that both share a border, that one senses that they are related in many respects, that they supply arguments and examples to each other. And yet, they typically refer to each other only in a more or less external manner, as if ultimately the border between social reality and the aesthetic sphere could not be crossed after all. I believe that the case of Manrique can also be seen as an attempt to finally sublimate this border – namely in a concrete manner that is rooted in history and society. This book is meant to (at least) narrow a second gap as well: the gap between the history of art and that of philosophical aesthetics. Consequently, the study of this individual case is meant to be understood neither as the philosophical attempt to bring out Manrique's aesthetics, nor as the subsumption of his work under concrete aesthetic-philosophical conceptions (which the artist certainly would not have wanted). Instead, it constitutes the attempt to unfold the philosophical narrative of the utopian promise of art in a concrete place, oeuvre, and artist.

The encounter between Lanzarote and Manrique was not a coincidence, not only for the simple, unmediated reason that the island is the birth place of the artist. In order to speak about Lanzarote thoroughly it is not possible to simply describe one of the many islands in the Atlantic Ocean. Rather, one always already moves in a mythical-symbolic terrain

that, like a hologram, is projected onto a real, geographically determinate place. The Canary Islands have always been a place where myth and reality coincided, and it is precisely due to this coincidence that they are a unique place in the world. Every travel guide to the Canary Islands begins with a chapter that relates how in antiquity these islands were described as the Isles of the Blessed, as the Elysian Fields, as the Garden of the Hesperides, and even as remnants of Atlantis. Time and again attempts have been undertaken to solve the tricky question of cause and effect: Were the Canary Islands discovered first and were they later – after the Phoenicians expelled the Greeks from the Atlantic Ocean with the help of monster narratives, or after Carthage closed the Straits of Gibraltar to foreign ships for commercial reasons – transformed into a mythical landscape that was exclusively inhabited by the old gods and legendary heroes? Or did the myth of the Isles of the Blessed, with its religious function, arise independently, only to be transferred ever farther west to newly discovered islands in a kind of secularization of the original story? The Canary Islands would become the final destination of this journey. The answer to this question is immaterial for the study at hand, even though it is by itself undeniably an important one. It is a fact that the myth of the Isles of the Blessed and the remnants of Atlantis became associated with the real Canary Islands – through literary, anthropological, and archeological narratives – in such a way that it now constitutes an irreplaceable pillar of the identity of the island. The Isles of the Blessed and Atlantis became actual in the Canary archipelago as the fundamental layer of its self-interpretation and self-understanding.

And it is precisely this mythical heritage, or, more precisely, the interplay of myth and reality, of narrative and fact, of plan and actuality, that can be sensed throughout Manrique's biography and work. It follows from

the essence of Lanzarote, which is always already utopian, that Manrique wants to actualize his utopia here on Lanzarote; or, to be more precise: that he wants to conceive his native island as utopia and transform it accordingly. By doing this, Lanzarote is meant to become what it once already was: Atlantis – a chosen place where life, culture, and humanity can be totally reconciled with each other. This idea is not meant to remain up in the air but is to become a tangible reality; and it is precisely this feature that renders the case of Manrique so significant. What turns the artist's proposal into a unique object of reflection is not just the formulation of an aesthetic utopia but its rootedness in the concrete vehicle of an economic, social, and eco-political model. The success, but also the failure, of his undertaking is worth thinking about not only because it contains an exciting story but also because it provides an insight in the state of late-capitalist society, its dreams and nightmares, its opportunities and dangers.

The method of presentation of this aesthetic-social plan is meant to mimic the structure of a labyrinth: it tests many paths without wanting or being able to find the royal one. Next we will present the success and the failure of this project: the former is as glorious as the latter is devastating. The undecided, shimmering ending of the book is not only an invitation to the readers to judge for themselves whether the attempt to establish a new Atlantis on Lanzarote was successful, or whether this new Atlantis has in the meantime sunk again beneath the waves of the ocean. Furthermore, it is an expression of my conviction that the result of Manrique's undertaking is rather reminiscent of another island: one that appears to be real at times, and that appears to be an illusion at others. This island is the island of San Borondón, with its shimmering existence.

Fernando Gómez Aguilera's excellent selection of Manrique's texts titled "La palabra encendida" ("The ignited word"), which was published in 2005, will serve as the foundation of our reconstruction of Manrique's aesthetic-social project of utopia.² All quotations from Manrique's writings refer to this edition and were translated from the Spanish by the author of this little book.³ Throughout the entire treatise we are also joined by Theodor W. Adorno's "Aesthetic Theory". The choice of this text is owed not only to the 'Frankfurt' affiliation of the author but has reasons that go deeper. Manrique understands himself – and is universally understood – as a modern artist. Adorno's now "classic" "Aesthetic Theory" constitutes a preeminent attempt of interpreting modern art in terms of its aims, forms, and limits. Even though there is no shortage of other theories of modern art, the specificity of the Frankfurt version consists in the discovery and penetration of the complex connections that exist between modern art and the social reality that is touched by it. There hardly exists a theory that lends itself to being a better reflective mirror for deciphering the utopian conception of an artist who throughout his life found his art embedded in a social context. The keyword "utopian" names another reason: The idea of the utopian impulse that necessarily inheres in art constitutes a pillar of both Adorno's theory and Manrique's aesthetic conceptions. Even though both are very similar in this regard, a huge difference exists between them with respect to their assessment of the possibilities that are open to art for the actualization of its utopian impetus. To anticipate an important point that will be developed more

² César Manrique, *La palabra encendida, selección de textos e introducción de Fernando Gómez Aguilera* (León: Universidad de León, 2005).

³ Translator's note: For the English translation some of the author's own German translations were amended in order to ensure that the English translation remains faithful to the Spanish original. At the same time, the translator has endeavoured to preserve or take into account the author's own interpretative decisions and translation choices as much as possible.

fully later: While Adorno engages critically with every attempt of visually concretizing the utopian element inherent in art, Manrique considers it to be his task to give the aesthetic idea of utopia a concrete social form. This book intends neither to interpret Manrique by means of Adorno's concepts, nor to instruct or correct Adorno with the help of Manrique's conceptions. Such hubris has no place in this treatise. Rather, my aim is to present – against the background of modern aesthetics – the concrete attempt of actualizing an aesthetic utopia in a determinate place at a determinate moment in history. The tension between Adorno's theory and Manrique's aesthetic practice is only a path on which the tragic dynamic of this actualization, or also of the frustration of art's utopian promise, is meant to manifest itself.

What are the insights that we gain by presenting Manrique's (un-?)successful attempt of actualizing the aesthetic-social utopia on Lanzarote? We gain at least two: the more superficial one pertains to the tension between success and happiness in late capitalism – the island falls victim to its own success. The more profound one: every place in the world fixes its future through its narratives. Lanzarote, and more generally each of the Canary Islands, tells the story of the actualization of its utopia by moving narratively over the arc that stretches from Atlantis to San Borondón; that is to say, between the sketched-out, promised aesthetic and social happiness that indeed becomes actual, but which then appears now as actuality and now as an illusion. It is inscribed in the DNA of its own mythical narratives that Lanzarote will appear as the place of the promised utopia and then as the alternating appearance of the deliverance of this promise and of the failure of this deliverance. This unique narrative, which is universally understandable even though it is actualized only on these concrete islands in the Atlantic Ocean,

teaches us that the art of foretelling the future is by no means a rare and difficult one. Quite on the contrary: only the correct interpretation of the foundational texts of a place, a people, and a tradition allows for the remote horizon of the future to appear.

Prologue



Labyrinth

Out of the mysterious fog that envelops the beginnings of European history and culture one of the decisive metaphors of this culture emerges: the labyrinth. As is well known, this construction, conceived and built by Daedalus, served both as a prison and a hideout for the monstrosity born from the womb of Pasiphaë, the monster who is also a creature of divine descent: the Minotaur.¹ The well-known story of the man-eating god-animal-human who was kept concealed in the labyrinth can also be read as one of the first European narratives about the attractive and at the same time terrifying (un)attainability of truth. In the centre of the labyrinth there lives a creature of divine descent who unites in itself animal and human nature. As such, the Minotaur becomes the symbol of the absolute, because he unites, as it were, the

¹ On the complex connections of the Minoan religious cults in which Ariadne appears as the 'ruler of the labyrinth', see especially the classic, impressive treatise by Karl Kerényi: Karl Kerényi, *Dionysos. Urbild des unzerstörbaren Lebens* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994).

three 'levels' of beings (how they used to be called time and time again in Greek antiquity): the divine, the animal, and the human, who dwells halfway between the other two. Here he lives hidden and concealed and thus, like truth itself, is invisible. And yet, he demonstrates his efficacy again and again by demanding and devouring human sacrifices. Like truth itself, he is feared and loved. Spared sacrifice out of (Ariadne's) love and instead kept in the hiding place of the labyrinth, the Minotaur shall not be seen, and yet he is feared: the human sacrifices that are offered to him show distinctly religious traits.

If we interpret this story along these lines, then the adventure of Theseus presents itself as the attempt to reach truth itself. But Theseus wanders through the labyrinth not only in order to discover this truth and to engage with it, but in order to vanquish it with his magical sword, to kill it. As is well known, he is given a thread by Ariadne – the (half-) sister of the monster – so that he would not become lost; this thread is meant to help him to leave the labyrinth after having vanquished the monstrous truth. Through this thread the human absolute (in the divine figure of Ariadne) wants to connect with absolute truth and become one with it. Ariadne's thread is nothing other than the logical thread of argumentation that always has to remain reversible if it is to actually lead to the truth. The researcher wanders along Ariadne's logical thread that accompanies him on the search for truth: He is at all times able to trace back his argumentative steps to the beginning of thought and knowledge. Myriads of (wrong) paths lead to the hidden monster, which stands for the absolute truth that can only be reached asymptotically. Theseus the researcher needs multiple threads from Ariadne: by choosing different entrances, he attempts to find the right path through the labyrinth. And yet, each time he only reaches the final

wall that separates him from the monstrous absolute truth. He can hear its uncanny roar, he can sense its closeness with fascination and fear, but he never comes fully face to face with its divine-human-animal form. On this interpretation, the monster is not that god-animal-human who is concealed at the center of the labyrinth. What is monstrous is rather the attempt to forget the human, middle course and the desire to vanquish the absolute truth.

I would like to understand the quest on which I embark in the present little book according to the model of the thusly paraphrased narrative, whose ending is free of bloodshed and takes a rather agnostic turn. Accordingly, my aim is not to reconstruct out of the scattered remarks in which Manrique explains his aesthetic-social utopia a unified conception that, ostensibly, lies behind these remarks and that would, ultimately, serve (like the magical sword) to vanquish the essential truth of Manrique's art. My point is rather to search for the truth of this art on different paths without the presumption that any one of the paths could lead to truth itself. We will approach the utopia from which Manrique develops his aesthetic-social conception from different directions, yet we will not claim that in doing this we have circled or vanquished this utopia. It is for this reason that we call the following chapters "approaches": each of them is a new attempt at understanding the truth of Manrique's artistic creation, and the truth of the island of Lanzarote, by way of different kinds of argumentative threads. We will wander through the labyrinth of Manrique's aesthetics in a playful manner. Arguably, the artist would have found this method, which is derived from the epistemological reinterpretation of the myth of the Minotaur, not unappealing:

"Absolute truth does not exist. In the face of something that is so unknown and fascinating as existence itself, the best thing is to understand life as investigation and play."²

Atlantis

What is the link between Atlantis and the labyrinth? Mythologically there is quite a bit if we consider that the monstrosity of the Minotaur is a consequence of the wrath of Poseidon, who had previously gifted the white bull (the future father of the Minotaur) to Minos the King of Crete. This is the same Poseidon who had handed the power over Atlantis to his son Atlas. What is, however, much more important for our purposes is the function that both myths receive in the context of this little study. As we have indicated, in the case of the labyrinth, it is the asymptotic, experimental form of the investigation of Manrique's aesthetics. In the case of the myth of Atlantis, by contrast, it is the heart of the problem that will occupy us: the promise of utopia.

The myth of Atlantis – conceived or bequeathed by Plato – is one of the most well-known European narratives. It has been introduced and analyzed to the smallest detail so many times that it seems unnecessary today to present it yet another time. Of this universally known story only a few elements are of interest to us, which I want to mention here: first and foremost, there is no doubt that Plato uses the narrative of Atlantis – irrespective of the amount of truth that the story contains – as an opportunity to depict an ideal political-social state and its gradual self-destruction. As soon as the greed for money and power took hold of the Atlanteans, the original harmony, the balanced, ideal state, perishes. The

² Manrique, 59.

gods then decide that Atlantis sink beneath the waves of the ocean. What follows from this is, firstly, that utopia can be actualized only on an island that is isolated from the other parts of the world; but this utopia can also perish and be transformed into the Golden Age of the past, namely when the original virtues are abandoned – which is the result of the all-too-human hubris and the ensuing destruction of the natural order. The myth of Atlantis shows utopia as an actualized but squandered possibility.

But that is not all: this possibility lives on in the memory of humankind. As soon as the memory of what has been lost is joined with the consciousness of the causes of the loss, this memory becomes a promise. And it is precisely this promise of utopia that the following pages are about. That which once was can take place again in the future: utopia must not remain but a memory, it must be transformed into a task.

For César Manrique, whose aesthetic-social conception of utopia constitutes the subject proper of this short treatise, this task took on a concrete form. He was concerned with the promise of utopia that he wanted to see actualized on his native island of Lanzarote. Since Lanzarote's mythical pre-history views the island as the remnant of the once mighty empire of Atlantis that was saved from catastrophe (just like the other Canary Islands), the memory of utopia can become a concrete task here. As we will see, art itself is capable of bringing the once sunken subterranean space of utopia back to the surface of the earth. In this respect art resembles the power of volcanoes, which carry that which is concealed to the surface of the earth again. In Manrique's conception, the lore of Atlantis, the promise of utopia, and the art and volcanology of Atlantis melt into a constellation that lets the happy state of harmony become actual again on the portion of Atlantis that was saved.

"We have managed ... to live in a volcanological space of Atlantis, which is unique on this planet."³

Whether this newly established state can last permanently is, however, questionable. As is generally known, Thomas More – the inventor of the concept of utopia and the author of the eponymous work – already toyed with the ambiguity from which the term "utopia" is derived:

"Wherefore not Utopie, but rather rightly / My name is Eutopie; a place of felicity."⁴

In contrast to the u-topia, which designates the non-place or the 'nowhere', the eu-topia is a good, successful place of harmony and felicity. Since the publication of More's work countless treatises have been written that all seek to interpret this etymological play on words. Did More use it to signal that the good state could not be actualized anywhere? Or was he ultimately being ironic and wanted to say that he had not describe a good and happy order but one that *fortunately* could not be actualized anywhere? For our purposes it will suffice to keep in mind the tension that is starting to show here between the promise of utopia and the (im) possibility of its actualization. The main reason for this is that even for Manrique over time the state of utopia on Lanzarote, which is described as actual, is in danger of being lost beneath the waves of greed for money and power. It is quite possible that the way out of the collision of the three factors mentioned – Atlantis, eu-topia, and u-topia – passes through another mythical island: the island of San Borondón. This Canary Island,

³ Manrique, 82.

⁴ Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. William Dallam Armes (New York: Macmillan Company, 1912), 230 ("A Short Metre of Utopia").

which was once charted on maps and which was said to have been sighted by the crews of ships, does, after all, seem to not exist in our dimension. It is an island that sometimes appears, as if it were totally real and tangible, only to elude our grasp again the next moment. So perhaps not Lanzarote is the utopian resurrection of Atlantis but rather the searched-for island of San Borondón: a gleaming place of harmony and felicity that sometimes, however, disappears from view, thus turning out to be the squandered possibility of utopia. We will have to pursue the question of whether this is true on different paths that lead through the labyrinth of Manrique's aesthetic-social project. We will attempt to enter this labyrinth through five different gates that carry the following inscriptions: nature, man [*der Mensch*], art, development, tradition.



**Chapter I.
First Approach:
Nature**



According to César Manrique, nature constitutes the absolute horizon both for man and for art and the progress of human culture. It is also the source of man as such, of his thinking and actions, even when he foolishly opposes nature through his thinking and actions. Furthermore, it is the source of the energy that rules art and that empowers the artist to create. Even though much can be undertaken that goes against nature and even though human beings undertake a lot that goes against nature, through this behavior human beings harm themselves and act not only against their own interest but, first and foremost, against their own happiness. For nature is the main source of human happiness, namely not as the dead object of human worship and wonder that has already become [*geworden*], but as the active power that creates and constantly changes everything. Even if we absolutely want to decorate Manrique with the label "ecologist", his thinking and his actions are ecological not for pragmatic reasons; he thinks and acts ecologically not because he is someone who is aware of the catastrophes that are awaiting us as the result of our mindless domination of nature, but rather because

he views nature as the true source and as the horizon of being-human [*Menschsein*].

In no way this is to be taken as a homespun nature romanticism or as a widespread misunderstanding of Rousseau, according to which man ought to return [*zurückkehren*] to the state of nature. Admittedly, nature, as already created, as *natura naturata*, constitutes the starting point of all human knowledge, reflection and, possibly, also mindfulness. And yet, Manrique places the emphasis on the active side of nature, on the concept of nature that in the history of philosophy and in cultural history is known as *natura naturans*, i.e. as "naturing" (i.e. creating) nature.¹ This creative power is the essence of Manrique's concept of nature. It does not stand in opposition to human (and artistic) freedom but underpins this freedom; provided that the latter is understood correctly: namely as the freedom to create. Accordingly, man is primarily connected with nature not because he himself is a part of the natural creation, not because he himself is also a part of the already created nature, but rather because he possesses in himself the creative power through which he can create something new. Ultimately, this power turns out to be related to nature's creative power, if it is not downright identical with respect to its source. The concept of *abundancia*, of abundance, appears to be the key to understanding César Manrique's dynamic concept of nature. Nature creates, and it does so in *abundancia*, it generates abundantly forms, shapes, colours and smells, without calculating, without economizing, without regretting later on the quantity and the quality of this production. And yet, nature produces in accordance with one great orderly plan that

¹ For the paradigmatic account of the distinction of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* see Baruch de Spinoza, *Ethics, with The Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected Letters*, transl. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992).

has so far remained incomprehensible and mysterious for humankind. The backdrop of Manrique's thinking and feeling is constituted by the notion of an inexorable but strictly ordered natural productivity that is so enormous that there is nothing left to do for man other than to reclaim [*rückbesinnen*] his position within nature, to discover for himself the gargantuan production of nature's power and to turn it into the source of usefulness and of felicity.

If, however, one employs such an immediate concept of nature in the industrial or even the post-industrial age, one immediately arouses the suspicion of pushing the naïve-romantic view of nature without reflecting adequately on the social formation conditions of this concept of nature. György Lukács once wrote that, "Nature is a societal category."² Joachim Ritter expressed more or less the same view in his classic essay on landscape, in which he portrayed the late 'discovery' and arrangement of landscape that was conditioned by the industrial development.³ The insight that the beauty of nature – and even more that nature as an aesthetic object of a special rank – is a relatively late, historically and socially conditioned cultural phenomenon that can be explained, first and foremost, as a form of compensation (J. Ritter, O Marquard), has long been one of the cornerstones of modern aesthetics. Thanks to this compensation, modern man, who is burdened with industrialism's impositions and who is completely at the mercy of artificial things, is able to abreact his 'urban' sufferings. Yet, Manrique's concept of nature is by no means strictly opposed to culture and society. Even if it cannot be called

² György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, transl. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), 234.

³ See Joachim Ritter, "Landschaft. Zur Funktion des Ästhetischen in der modernen Gesellschaft," in *Subjektivität. Sechs Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), 141-163.

'dialectical', Manrique sees a strong relation of interdependence between nature, man, and the culture that man fashions. How does Manrique conceive of this factual mediatedness of nature notwithstanding its ideal of an original immediacy? It is important to answer this question, because it allows us to discover a mix of conservative, elitist, but also social-critical elements in his thinking and his creation. Manrique would certainly not endorse the radical view that nature is a societal category. Rather, man stands to nature in a relation of hearsay. In one of his poems Rafael Alberti called Manrique the shepherd of the winds and volcanoes (*pastor de vientos y volcanes*)⁴, and by doing this Alberti saw man's position, or more concretely: the artist's position, quite correctly. Nature waits for man so that he can express its essence: be that in language, be that in art or architecture. As such man stands in his relation to nature like Heidegger's poet stands in his relation to being. He is the shepherd of nature and brings it to appearance through his thinking, actions, and creation. Here we come up against a paradox: Does this mean that nature itself cannot manifest itself, cannot render itself objective? Put differently: Does this view imply that the process of appearance requires the nature of man? Not in the trivial sense that no human experience (and thus no experience of nature) would be possible without man; but in the much more radical sense that man, as the interpreter of the essence of nature, plays a key role for nature itself?

In order to tackle this paradox we must take into account another dimension of Manrique's concept of nature: namely the artist's view of nature not merely as *natura naturans*, i.e. as creative nature, but also as *natura abscondita*, i.e. as the nature that conceals itself. This becomes

⁴ See Rafael Alberti, *Lancelote. Primera estrofa*, in: Manrique, *La palabra encendida*, 23.

especially apparent in the description of the effect that, according to Manrique, his native island has on the newly arrived guest. It says: "The island does not want to be understood at first sight, as if it protected itself against a massive invasion of vulgarity."⁵ Manrique often describes the gloomy and depressing impression that the island's lunar (moon-like) landscape has on the observer, as if it wanted to deter him, as if it wanted to protect itself against his intrusion. Of Vicente Vela, whom Manrique had invited to Lanzarote, he says, for instance, that he "was frightened" by the landscape and the island had "rejected" him.⁶ It was not Vela who had rejected the island: the island itself had closed itself off in front of his eyes. This is precisely one of the possibilities that nature has at its disposal: to conceal itself, to close itself off, to not lay bare its own beauty and creative power. This is Manrique's only explanation for the fact that Lanzarote's landscape, which in fact he regards as one of the most interesting and most beautiful in the whole world, was for many decades, if not centuries, considered to be frightening, barren and unpleasant to man. "For a long time," writes the artist, "people thought that the landscape {of Lanzarote} was terrible and uninhabitable."⁷ Neither the people's view nor the fashion has changed; rather, at a certain point in history the island opened itself to the eyes of the reflective but not of the 'vulgar' observer. Nevertheless Manrique considers the deterrent power of the landscape of Lanzarote that prevailed in earlier times to be, as it were, a blessing for the island. Without it, the island would have fallen victim to the mindless and corrupt massive tourism industry decades ago. The deterring effect that was exerted by the concealing

⁵ Manrique, 35.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 26.

nature of the island has practically saved Lanzarote's environment, its architecture, and its landscape from the vulgarity of the massive and mindless touristic overbuilding.

If nature, and in our case the nature of an island, is able to conceal or reveal itself, this implies that this nature is more than that which manifests itself. Here Manrique approaches in his own, original manner a category of Kantian aesthetics that Adorno revived around the same time: the category of natural beauty.⁸ For Adorno, natural beauty is precisely this 'more' that nature is and that points beyond the empirically given. "What is beautiful in nature is what appears to be more than what is literally there."⁹ And elsewhere he writes: "Nature is beautiful in that it appears to say more than it is."¹⁰ Thus, natural beauty is made possible by the fact that nature conceals within itself potentials that still need to be realized. This means that nature itself contains a dimension of futurity, which allows both Adorno and Manrique to understand nature not as the sanctuary that lies far before all cultural and social progress, but as the promise of a different future. That which is concealed in nature is precisely that part of it that has not yet become, that which has not yet externalized itself but which shines through what has already been externalized and which stirs hope. What makes nature beautiful is less what it shows than what it promises by means of what it shows. Adorno gets to the heart of the matter when he pointedly writes in his radical fashion: "so long as nature is defined only through its antithesis

⁸ See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, transl. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), §42.

⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, transl. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), 70–71.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

to society, it is not yet what it appears to be.”¹¹ The power to both hide and manifest itself, to conceal itself shyly or jealously at one time, and to show itself with full force at another, is suggestive of the concept of play. For Manrique, nature is not only creative and self-concealing, it is also a playful nature – *natura naturata*, *natura abscondita*, *natura ludens*. This playful aspect is inherent to life as such: life cannot be had, nor be preserved, without play; it can neither be understood, nor can it unfold. Manrique’s recommendation – that life, including the personal life of the artist, and possibly also the life of every individual, be understood as play, as a field of possibilities and as a domain for experimentation – has to be understood in this context rather than in a ‘Nietzschean’ one. Only when the artist – and possibly every artist of life – understands his existence as an experiment, as a play of possibilities, does he live in tune with nature. It is not simply an ‘ecological’ life that can be viewed as a life that is in tune with nature, but only the life that is properly understood – namely as an experimental creation – and that is lived in accordance with this knowledge.

Nature creates incessantly, but it conceals this creation from the sensual, vulgar-superficial eye of the observer; and by playing with man, nature invites man to be playful with his own self. As *natura naturata*, *natura abscondita*, and *natura ludens*, nature takes on humanoid traits. Manrique does not shy away from describing nature in categories of humanoid behaviour. In one impressive, quasi-poetic passage in which Manrique elucidates the origins of his conception of *Jameos del agua* this comes out with special clarity. In this passage the artist describes the night that he had spent inside a *jameo* – a lava tunnel that later he would transform into

¹¹ Ibid., 66.

one of his most famous artworks (*Jameos del Agua*) – and the impressions that he had collected during this unique attempt of communicating with nature itself:

"I wanted to communicate {with the *jameo*} and wanted him {the *jameo*} tell me his totalizing secret. That night all my senses opened up so that I would begin to hear the sounds in a language that I understood intuitively ... I began to comprehend everything: I heard his {the *jameo*'s} call very clearly and heard that he asked me to help him to present his gigantic beauty to the world. I was surprised by his narcissism {!}, by his consciousness {*sentido*} and by his awareness of his own importance. He wanted to be seen and to be presented in his grand festive attire. ... It was obvious that his beauty had {hitherto} not be recognized"¹².

We would go totally wrong if we wanted to understand these sentences as a series of metaphors. It appears that what Manrique describes here is his factual experience, the beginning of his artistic creation [*Schaffen*] in the sense of the creation [*Schöpfens*] of a concrete artwork. It is not nature as a whole, not the totality of nature ("the All"), that speaks to him but the *jameo*, the lava tunnel, which (its magnitude notwithstanding) only constitutes a part of nature. This shows the multifaceted ways in which nature can appear to man as soon as he opens his senses. The lava tunnel shows itself as being aware of its own beauty, and, at the same time, as being desirous of presenting itself in its beauty – because human beings had until now not *properly seen* and not *recognized* this beauty. But that is not all: the *jameo* is jealous and narcissistic. It is aware of its beauty; of *only* its beauty. It wants that its beauty, not the abstract beauty of nature as such (or as whole), be presented. Nature proceeds

¹² Manrique, 84-85.



César Manrique
Jameos del Agua



César Manrique
Jameos del Agua

concretistically; it manifest itself as concrete beauty, as a singular individual phenomenon. Here as well (and perhaps especially here) nature proves itself to be guarantor of human individuality, and thus also of human freedom. The aspect of free, playful, and experimental creation mentioned earlier is thus joined by the accentuation of individuality and its irreplaceability.

With this view Manrique again comes close to Adorno's aesthetics: "every individual object of nature that is experienced as beautiful presents itself as if it were the only beautiful thing on earth; this is passed on to every artwork."¹³ One could add: This is also true of the freedom of the individual. By mirroring, saving, and preserving in itself what is concrete in nature, nature harbours the possibility and the promise of the true individualization, of the inextinguishable particularity and irreplaceability, of the individual. Nature always appears individually, whereby it teaches art to lay claim to the irreplaceable, exclusive individuality of the artworks. In turn, by factually making this claim, art reminds man of another type of unactualized individuation, one that would turn him into a particular but not a lonely being, one that is irreplaceable but not isolated. In this manner, the 'narcissism of the beautiful natural object, its 'awareness' of its own uniqueness and its 'desire' to demonstrate its own beauty to the world and to 'compel' this world to admire it, is a presentiment of every person's entitlement to be accepted as the particular person who they are and not another, to be recognized and to be treated with respect. If the reader is at first astonished by Manrique's use of concepts such as *narcissism* – terms which are typically used to designate egocentric, anti-social attitudes – for the description of natural beauty, this astonishment

¹³ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 70.

is quite justified. Natural beauty, which manifests itself as a jealous and narcissistic particularity that excludes all other natural beauties, is anti-social in a double sense: for one, it is anti-social because *qua* pre-social phenomenon it has nothing to do (and wants to have nothing to do) with the universalization that is characteristic of modern society. The uniqueness of each beautiful natural phenomenon is in danger of disappearing as soon as it is reproduced 'postauratically', for example in tourist brochures. And yet, the 'more' of natural beauty that one senses, for example, during the sunset on Santorini does not disappear even when it has been reproduced a thousand times. Secondly, natural beauty is anti-social because it animates man to lay claim to his right to particularity that the administered social world denies him.

On this path the artist from Lanzarote discovers something in nature that seems to be related to the old Kantian concept of the sublime. At the same time, however, he changes the meaning of this feeling completely. In Kant the sublime, whose examples are, by the way, taken from the domain of nature, exerts a force on the mind of the observer that is in equal measure attractive and repellent. It produces admiration, but at the same time the admirer feels repelled by the magnitude and the threatening nature of the phenomenon, feels referred back to himself. But in this situation he discovers in himself that which places him above the natural, external sublime: namely his moral autonomy.¹⁴ Thus he is able to reclaim the sublimity of nature and is able to express, together with the philosopher from Königsberg, his admiration for the "starry heavens above me" and, at the same time, for the "moral law within me", which appears to be even

¹⁴ "Hence, sublimity is contained not in any thing of nature, but only in our mind, insofar as we can become conscious of our superiority to nature within us, and thereby also to nature outside us (as far as it influences us)." (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 123 [§28]).

more powerful.¹⁵ Natural beauty has a related effect on Manrique, albeit one that is distinct from Kant's moral law. At first the observer of the *jameo* is intimidated: the mysterious profundity of this natural phenomenon is unable to frighten him off in the way that the lunar (moon-like) landscape of Lanzarote had already frightened off so many. But then the person who does not run away and who dares to take up a kind of communication with nature attempts to understand the language of this natural phenomenon and its hidden longing. As soon as he factually achieves this understanding, he is shaken in his essence: he is surprised by how self-assured, narcissistic and convinced of its own beauty a natural phenomenon can be. The true understanding of natural beauty – a becoming-aware of its irreplaceability – would have to awake in the admiring subject the feeling of a new sublimity, the desire for true particularity and for the preservation of his own and unique individuality. Something lies concealed in us that, while it may not elevate us *above* natural beauty, places us at any rate on the *same level*: the claim to uniqueness and irreplaceability. As soon as man finds his way around Manrique's view of nature, two things fill him with an increasing wonder: the uniqueness of natural beauty and the irreplaceability of every human individual.

This irreplaceable part of nature is also representative of nature as a totality; it is *pars pro toto*, as a unique natural phenomenon it mirrors the essence of all of nature. The phenomenon of the *jameo* shows what we have previously tried to term *natura abscondita* and what Manrique himself conceives as *profundidad*, the profundity of nature. The thesis that nature loves to conceal itself turns this concealment into a *universal*, as

¹⁵ See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, transl. Mary Gregor, revised edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 129 [5:161].

it were, *abstract*, attribute that is supposed to inhere in every natural phenomenon. Here the desire for true individuality is in danger of reverting to pure ideology, in the same way as this has happened for a long time in the world of advertisement. As long as the sentence "Everyone is unique!" is not grasped in its deep-seated truth and is instead transformed into an advertisement slogan, it loses its credibility and becomes one of the many means of late-capitalism's mechanism of assimilation [*Gleichschaltung*]. A related danger looms in the domain of the aesthetics of nature: as soon as one attributes a unique beauty to every place, this 'unique beauty' is transformed into a universal characterization of all places and natural phenomena and thus into a repetitive quality.

Is it possible to escape the dialectic of the universal and the particular at least in the context of aesthetic theory? One possibility would be to make the thesis of the uniqueness of natural beauty plausible with the help of a particular natural phenomenon. This would evidently lead one beyond an aesthetics that follows Adorno and would venture boldly in the direction of a thesis that, at first, will sound improbable and baffling: namely the thesis that 'the' aesthetic theory does not exist and that there is always only *an* aesthetic theory of the concrete natural phenomenon. Manrique's aesthetics has always been an *aesthetics of Lanzarote*. Even though the Spanish artist also makes some claims whose validity goes beyond the Canary Islands, ultimately his aesthetic reflections nevertheless always return to the phenomenon of this unique place. But this raises a question: Why is Lanzarote chosen as the place of the concretized aesthetic theory? Because it is the native island of the artist? This is certainly an important reason. As we will see in the next chapter, the nature of a place grows into the essence of the human being (and artist) who was born in this place in such a way that in his artistic

creation (and consequently also in his aesthetic reflection) he maintains, consciously or unconsciously, a relation to these influences.

There is, however, an even more important reason why Lanzarote can count as the case where nature's universal traits are reflected in a unique manner. *Natura naturata*, *natura abscondita*, and *natura ludens* – each of the three descriptions of nature manifests itself in the figure of Lanzarote. It is an island of the nature that creates, that conceals and manifests itself and thus also plays with the observer – because it is an island of volcanic activity. For Manrique, Lanzarote's essence is constituted by volcanology. This volcanology must, however, not be understood in the sense of a science that deals with volcanic phenomena. What matters is rather the logic of volcanoes itself, the internal logic of their creative activity. This logic may be understood as the process of the bringing-itself-to-appearance and the putting-itself-on-display. The volcanic activity transports that which comes into being in the mysterious womb of the earth to the surface of the earth. In the womb of volcanic nature new life forms are created that remain concealed in their plenitude and await the time of their appearance. The 'more' of natural beauty acquires a concrete form here. Later on we will see that it is also art's prerogative to join in this creative process – whether that be in the form of an architecture that draws on volcanology, or whether that be in the form of paintings that, through their abstract forms, continue the volcanological forms. This claim ("All my paintings are fundamentally and in principle volcanology and geology."¹⁶) is reflected in Manrique's paintings, as we can see, for instance, in *Hundido*, *Fósil*, and countless other works. This volcanological aspect turns Lanzarote into the most

¹⁶ Manrique, 88.

concrete example of the nature that conceals and reveals itself, the nature that is profound and then naked again, the nature that is creative and playful. The following remark, in which volcanology is tied directly to the name Atlantis and thus to the concept of Lanzarote as a promised and actualized utopia, unmistakably proves how important this aspect is for César Manrique: "We have managed ... to live in a volcanological space [Raum] of Atlantis that is unique on this planet."¹⁷

But when we look more closely, this type of praise of the volcanic nature of Lanzarote really has to amaze us. In 1730 the inhabitants of Lanzarote witnessed how violently erupting and newly emerging volcanoes systematically destroyed their land; how they covered their houses, communities, and fields in debris and ashes. They escaped fearful of new eruptions and earthquakes.¹⁸ What manifested itself before the eyes of the inhabitants of Lanzarote was not the creative and playful but the threatening and destructive power of the volcanological nature of their island. What they saw stood under the sign of death and annihilation rather than the sign of creation and life. In the face of these historically consequential events that have had such a strong impact on the consciousness and the identity of the inhabitants of Lanzarote, how is it possible to praise the volcanological nature as the source of creation and life if all that it leaves behind are dead and fruitless fields?

But it is precisely here that the mystical essence of nature, which remains committed to life even in death, manifests itself. Once again the landscape

¹⁷ Manrique, 82.

¹⁸ See the famous and arresting account of these events by Father Andrés Lorenzo Curbelo from Yaiza, in: Andrés Lorenzo Curbelo, *When the Volcanoes Spewed Fire. Notes about the Occurrences between the Years 1730 and 1736*, transl. Wolfgang Borsich (Ed. Yaiza, 2007).

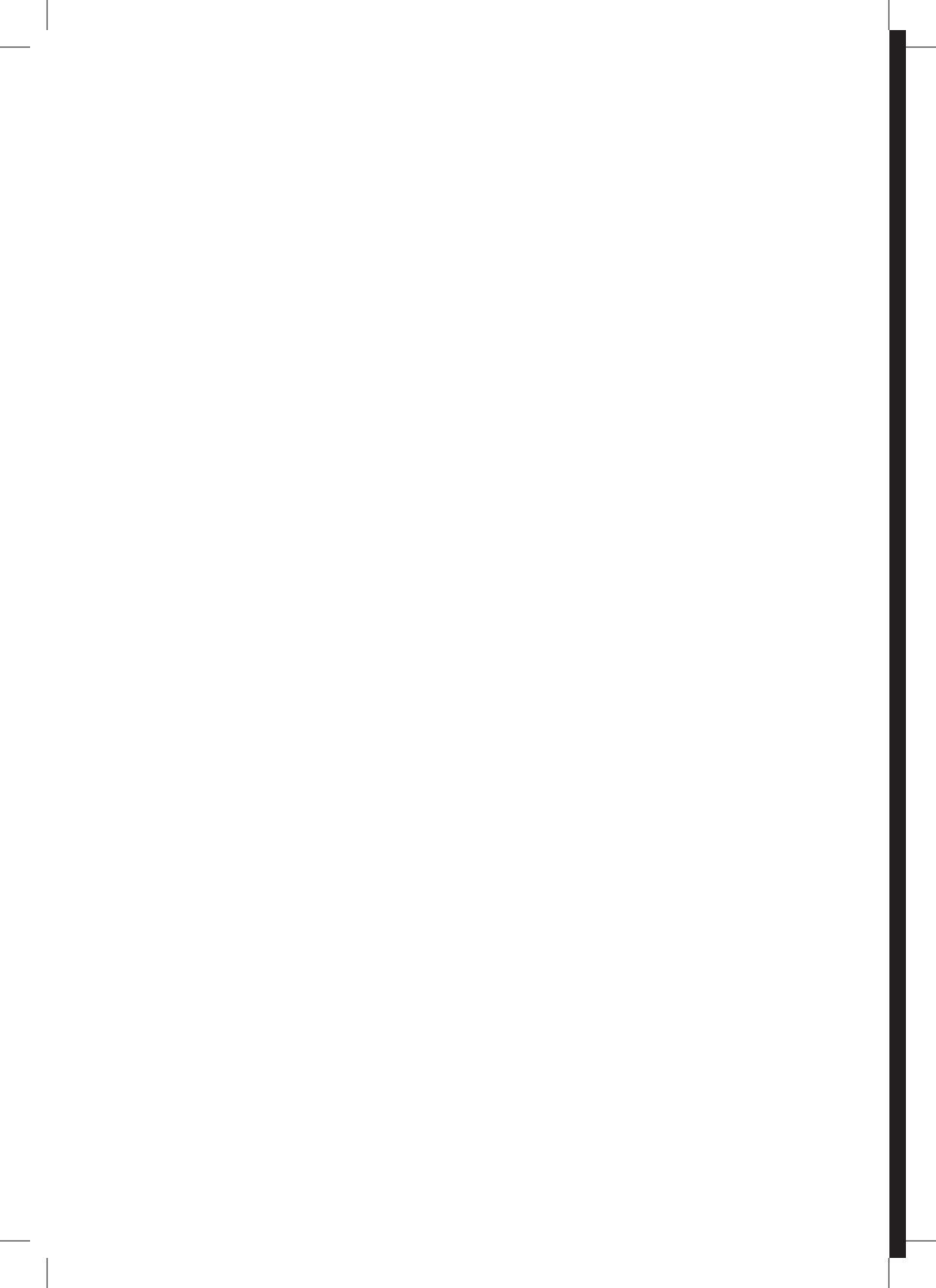
of Lanzarote allows us to admire in a concrete, determinate phenomenon this closed cycle of nature that connects life with death and the latter again with life. The unique viniculture in the region of La Geria consists of countless small stone walls in whose vicinity grape vines crawl directly on the ground. They are built so low because otherwise they would be completely destroyed by the constantly blowing trade winds. But what is more important for us is the question why at all they are able to grow on what at first sight is a dead and empty lava field. They owe it to the lapilli, which the islanders call *picón*, i.e. the tiny lava stones that give the fields of Lanzarote their character. The peasant-farmer of Lanzarote discovered that the tiny lapilli, which like the bigger rocks stem from the womb of the volcano, could be helpful for growing grapes. The reason for this is the *picón's* ability to reduce evapotranspiration. It prevents the water that is indispensable for the survival and the growth of the plants from evaporating so fast. Thus, it is precisely the substance of the volcano – which at a first, frightening sight stands for death and destruction – that gives life and happiness. Like in the famous verse by Friedrich Hölderlin, the rescue grows where there is danger.

The creative essence of the volcanoes, which manifests itself also and perhaps especially amid destruction and death, turns Lanzarote into the scene of a nature that is profound and at the same time naked, threatening and at the same time playful. Lanzarote's volcanology predestines it to become the place of the *entelechia* – the total, boundless actualization of nature's potentials. It also turns Lanzarote into a place where culture, nature, and man can be brought together into a unity that makes the actualization of utopia possible in the first place. Manrique was at all times convinced of this uniqueness of his island as the potential location for the highest synthesis of life, man, and art. Manrique held this

conviction throughout his entire artistic creation, a conviction that until the end never allowed him to doubt the feasibility of his utopian plans:

"Lanzarote is pure magic, a mystery. Pure, unashamed, naked beauty. An infinite education. The unknown and concealed nature {of Lanzarote} is aware of the great spectacle that it puts on."¹⁹

¹⁹ Manrique, 127.



**Chapter II.
Second Approach:
Humanity**



For Manrique man is a strange child of nature. He is the only one of its children who is capable of grasping the mysterious essence of nature. On the other hand, there is no other species that can inflict so much harm on nature. Everything that Manrique says about man and about society is marked by seemingly irreconcilable antagonisms, by paradoxes and tensions that constantly accompany man, his works, and his purposes. Man and society are chosen to continue nature's creativity and yet, time and time again, they turn into destructive forces that bring nothing but death and devastation to nature. Evidently Manrique is deeply distressed by a question that appears to be related to the opening question of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. There it says: How is it possible that in spite of the available resources that would enable humanity to enter a state of felicity, humanity is descending ever more deeply into the abyss of barbarism?²⁰ Here it says:

²⁰ "What we had set out to do was nothing less than to explain why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism." (Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, transl. Edmund Jephcott [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002], xiv.)

How is it possible that humanity – whom nature supplies with the impulse for establishing a state of felicity and whom nature even provides with the means necessary for achieving this state – turns its back on this very generous nature and drives itself into a state of misery and despair? The attempt to answer this radical question and to set man back into the right relation to nature in general, and to his own nature, constitutes the necessary condition for Manrique's utopian project.

In order for us to correctly understand man's rootedness in nature, we must make the concept of this rootedness concrete – in a similar way as the concretization of the concept of nature was carried out in the previous chapter. From the perspective of the artist from Lanzarote, man is not simply anchored 'in nature' but rather always in its concrete section, in a concrete part of the world whose specific qualities and atmosphere become, so to speak, sedimented in each of its children. Every human being is born *out of* a concrete place and grows *into* this place throughout his whole life. What is described here is the process of the self-reassurance [*Selbstvergewisserung*] of the individual who reclaims his roots and at once begins to understand, for the first time, to what extent and in what sense he is determined by these roots. The following passage succinctly attests the importance that this process has for Manrique's anthropology:

"Every authentic artist, rooted in a concrete nature, town or geographic latitude, is determined by all the sounds and impressions of the place that he has received like a receiving set from the area that he inhabits."²¹

Although this passage talks about the artist, the difference between the artist and other human beings likely does not consist in the circumstance

²¹ Manrique, 37.

that only the former receives the sounds and impressions of his environment, but rather in that only the former becomes fully aware of this circumstance and relates to it in his creation. We may thus assume that every human being is rooted not only in nature but in the concrete nature of his place of birth and of the place (or the places) where he grows up. This rootedness entails that his perception of the world is, as it were, 'coloured' by the impressions that he had already received from his environment when he was a child. Thus, he owes not just his aesthetic judgments and decisions to this original determination but even the unconscious classification and interpretation of the images of the world that he perceives. The degree to which the artist is pre-determined by his home [*Heimat*] remains rather open at this point, even though the answer to this question would be relevant for understanding the possibilities and tasks of the artist. Are artists in principle able to develop and actualize aesthetic ideas anywhere in the world, or are they, as it were, predestined to become active in their native place, to continue the creative impulses of the local nature, as was the case with Manrique himself? Does the artist from Lanzarote only generalize his own individual life experience or does he actually believe that the artist is able to actualize his profound aesthetic purposes only in the narrow domain of his 'growing-into-nature' by serving his own community?

Strictly speaking, the answer to these substantial questions would be critical for understanding not just the situation of the artist but also that of the individual as such. The following point needs to be emphasized here: The fact that one grew up in the context of a concrete nature in no way means that the sounds and sensations of the nature that surrounds the individual and that have been absorbed since childhood are consciously processed. In most cases people live their life in complete abstraction from their living environment and the unconsciously assimilated 'teachings'

that they have extracted from this environment. They turn their back on this nature, which, as it were, educates them, and fashion their activity in complete indifference, if not adversity, towards nature. In this phenomenon the self-destructive character of human actions manifests itself again not as an abstract but as a concrete quality. By ignoring the immediate surroundings, man puts a strain on himself in a totally verifiable manner: he destroys the environment that surrounds him and therewith threatens his own survival and the chances for his own happiness.

But the indifference towards nature does not immediately have to turn into radical negativity. What Manrique wants to indicate here is the fundamental discrepancy between man and nature; man's quasi-natural maladaptedness to nature. Manrique notes, "If there is a species that is not adapted to life on this planet, it is ours."²² By saying this the artist appears – at least at first sight – to draw on one of the oldest *topoi* of classical philosophical anthropology. Countless and important authors, among them first and foremost Johann Gottfried Herder and much later Arnold Gehlen, have noted that as a natural species the human being stacks up fairly poorly against other animal species.²³ We lack big, hard teeth or claws, we are neither able to hide well, nor are

²² Manrique, 62.

²³ "The human child enters the world weaker than any of the animals ... The human being alone remains weak for a long time; his build is, if we may put it this way, created to support his head ... The weak child is thus, if you will, an invalid of his higher powers" (Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, vol. 4, *Herders Werke in fünf Bänden* [Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1969], 95 ; translation NF). Arnold Gehlen, one of the most influential philosophical anthropologists of the 20th century, argues along similar lines, claiming that man is a 'deficient being' and calling Herder the 'predecessor' of his own position: "It is admirable that Herder recognizes the inner relationship between man's biological helplessness, his world-openness, and the absent-minded nature of his desires." (Arnold Gehlen, *Man, His Nature and Place in the World*, transl. Clare McMillan and Karl Pillemer [New York: Columbia University Press, 1988], 75.)

we able to flee from dangers as fast as other animals. The list of human weaknesses used to be extended *ad infinitum*. In all of this the favourite motif has been the human being's very long childhood period; compared to other animal species, it takes human beings much longer before they can preserve themselves alone in the world. But the hidden goal of this ancient anthropological *topos* of the human being as a *deficient being* has always been an affirmative one. It is precisely through his weakness as a natural being that man's true being is predetermined: being the weakest animal, man has to rise above the whole animal kingdom, indeed above all of nature, through specific traits and skills. Since he is the weakest animal, man turns himself into the master of all of nature – namely by means of the development of his brain, his reason, the powers of his mind, his language, his imagination and his moral sentiments. Kant too uses this *topos* when he interprets man's very weak natural 'preparation' for the satisfaction of his natural search for happiness as a sign, hinted at by nature itself, of man's higher calling. As a moral being, man's task is in fact to assert himself as an autonomous, moral subject; the search for happiness comes, perhaps, after this and only on the basis of his moral merits.

"Nature has willed that man should, by himself, produce everything that goes beyond the mechanical ordering of his animal existence, and that he should partake of no other happiness or perfection than that which he himself, independently of instinct, has created by his own reason."²⁴

In classical anthropology man's maladaptedness to nature, which is all too readily admitted, and his deficient 'equipment' are used like a springboard

²⁴ Immanuel Kant, *On History*, transl. Lewis White Beck (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2001), 13.

for man's ultimate elevation above nature. Thus, the ostensive criticism of man turns into his praise as an extra- and supernatural being.

Even though Kant's statement appears to be anchored in this tradition, its purpose is not only completely different but quasi-antithetical. Man is maladapted to nature not due to his naturalness but precisely due to his mind. It is not the physical qualities of man that render the adaptation to his environment impossible but his mindset. This becomes especially apparent in a passage that comes a few lines before the passage quoted earlier, where Manrique explicitly decries man's 'intellectual' rather than his 'physical' weaknesses:

"I consider man to be dumb by nature. The teachings of the great sages and of the world-renowned philosophers, the experiences of centuries and the infinite wisdom of the planetary balance have not been understood by man. In his brutal and despotic zeal to become the greatest intelligence in the universe, he has rather systematically destroyed everything that emanated an innate beauty."²⁵

When man lives a life that is completely maladapted to nature, this is not the result of his natural, physical conditions, but stems from his intellectual inability to comprehend the 'wisdom' of nature, to appropriate it and to live in accordance with it. Manrique renders this thesis a bit more concrete by giving us an inkling of the content of this 'wisdom of nature'. He does so in a negative way by opposing the wisdom of nature to human behaviour. In several places he depicts this opposition in an unmistakably critical manner:

²⁵ Manrique, 61.

"Humankind demonstrated its foolishness by turning its back {on the great wisdom of nature} and by producing a series of absurd, repressive recipes of false morality which had a single purpose: to generate unhappiness and suffering. ... In his hubris man has always tried to impose his system on others – by means of borders, flags, nationalities, religions, political systems, military groups, spiritual superstructures, and the long {list} of social and political recipes that have nothing to do with the fundamental and biological principles that govern in nature."²⁶

"The creation of flags, borders, anthems, religions, and political organizations has contributed to a progressive paralysis of every attempt of a healthy and peaceful co-habitation. ... We have to give up all divisive ideas and appeal to common sense."²⁷

What manifests itself in these utterances is a firm, fundamental cosmopolitanism that is determined not by some ideological plan but rather by the idea of an all-unifying nature, an idea that resembles the great tradition of stoicism. The view of nature as the deep foundation of the unity of humankind, which throughout history has always been disrespected, is indeed reminiscent of the ancient concept of the *pneumas*, which pervades the entire cosmos and which, according to Marcus Aurelius, connects everything with itself so that the whole world is ruled by "one substance and one law, and one reason common to all intelligent creatures".²⁸ The Stoic vision of an all-unifying nature that transcends the artificially established human divisions – into sites, people, etc. – implies that the observance of the 'great wisdom of nature' would entail that instead of thinking in divisive categories and perpetuating the division, we reconcile and unite human

²⁶ Ibid., 44.

²⁷ Ibid., 62.

²⁸ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, transl. Robin Hard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011; Book 7, Reflection 9 (p.59)).

beings, their societies and cultures with each other. Yet, it does not come as a surprise that Manrique does not preach this simple solution sketched here. He has good reason to refrain from it. He knows that this recipe can, unfortunately, be easily misunderstood in a fateful way. The following passage evidences the awareness of this danger:

"Every day we must take on responsibilities ... in order to maintain our identity, to not fall into the vulgarity of international standardization."²⁹

"Nothing is more profitable than to distinguish oneself and to excel in a world that tends toward total standardization."³⁰

In these passages, 'the total standardization of the world' – an expression with which Manrique anticipates, as it were, so many phenomena of the much-trumpeted globalization – seems to constitute a genuine danger, one that appears to result from a misunderstood and wrongly executed strategy of unification. Apparently, the false and harmful division of the world can thus turn into an equally false and harmful coalescence. Are we hence hopelessly caught between the two fatal poles of isolation and coalescence? And is it not a paradox that the artist warns us at once against divisive ideas and the dangers of the international assimilation?

To resolve, or at least qualify, this ostensive paradox, we must once again try to decipher the meaning of man's rootedness in nature and the sense of his possible reclamation of and adaptation to nature. It is important to highlight that Manrique conceives of man as coming *from nature*, but he certainly does not conceive him *naturalistically*. The

²⁹ Manrique, 125.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

nature from which man springs is always already intimately intertwined with culture. It is 'ARTE-NATURALEZA', 'culture-nature', a nature that has been co-shaped by entire generations of human beings. To the extent that human beings want and are able to assume nature's creative role and indeed continue its creative work, the culture that has been created through the generations belongs to the overall picture of nature. And conversely: since nature depends on humankind's collaboration in order to completely develop its essence – in order to fully actualize its *entelechia* – nature itself can never be conceived naturalistically. In this context a 'naturalistic' conception of nature would mean: a conception of nature that abstracts from the spiritual activity of intelligent beings from which the (sovereign) actuality – which is based in nature without being reducible to physical states – of the works of art, of tradition, of culture, of science, philosophy, and religion results.

If man is not simply anchored 'in nature' as such but in a nature that is co-determined by a concrete culture and tradition, then the process of his reclamation has to involve also the becoming-aware of that culture and that tradition. This repudiates a simplifying reading of Manrique's anthropology that could result from what we have discussed earlier: as if man, with his tradition and culture, were always already and necessarily a being that stood in opposition to nature. But as we have already seen earlier, man's own, autonomous activity does not necessarily put him in an antithetical relation with nature. The culture that man generates does not inevitably have to be aimed against nature; it can take up nature's creative impulses and can continue the work of nature. Thus, Manrique does not flat-out oppose nature to culture. His position rather opposes a nature that is always already intertwined with culture to a false and failed culture that denies its rootedness in nature. The reclamation of the

responsibilities that result from our rootedness in nature by no means amounts to a rejection of culture. Quite the contrary: there is much to suggest that there first needs to be a rejection of the pseudo-culture of the global assimilation and of short-sighted money-making. There needs to be a reclamation of the modes of conduct – for example of dwelling, building, house-keeping – that are, as it were, encoded in the local culture. These modes constitute the tried and proven traditions that are, at the same time, in harmony with the natural ambience of this local culture.

In a later chapter we will explain in more detail how we are supposed to understand the appropriation of the tradition that, as we can see, constitutes the *conditio sine qua non* of the reclamation of the exigencies of nature, and why this process by no means must and ought to be an unreflective repetition of what has been tried and proven. For now we must first and foremost affirm what we have gained with the concretization of man's rootedness in nature. It is gradually becoming clear how Manrique's fundamental anthropological statement about 'man's natural maladaptedness to nature' needs to be understood. We can view all animals as beings that are adapted to nature – to their nature – immediately, instinctively, and without conceptual mediation. In contrast, as a thinking animal, man becomes entangled in tensions and contradictions. Moreover, he generates such tensions and contradictions himself. For example by constructing systems of thought, ideologies, and cultural models that he tries to force on other human beings on pain of their exclusion (if not their extinction). Along with the not entirely thought-out terminology (or as Adorno and Horkheimer would say: with the enlightenment that is not sufficiently enlightened about itself), the principle of the *exclusion of the other* comes into play, which erects borders and places individuals, societies, and entire cultures into

a relation of conflict. However, this exclusion in thought and practice evidently leads to man's exclusion from the domain of nature. The human being who distances himself from others and sets himself apart becomes the other of nature, the being that is not adapted to the world. Thus, in the end the exclusionary force of his conceptual thinking also turns against the thinker himself. If we understand Manrique correctly, at this point he is indeed not so far away from the insights of the authors of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The re-adaptation to nature, which would bring man his salvation, can thus by no means be brought about through the elimination of reflection (which is impossible anyway), but only through the attainment of a higher level of reflection. And this means that man as a thinking being ought to reclaim the element in his thinking – and, especially, the element in the intellectual traditions of his community – that does not set the other in opposition to him but allows him to consciously continue the productive, creative aspect of nature *by including others*. To put the matter somewhat aphoristically: animals are adapted to nature without reflection; man separates himself from nature precisely through reflection. Nevertheless he can re-adapt himself to nature only by raising his level of reflection again and by becoming aware of nature's creative aspect, which fills local tradition with life and which ought to be continued by culture. Put differently: by growing into his authentic role – which is the continuation of natural creation – *through his thinking*, man adapts his essence and his actions to the exigencies of nature. Therefore, the reclamation of nature requires both a sufficient and internally differentiated knowledge, and the will to become aware of this knowledge and to act in accordance with it. But does this not imply that the process of man's 're-adaptation' to his nature has to be tantamount to the becoming-artist – i.e. to the practical adoption of the position of the artist? And if that is the case: to what extent can the

artist count as the representative (model? paradigm?) of man as such? Is it possible that on this point some very unequivocal elitist elements are creeping into Manrique's social-anthropological thinking?

Our attempt to answer this question requires that we add another element to our investigation. So far we have repeatedly spoken of man as if he was responsible for the divisive thinking and actions as an individual. But Manrique explicitly considers the divisive systems of thought and culture to be the work of multiple social groups and generations. Divisive systems of thought and culture are societal products that are expanded by the state and its institutions and are used for their own purposes. However, if the process of man's exclusion from nature only takes place in the societal setting, then the 'reclamation' of nature that we have described above also needs to exhibit this societal character. It is only at this point that an elitist streak indeed comes to light in Manrique's anthropology. Where the concern is not with the individual human being's reclamation but that of entire human communities, the socially conscious and active artist rises to the position of the guide, if not the leader, of such communities. It appears as though for Manrique not everyone is at the level where they can consciously decide in favour of a 'reversal'; someone has to lead the 'masses' to this point. The following passage provides succinct proof that in Manrique's social thought we can indeed find a trace of such a break and such a tension between the more or less unreflective 'masses' and the conscious 'artist' who is made out to be the leader:

"Unfortunately I am convinced that the intelligence and the character of the masses is incomparably inferior to the intelligence and the character of those few who examine and discover the positive values for the entire humanity."³¹

³¹ Ibid., 94.

This passage has an unequivocally Nietzschean overtone. Nevertheless, it does not yet allow us to draw any inferences to Manrique's, as it were, concealed political position in the background of these words. What the artist from Lanzarote has in mind is the vision of a political community that inhabits a specific country and that is faced with specific challenges. This community can either be led – by active and socially engaged artists and thinkers – to a reclamation of the exigencies of nature and to the conditions of its own happiness, or it falls victim to the unscrupulous 'speculators' who lead them to believe in a quick profit, but in reality lead them into perdition. In this picture, politicians hold an ambiguous position. They constitute, so to speak, a transmission belt that can convey both development and downfall to the community, depending on who provides the 'input': the far-seeing artist and thinker or the short-sighted, moneygrubbing 'speculators'. For Manrique, the political-social function of art corresponds to an 'agonic' view of politics, which resembles a field on which the different forces fight each other and struggle for dominance. This fight, which seems to constitute the essence of politics in Manrique's view (which, by the way, moves him into closer proximity of Nietzsche or Schmitt than of Kant or Habermas), has not only a strictly political sense but also an ethical and ecological one.

The model that guides Manrique and that is reminiscent of Plato's Sicily escapades seems to be a close cooperation between incorruptible politicians and forward-looking artists and thinkers for the benefit of the development of a political community. Once again the utopian character of Manrique's aesthetics and anthropology comes into play here: the concern is not with individual 'reclamations' and private conceptions of happiness. What is at stake is rather conservation and advancement, indeed even the chance of a happy life for an entire political community. The social

engagement of the artist or of the thinker is not a bonus but the essence of his activity. Artists and thinkers go back into their community with the message of the 'reclamation of nature', which they have gained through higher reflection, just as the wanderer who had become enlightened about the idea of the good had formerly done in Plato's allegory of the cave. In fact, the project of this social renewal, which is conceived by artists and thinkers and implemented by genuine politicians who actually serve their community, is not all that utopian and radical as one could at first assume.

All affinity notwithstanding, on this point Manrique's path and that of the Frankfurt thinkers, who regarded their utopia as fundamentally *unrepresentable*, diverge: in order to become happy and live happily modern society does not need to discover and actualize a new 'principle of individuation and socialization'. In fact, Manrique does not condemn everything that typically falls in the category of 'consumerism' and that is often portrayed as the phenomenon of a falsely socialized society. One example that stands out is the tourism industry. While for Adorno, who with a certain *schadenfreude* came across the term 'foreigner industry', this industry was a sign of the alienated observation of nature and a phenomenon that is typical of alienated society, Manrique initially appears to resign himself to the fact that for the population of Lanzarote who so far has mostly been occupied with fishing and agriculture the tourism industry constitutes a new source of income that over the years will become the main source of income. The point is thus not to vilify the tourism industry as an industry, but rather to determine the quality of this tourism in such a way that it can contribute to the actualization of a possible and real utopia.

Along with the tourism industry a new type of human being arrives on the island: *el extranjero* – the foreigner. In the eyes of the artist,

these people, who are attracted by tourism, are not all of the same kidney. Among them we find those who just want to 'vacation' and 'live it up'. But evidently there are also those who want to discover the hidden beauty of Lanzarote's nature. It is the latter group of tourists that needs to be attracted. The fundamentally positive assessment of tourism clearly shows that Manrique's 'local' thinking does not serve the isolation of his island from the outside world. Just as there are different reasons for and different forms of vacationing, Manrique distinguishes two different forms of tourism. The first is the 'falsely internationalized' form that virtually assimilates all the parts of the world that are 'suitable for vacationing' and covers them with the same type of touristic 'architecture'. The consequences of this form of tourism are not limited to the difficulty that the guests of such touristic 'oases' have in telling whether this year they find themselves (in their three-star-hotel) in Egypt, on the Balearic Islands, or, after all, maybe on Chalkidiki. Another strange and at the same time symbolic consequence is that the assimilated and thus fictitious vacation landscape could be 'cut out' of the real context and be 'installed' at an arbitrary location under an artificial roof, for example not far from Berlin. The fact that the phantasm of the 'holiday island', which is formatted by and for advertisements and which can in principle be established anywhere, is well received by the customers of the vacation industry, proves once more that the industry's concern is with standardized attractions (palm trees, waterfalls, tropical heat, sun-like radiation) that are meant to satisfy the customer needs that are aroused by the advertising images. On the side of the provider, this kind of tourism industry is the domain of the 'speculators', as Manrique often derisively calls them. What they have in mind is to cover the coasts of Lanzarote completely with monotonous hotels intended for 'masses of tourists'.

The tourism of a higher level is supposed to differ from such 'vulgar' tourism. Caution is advised lest we misunderstand Manrique's intentions. What he certainly does *not* have in mind are the 'upscale' vacation sites that have become so popular today, where richer tourists can segregate themselves from the 'masses' of average guests. Manrique's intention is not to establish an 'exclusive' tourism industry next to the 'mass' industry. Rather, he advocates for essential, qualitative changes within the concept of tourism. And it is precisely in this undertaking of establishing a qualitative tourism on Lanzarote that art plays a decisive role. As we will find out in the next chapter, by first opening the observers' eyes to the beauty of Lanzarote's nature, art discloses this terrain for the true *visitor*. This visitor differs from the mass tourist not by virtue of her financial resources but due to her aesthetic attitude, due to the wish to discover the hidden beauty of Lanzarote's nature. For Manrique, only such a tourism can in the long term become the stable foundation of the economic development of his island.

At this point we can already note that Manrique's recipe for a successful future for his island is by no means conceived in an elitist way, neither with respect to the guests who arrive on Lanzarote, nor with respect to the locals. The artist often recalls the image of the simple islander who has to wage a heroic struggle against the challenges of the volcanic landscape and against the chronic shortage of water resources – an image that is so familiar to him from childhood. Manrique grew up in an atmosphere in which this hard struggle was recognized, and until the end of his days he showed deep respect of a quasi-Rousseau-Kantian kind to the 'simple' peasant-farmer of Lanzarote. This respect is, among others, embodied in the sculpture *Fecundity* and Casa Museo del Campesino that Manrique designed. The conception that Manrique develops is worlds away from turning his island into an elitist artist colony or an exclusive tourist oasis for the rich of the world; instead



César Manrique
Fertility, 1968



César Manrique
Casa Museo del Campesino

it is meant to secure a new source of survival, even the chance of a happy life for the population of Lanzarote. This conception is tied to a qualitative tourism that, as we have said before, is meant to be a tourism not for the moneyed tourists but for those guests who wish to discover the island out of an interest in and respect for its nature and culture. Mind you: this demanding agenda can only succeed if the inhabitants of the island also participate in it. And that means: the inhabitants of Lanzarote themselves must reclaim their own tradition, the cultural sources of their island, and must draw inspiration from them for the sake of shaping the present. This includes the insight that mass tourism without style or personality generates profit only in the short run, which is, moreover, for the most part processed by corrupt politicians and 'speculators'. "All good inhabitants of Lanzarote have become aware", writes the artist, "that the task of saving {Lanzarote} is a collective endeavor from which no one ought to stay away."³² Even though Manrique does not use this term, what he proposes to his compatriots is the path of 'sustainable development', which requires a conscious and reflective stance towards their land, their life, and their economic interests. Even though we will describe this path in more detail in a later chapter, it already becomes apparent here that this path has to entail a cultural and economic policy 'for the long term'; thus, it has to be a policy that takes equally seriously the ecological conditions of life, which, as we have shown, are closely connected with the responsibility to preserve one's own cultural identity, and the requirements of the tourism industry in an increasingly globalized world.

The project of Lanzarote presents itself here not as an illusion that is detached from reality but as the concretely envisaged plan of the aesthetic, cultural,

³² Ibid., 70.

ecological, and economic development of the island. This development remains committed and continues to do justice to the different dimensions of being-human. Thus, if we describe Manrique's conception as a utopia, this must not be understood in the degenerate sense of an untenable, elitist ideal, but in the sense of a detailed aesthetic-social project in which even the commercial conditions of its actualization do not go underexposed. If there is a point where Manrique's path diverges dramatically from that of, for example, the Frankfurt apologists of utopian thinking, it is likely right here. The vehemence of Adorno and Horkheimer's insistence on the non-representability of utopia, which they interpret in the sense of a renewed biblical ban on images, is matched by the courage and carefreeness with which Manrique sketches the concrete – social, political, and economic – conditions of the actualization of utopia here and now, on his island of Lanzarote.

A symbol that is indicative of this quiet but important disagreement between the mentioned champions of utopian thinking – who were distant and yet intellectually kindred – is a concrete aesthetic phenomenon. A short analysis of this phenomenon is better suited to serve as the concluding reflection of this chapter than any other phenomenon. We are talking about one of Manrique's most popular aesthetic installations, namely his *miradores*, the lookout points. On the topic of the phenomenon of the lookout point Adorno writes uncompromisingly:

"The more intensively one observes nature, the less one is aware of its beauty ... Planned visits to famous views, to the landmarks of natural beauty, are most futile. Nature's eloquence is damaged by the objectivation that is the result of studied observation"³³.

³³ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 69.

In the context of this interpretation, to build a lookout point seems to be nothing other than to reify nature in the sense of its being-put-on-display in the service of the human greed for observation. Admittedly, lookout points are a fixture of modern tourism and are very popular. It is precisely this function that Manrique wanted to utilize to the benefit of Lanzarote's nature (and, more broadly: the nature of the Canary Islands). His *miradores*, among them paradigmatically the famous Mirador del Río on Lanzarote, constitute architectural artworks in their own right that are not only ideally adapted to the natural landscape but, in accordance with Manrique's concept of nature, continue nature's creative power. They serve human beings not simply for pleasure but for discovering the true beauty of nature, which for Manrique, as we already know, is not evident and objectively given. Concealed nature is not simply exposed and laid bare by the installation of a lookout point. The latter merely opens up the possibility for man – whether that be for the local or for the visitor – to discover the concealed beauty of nature. Just as Manrique regards the *mirar* merely as a deficient form of the *ver*, we could say that the *miradores*, as places created by art, are only invitations to catch sight of natural beauty out of one's own power for the very first time. Art takes man into close proximity of nature, but the last step is his to take. As such, we can regard the *mirador* as an eye that the hand of the artist has put on nature and that can only ever be opened by the person who wants to see.

The meaning of this concrete but fairly important aesthetic phenomenon is transferable to Manrique's entire utopian project. What nature and culture are able to achieve always remains in the domain of the possibilities of happiness. The latter have to be perceived and actualized by man himself – more precisely: by entire communities. Utopia has



César Manrique
Mirador del Río

to be constructed *collectively*. As Manrique says unequivocally: "This is the only way to make it possible."³⁴ Human beings thus ultimately emerge as potential opponents – or as potential partners and comrades of creative nature. If they decide to become comrades of nature, this opens us possibilities of the actualization of their claims in the sphere of life (of existence, including its economic dimension), in the sphere of reflection (reclamation of the cultural tradition of their own land and of the meditation that is fostered by the natural beauty that has been discovered), and, *last but not least*, in the sphere of happiness (both individual and collective). However, the final word in Manrique's anthropology belongs to the free human will. Where it is lacking,

³⁴ Manrique, 133.

both at the individual and the social level, no utopian projects can be actualized. Manrique's utopia is not a daughter of historic necessity, but a very improbable late child of human wisdom and freedom.

**Chapter III.
Third Approach:
Art**



Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, to which we have already referred in the previous chapter and which is rightly one of the most important documents of the modern understanding of art, resists from the first pages every attempt of giving art a supertemporal, 'eternal' definition. We would also search in vain for such a definition in Manrique's work. Paradoxically, art is too important to him, too central, to determine it conceptually. Such an undertaking would roughly resemble the attempt of defining life. Any definition of such fundamental categories as life, art, or man, always contains too much and too little, which renders them obsolete in both cases. Instead of becoming entangled in this rather hopeless undertaking, Manrique chooses a different path in order to explain his understanding of art: he places the concept of art in different – social, spiritual, economic, ecological – contexts and thus describes the tasks and functions that art takes on and ought to take on. Manrique's relationship with art is reminiscent of Ludwig Wittgenstein's later treatment of language: what art is is measured by how it is carried out, by what it can change, by how it is applied. This context-dependent

and, as it were, pragmatic conception of art can be summed up thus: Manrique is not interested in the question of how art – as the works that are generated by it – can be defined in general, but rather in what the artist is able to and ought to undertake (and to what purpose).

Before we move on to the presentation of the possibilities and tasks of the artist, we shall first distinguish Manrique's concept of art from two poles that are equally antithetical to it. The first radical possibility of art's degeneration is its (self-)degradation into a culture industry, hence more or less what Nietzsche called "a kind of cure and intoxicant"³⁵. Art as an *ornament of life* that changes nothing and may change nothing in the formation of life – that is essential here. Such a concept of art only seemingly serves life. Essentially, it rather serves the blind mechanism of reproduction that in its totality turns against the substance of life, as Adorno and Horkheimer later rightly saw. This turns art into an intoxicant, a neutralized sirens' chant that, although it is audible for Odysseus who is tied to the 'mast of praxis', no longer possesses any true efficacy.³⁶ It is a part of the industry that reproduces the unfreedom of the whole in accordance with its own laws. The Late Romantic idea of an autonomous art that is completely uncoupled from everyday life and its interests stands in direct opposition to this instrumentalized art that is misused in the service of the reproduction of interests. This idea has entered history under the rallying cry '*L'art pour l'art*', which really sums up its essence: it views art as a quasi-sacral sphere that must under no circumstances be questioned with the criteria of usefulness and utility.

³⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, transl. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 212.

³⁶ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 25 ff.

The artist does not have to be understood, his works do not have to be enjoyed. In fact, these circumstances prove that a true artwork has been created, one that falls on the deaf ears of the philistines who despise and laugh at everything that does not conform to their mean and utilitarian lifestyle.

Manrique's understanding of art is situated between these radical poles of a utilitarian reduction of art in the service of the process of reproduction and an elitist uncoupling of art from all aspects of life. In contrast to the '*L'art pour l'art*' conception, Manrique believes that art must by all means and absolutely be applied to and in life: the possibility of this application even constitutes its essential trait. Art definitely ought to serve life, albeit not in the sense of a compensation of the burdens of the process of reproduction, of the re-integration of the audience into the alienated world or the intoxication against the suffering that is generated in this world. Against the conception that views art as an ornament of life (or as compensation) Manrique insists that art's task is – to use an English expression – *to make a difference*. And that means: art ought to gain its significance by transforming the circumstances of life. For Manrique, the interdependence of art and life is so strong that neither art can be explained without life, nor life without art. If art is indeed intimately connected with life, this life is not the 'philistine life' that Nietzsche denounced, nor the reproductive compulsions that the social critics of the Frankfurt School unmasked, but a life that inherently – in order to be able to unfold at all – depends on culture's accommodation. Therefore, Manrique claims unmistakably and quasi-programmatically: "Today, art is already an anthropological-human question."³⁷

³⁷ Manrique, 77.

This raises three important questions: What are the sources from which art draws its strength (the question of the *arche*, of art's principle)? What is art able to achieve through its works (the question of the *telos*, of the 'for-the-sake-of-which' of art)? And in what way does art effect something in the world (the question of the *modus operandi*, of the 'How?' of art)? Manrique answers all of these questions in countless places, and he does so in a consistent and coherent manner, so that one can indeed extract his aesthetic theory from it even if Manrique never gave this theory a systematic form. It should not come as a surprise to us anymore that Manrique locates art's roots in nature, which – as we have extensively described in the first chapter – is a creative nature that conceals itself. That which art takes up is not nature in the sense of something given but rather that which in the first chapter we have tried to render with a concept from Kant's aesthetics: natural beauty. As much as Manrique considers himself an ally of creative nature, he is worlds away from understanding and interpreting art in general and especially his own art 'naturalistically'. As we have already highlighted in the previous chapter, it is precisely because Manrique does not conceive nature naturalistically that he does not understand art, whose roots are concealed in nature, naturalistically either. Art is related not to the already objectivated nature but rather to the *natura abscondita et naturans* – the nature that conceals itself and that creates. If this is taken into account, it becomes entirely clear why in Manrique's view art can never and must never become a mere imitation of nature. Neither Manrique's paintings nor his architectural projects imitate nature. At most, they make creative nature appear, make it take form, namely by adding new forms to the ones that have already been created by nature.



César Manrique
Buried, 1974

We will never capture Manrique's understanding of art as long as we understand the following succinct passage (and all similar passages that are scattered in his statements) only metaphorically:

"All my paintings are fundamentally and in principle volcanology and geology."³⁸

It is crucial for understanding Manrique's aesthetic theory that this passage be taken *literally*. In the 'Nature' chapter we have seen that the

³⁸ Ibid., 88.

volcanology of Lanzarote confers a concrete sense on the abstract thesis about the self-concealing and creative nature. Just as the volcanological essence of Lanzarote brings the natural potentials into actuality, artistic work as Manrique understands it also wants to bring those forms to light that have so far remained concealed from the human eye. The abstract character of Manrique's paintings entails not a distancing from nature, not an abstraction from the real forms; rather, it is the only manner in which we can come as close as possible to the creative force of nature. Abstract art is not an abstraction from the objective world but the human continuation of nature's creative aspect itself. And it is precisely this Manriquean understanding of modern, abstract art that Adorno is concerned with in the following succinct passage from his aesthetics:

"In fact, the spiritualization that art has undergone during the past two hundred years and through which it has come to maturity has not alienated art from nature, as is the opinion of reified consciousness; rather, in terms of its own form, art has converged with natural beauty."³⁹

At this point it becomes hard to resist the impression that Manrique's aesthetics uses the oft-cited and much-discussed Kantian concept of the artistic genius. For Kant, through his creation the genius, who simultaneously adopts the rules of art and revolutionizes them on his own initiative and account, becomes, as it were, an instrument of nature.⁴⁰ Another similarity: as an artist Manrique is literally the heir to Lanzarote's volcanology. In his abstract, form-generating work he continues the creative work of volcanological nature. He does not imitate

³⁹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 77.

⁴⁰ "Genius is the talent (natural endowment) that gives the rule to art." (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 174 [§ 46])

the volcanological activity but is this volcanological activity itself – or, more precisely, this volcanological force connects him with Lanzarote's nature and at the same time allows him to create his artworks.

Manrique's basic insight in the domain of aesthetics, which at first sight seems paradoxical, can be captured only in the following manner: the *non-naturalistic character of an art that is rooted in nature*. Only if we capture it in this way can the following laconic sentences be understood not as totally disparate utterances (even though each of them is admittedly meaningful by itself), but as the forms of expression of a coherent conception of art:

"Nature itself, in a magical way, collaborates with the influence, enthusiasm, and talent of the artist."⁴¹

"First and foremost, I feel ... like the shepherd of creation."⁴²

"The world in which we live is dark and cold unless we open the inner eyes of the spirit to the inner flame of nature."⁴³

First we will try to relate the first statement to the second. Manrique reacted to the designation as the 'shepherd of the winds and volcanoes', which he received from the poet Rafael Alberti, by making an important addition that in the light of what we have said above now looks fairly clear. To say that he feels, first and foremost, like the shepherd of creation means: it is not primarily his artistic concern for Lanzarote's landscape

⁴¹ Manrique, 107.

⁴² Ibid., 110.

⁴³ Ibid., 125.

that ties him as an artist most strictly to the nature of Lanzarote (even though this plays an enormous social and political role in his thinking and actions), but the kinship of his art with the creative aspect of the volcanological activity of the island. One could also say that by making this ostensive addition here, Manrique in fact expresses the ground of the ecological conception of art that Alberti himself seemingly fails to think. The artist is chosen to be the shepherd of nature not because he has a heightened ecological sensitivity but because he is related to nature itself, namely as the *creator of new forms*. The first statement – which speaks of the 'magical way' in which nature collaborates with the 'enthusiasm and talent of the artist' – has to be interpreted precisely in this way and not as the slavish imitation of the already fully formed nature. It is evident that this 'collaboration' must not be viewed as the artist's authoritarian 'making-use' of nature but rather as a cooperation that is made possible on the basis of that which the artists and nature have in common, namely: the creative force, the ability to bring to light that which has never been. If the artist rises to the position of the 'shepherd of nature', this is the consequence of the intimate kinship between his creation and nature's creation. The talent of the artist is the human form of what Manrique figuratively calls "talento de la naturaleza (talent of nature)"⁴⁴. The already objectivated forms of nature deserve to be protected because they are the traces of the eternal talent – of the never-ending, eternally perpetuating creative force of life – which is the same in both nature and the artist.

We have thus interpretively linked the first statement with the second. This leaves the third statement. This statement once again seems to express the importance of human art for the manifestation of natural

⁴⁴ Ibid., 86.

beauty and the structural equality of human and natural creation. After all, we have already seen in the 'Nature' chapter that self-concealing nature does not always, and especially not at first sight, put its beauty on display. Manrique used the example of Lanzarote several times to show how this beauty had eluded the fleeting, 'vulgar' gaze, thereby protecting the island for a long time from the invasion of mass tourism. And now, in the third of the three statements quoted above, he calls the hidden force of nature that can give what is beautiful in nature an objective form the 'inner flame' of nature. By doing this he not only constructs, as it were, a counter-metaphor to the initial 'darkness and cold' of the world 'in which we live', but he simultaneously concretizes this metaphor in a wonderful manner by evidently referring to the volcanological essence ('flame') of Lanzarote. The final element serves to emphasize the internal, quasi-essential connection between the artist (respectively *man* as an *artist*) and the invisible, self-concealing core of nature. The 'inner flame' of nature can only be seen by the 'inner eye' of man. Translated into less metaphorical terms this apparently means: through his initiative (through his creativity), man (or more precisely the artist-man) first has to give the concealed natural beauty an expression. Natural beauty appears thanks to man's reflective reclamation, when man's seeing no longer moves at the surface of the objectivated forms but pushes deep into nature, the great workshop of these forms. If we put this in more concrete terms, it can mean that the human eye discloses totally unexpected images that 'surprise' man insofar as they awaken him from the daily or the touristic 'slumber'. We will return to this element of surprise that arises from the contemplation of artworks later.

For the time being it is important to summarize the reflections that we have just concluded from the perspective of the second of the questions

that were posed earlier (from where? for what sake? and how? of art). What can and ought to be achieved by art is evidently not an imitation of nature in the sense of a repetition that is more or less true to the original of what has already been rendered objective. Manrique is aware of what Adorno rightly identifies as one of the core convictions of modern art, namely the conviction that as soon as one wants to capture nature as something beautiful, nature cannot be represented.⁴⁵ The Old Testament prohibition that the 'new art' takes up again and interprets in its own way turns art into a daring undertaking that in no way ought to copy the objective world and that nevertheless, at least for Manrique, ought to remain committed to life. The paradox of an art that is *rooted in nature* but that is nevertheless *non-naturalistic* can be sublated only if we understand art's connection with nature as its connection with the natural beauty that conceals itself and that eludes the 'vulgar', superficial gaze. The theoreticians of modernity and the modern artist from Lanzarote agree on this as well: "art is not the imitation of nature but the imitation of natural beauty."⁴⁶ And we have also seen how Manrique concretizes this at first sight seemingly abstract characterization: that which connects art intimately with nature is initially not their common object but the common force that creates objectivity.

Through this dynamic, through the shift of emphasis to the act of creation that connects nature with art, another dimension of art comes to the fore that is enormously important for Manrique's utopian thinking. An art that attempts to imitate the already objectivated world in one way or another is ultimately always *historical*. According to its essence it

⁴⁵ See Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 67.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

belongs to the past because it is dependent on what has already become. In contrast to this, the art that Manrique conceives as a continuation of nature's creation is always *future-oriented*. It brings that *which-has-not-yet-been* to appearance, it creates something new and unexpected. As such it is linked not to what has already become but to what is yet to be actualized. There are several passages in Adorno's work where he points to the decisive role that such a conception of art has for the mere possibility of utopian thinking. Every time his discourse turns to the topic of utopia he chooses expressions that instead of colouring something positively rather negate reflectively that which already exists. Of the prospective, happier human beings it says that we do not know what they will be like even though we know very well what they will certainly not be like – namely not like the human beings of today.⁴⁷ Of human dignity, in turn, it says that human beings are not “equipped” with it, but that its concept denotes that which human beings “have yet to achieve.”⁴⁸ It is a recurring figure: contrary to conservative thinking, that which is better is not that which existed previously and was lost due to wrong decisions and developments. That which is better is rather that which has not yet become. Art directs our attention to this not yet actualized betterness. As such it is at the same time future-oriented, utopian, and emancipatory. For Adorno, the artwork “is not the imitation of something real but rather the anticipation of a being-in-itself that does not yet exist”⁴⁹. So far the philosopher from Frankfurt and the artist from Lanzarote are in full agreement. Their paths diverge – in a highly

⁴⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, transl. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1978). [Translator's note: This is the standard English translation of *Minima Moralia*. It does not include the “Anhang” (appendix) to which author's original citation refers.]

⁴⁸ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 62.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

telling manner – only on the question of whether and when the utopia to which art necessarily points can be actualized at all. In Adorno we find a strategy that we may call the *endless delay* of the utopian future. In the view of the Frankfurt philosopher, an art that would not only suggest the desired fruit of a better world in negative images but would flesh out, harvest and consume this fruit, would forsake its legitimation and would demean itself by becoming a part of the 'false totality'. Manrique disagrees: his utopia, which would not be possible without art, can and in fact already ought to be actualized now. Or at least the artist and his community have to be capable of venturing and of attempting this 'leap into utopia'.

We have already seen the rudiments of what this is supposed to look like concretely. Art ought not to be accessible for a select, quasi-elitist audience, or even be 'reserved' for such an audience. It ought to be actualized in the midst of life and ought to transform this life in a concrete manner. Moreover: it ought to serve this life, ought to increase its standard and comfort; albeit not, as we have already argued, as an embellishment, as an ornament, that only decorates life without permeating it. Here we see again how closely intertwined art and life are in Manrique's view. The issue is not art's application in life (even if Manrique at times puts it in such simple terms) but something more: the aim is to *conceive and practice art as a form of life*. 'Vida-Hombre-Arte' – 'Life-man-art' – this recurring trinity of concepts points to the fact that for Manrique talk of a 'pure' art that is abstracted from life and elevated above people's needs is completely out of the question. For Manrique, art and life must not constitute alternatives: rather, the art that serves life is the only true art, and vice versa. The life that is permeated and

guided by art is the only form of life that can guarantee a sustainable development and therewith also the hope of lasting happiness.

It must no longer come as a surprise that for Manrique the true-to-life, touristic 'application' of art is not something secondary or contingent but results from art's essence itself. We can even say: art first creates the object Lanzarote that is worth seeing, precisely by making the inner beauty (the 'natural beauty') of the island appear in the first place. As Adorno says somewhere, "With human means art wants to realize the language of what is not human."⁵⁰ And this, in turn, means that art must not be understood as an additional ornament that further adds an 'elitist' aura to nature-centered tourism. Rather, *true tourism* – understood as the visit to a place for the purpose of discovering the concealed beauty of this place – *is not possible at all without art*. This has nothing to do with the once popular 'art trips', whose main purpose was to enjoy artworks, nor with their contemporary, commercial mutation in the form of luxurious and expensive excursions on which a professor of aesthetics, for instance, assumes the role of the tour guide. Manrique's idea, as baffling as it may seem at first, is indeed that *the touristic place of Lanzarote owes its existence to the art that brings the island's concealed beauty to light and that can teach people to see this beauty for the very first time*. Everything else – the hotel industry, the development of the gastronomy, etc. – merely continues to build on this aesthetic foundation. The alliance of nature and art is indispensable for opening up the possibility of a true tourism that guarantees a sustainable development. We will examine this dependence more closely in the chapter that is devoted to the concept of development.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 78.

At this point it is more important to move from the second to the third question sketched above. We have already identified natural beauty as the source of art and the future-oriented continuation of nature's creation (and with it the bringing-to-appearance of natural beauty that is so relevant for life and for the development) as its 'for-the-sake-of-which'. This leaves us with the question of the 'How?', the question of the manner in which art can manage to direct the eye of the observer to the natural beauty that has been set free.

According to what has already been said, art is situated in the midst of life; it serves life, namely the concrete purposes of life, like, first and foremost, the touristic development of the island. But how can art manage to subserve these purposes without degrading into a kitschy, de-auralized repetition of this life in the process? This is only possible if the continuation of nature's creation remains faithful to its original law, which is: always to be future-oriented and non-imitative, and to constantly create anew. The point is to surprise the gaze, to destabilize what has already been bestowed and recognized in order to call into question the already objectivated actuality and its enchaining force. Art, like nature, has to constantly throw man off the habitual track so that he opens his eyes to the hitherto un-identified possibilities. Adorno writes, "What nature strives for in vain, artworks fulfill: They open their eyes."⁵¹ There is a direct link between art's element of surprise and its future-disclosing, liberating, and emancipatory role. Without fulfilling this role, art is unable to contribute to the establishment of the actualized utopia, because the latter cannot be conceived of without human freedom and openness towards the future.

⁵¹ Ibid., 66.

In this aesthetic theory Adorno recalls a joke that dates back to the time of the Wilhelmine Empire: A lieutenant sends his adjutant to the zoo so that he can later report back to him. After the visit the adjutant reports to this superior: Lieutenant, animals like that do not exist! The German language has found a concise expression for the utterance of total surprise: such a thing does not exist [*Das gibt es doch nicht!*]! Adorno uses this idiosyncrasy of the German language to describe the essence of genuine art: "In each genuine artwork something appears that does not exist."⁵² Analogously, we could add that in every artwork something appears that does not yet exist. Thus: that which is not visible is not that which is no longer visible but rather that which is not yet visible. It is precisely this aspect that equates what is metaphysical in the artwork with its opening towards the future. And it is this essential *modus operandi* of art – to bring what is not yet visible to appearance – that confers a true element of surprise on art that has nothing at all to do with the addiction to novelty that is so typical of modernity. The element of surprise of genuine art cannot be reduced to a superficial, fleeting interest. The mood to which it appeals can be described much more fittingly with the Greek verb θαυμάζειν, which can be translated as "wonder". It is well known that the Greeks took this wonder as the beginning of philosophy. Thus, we are dealing with the wonder that profoundly shakes the essence of man. True art ought to exert precisely this effect on the observer: to shake man in his essence, in his deeply-rooted views and ossified habits. It is true that modern art is always confronted with the danger of confusing the task of this shock with the superficial element of surprise; but it is precisely for this reason that genuine artworks are so rare in modern and every other art.

⁵² Ibid., 82.

The following succinct passage, in which the artist explains the difference between various forms of perception, proves that the concept of wonder has moved us into immediate proximity of the intended goal of Manrique's art. He writes that his artistic work is about "surprising the gaze" and "teaching to see", where active and reflective 'seeing' (*ver*) is opposed to the passive and fleeting 'looking' (*mirar*). The artworks that Manrique intends are meant to produce the element of surprise described above and thereby not only offer an invitation to reflection but even transform the form of perception. According to Manrique, the purpose is "through surprise [to] bring about an imaginative leap that transforms the indifferent gaze into a change of the visual objective, into study and analysis."⁵³ The conceptuality of this art thus resides not so much in the work of art itself but is rather located at the threshold between the artwork and the beholder of art. We can also describe this by saying that the artwork that is – as we already know – rooted in nature and integrated into nature is the arc strike where a new kind of seeing is kindled which then perceives the nature around the artwork in a transformed way. It is also telling that Manrique associates this new perspective on nature with 'study and analysis' which, in turn, confirms our conjecture that this conception of art revolves around the concept of wonder that since antiquity has been regarded as the source and cause of philosophy, of thinking, and of theory.

Thus, genuine art manages not only to create a new, unexpected object of sight (and thereby to give expression to the silent language of natural beauty) but to transform the observer – the subject of the seeing. Art neither ought to decorate, nor to compensate; it neither ought to be made absolute, nor be commercially misused. Its task is nothing less than

⁵³ Manrique, 89.

to create a new world of objects that constitutes a genuine continuation of the creative activity of nature. This may sound a bit pathetic, but this task must nevertheless be carried out here and now. Since this task needs to be carried out here and now, art is able to change something in the actual world. It can even make an essential contribution to the sustainable development of a country and the people, for instance as the basis of a qualitative tourism. At this point it becomes clear once more that art, including modern art, does not constitute an elitist undertaking but addresses itself 'democratically' to all who are ready to learn to genuinely see. Art is not meant to entertain art aficionados; it ought to grant man access to natural beauty. As we have already seen at the end of the previous chapter, the final step always belongs to man: the 'imaginative leap' only happens in those who are ready to shed the petrified perspective on things and to open themselves up to a new kind of seeing. As such, we ought to say: art in itself does not create a new world of objects; it is only through the imaginative leap of the observer, through the active contribution of the beholder, that a new 'visual target object' comes into being – at the threshold between the artwork and the beholder of art. Art only creates the foundations upon which human activity is able to build. Just as nature merely calls on man to continue its creation, the decision for it always lies with man himself.

The profoundly shocking surprise that is caused by artworks changes the objective world only by changing the beholder. The qualitative change of the object is mediated by a qualitative change of the subject. But how does the latter exactly come about? Here the artwork again contains something that is reminiscent of Kant's concept of the sublime: it is not by producing simultaneously pleasure and fear (like enormous objects of nature, for instance the sea or great mountains), but by referring the

subject back inward through the contact with the artwork. This return of the beholder of art to himself is directly linked with the reflective moment of seeing ('study and analysis') that we have already addressed above. It is precisely because art sends man on the path of reflection through the element of surprise that Lanzarote, as a place of creative nature and of surprising art, could become a place of meditation. Manrique himself comes up with this idea, but he does not elaborate it so as not to be seen as a 'lunatic'.⁵⁴

This last and somewhat funny theoretical 'cop-out' on the part of Manrique proves once more that as radically modern and conceptual art ought to be in the eyes of the artist from Lanzarote, it must never degenerate into an elitist undertaking. Rather, it must always remain committed to life and to humankind. It has to open up the perspective for sustainable development and happiness and must thereby grant the possibilities of an actualized utopia.

⁵⁴ See Manrique, 47.

**Chapter IV.
Fourth approach:
Development**



The reconstruction of the triad man-art-nature that we have attempted above opens up the possibility of conceiving utopia as the state that is to be actualized against the background of this triad. First, we must note that for Manrique the longed-for utopia is not an extra-temporal phenomenon. The fact that utopia can become actualized means first and foremost that it is in principle possible to localize it temporally. We are neither talking about a mythical time nor about primitive times or a parallel time. Utopia can be actualized – or not – in historical, human time. This points to a second premise of Manrique's utopian thinking: utopia is neither unactualizable in principle nor is it historically necessary. It is and remains a possibility. Certain developments lead to this historically localizable possibility; but there are also developments that lead away from it. As a state that can be actualized in history, utopia remains fundamentally open 'on both sides': a temporal door grants access to it; but there is also an exit door. Whether the latter leads irreversibly away from the state of utopia has to remain an open question for now. At any rate, utopia remains dependent, both in its actualization and its

disenablement [*Verunmöglichung*], on certain developments. And it is precisely these developments that we want to discuss in this chapter.

The reason why we do not want to interpret Manrique's concept of '*desarrollo*' in the obvious sense of *progress* has to do with the essential determinations of his 'utopia'. The interpretation of history that thinks in the categories of progress necessarily proceeds teleologically: the use of the concept of progress implies an 'oriented' interpretation of the historical process. Regardless of whether the final state of a history that is conceptualized as progress is presented positively or remains undetermined with respect to its content as the 'empty spot' of an asymptotic movement, there is no denying that the historical purpose has utopian traits – 'utopian' already in the sense that it is conceived of as the moment in which we expect to see less injustice, less coercion, less suffering, etc. The emancipatory sense of history conceived as progress transforms the future into a horizon that is tinged with utopia. In this respect, the concept of development is much more neutral, which can already be seen in its linguistic determination. Those who want to speak of 'bad progress' evidently posit a strong historico-philosophical thesis and have to justify this paradoxical-seeming manner of speaking. By contrast, to speak of 'bad' and 'good' developments does not create any problems and is readily understood. In comparison with progress, developments lay no totalizing claim: in a certain period there can be at times good and at times bad developments; indeed, there can be developments that run parallel in time but that nevertheless proceed in opposite directions.

Aside from the neutrality that we have already mentioned, the concept of development also has another advantage: it allows us to understand

historical, social, or cultural processes as an unfolding of something that is actually already present now, in an 'enveloped' [*verwickelt*] form. This trait of the concept of development takes us near the category of *entelechia* – a living unfolding of a potentiality in actuality; an actualization of what is potentially already present. What is particularly striking about this category is not only the immanent source of the dynamic (the substance develops its potentiality 'from out of itself'), but also the immanence of the results of the development. That is to say: the intended state [*Zweckzustand*] does not develop in accordance with the immanent laws (and not because it is 'intended' from outside). Instead, it is according to its essence not alien (not heterogeneous) to the process that leads to it (or: the forces, agents, etc. that bring it about). If we relate these slightly abstract-seeming philosophical determinations to Manrique's social-aesthetic utopia, its special appropriateness manifests itself very clearly. If the concept of development is understood in this way, it corresponds above all to Manrique's understanding of nature as it has previously been reconstructed. As we have shown, nature is interpreted as the productive source of creation that generates a plentiful abundance. As we have also explained, human beings constitute an important aspect of this creative process. They can participate in this process, for instance by making natural beauty manifest through their art. However, if they do so, they act precisely as the fulfillers of the force that unites them with nature and not as a heterogeneous power that would do violence to nature from without. In this sense, a socially and aesthetically aware humanity can become a part of *nature's development into natural beauty*: this possibility is grounded in the artist's 'complicity' with nature.

This conception has two significant consequences that we now have to elucidate further. For one, it yields the interpretation that already now,

at its current level of productivity, nature has supplied us human beings with sufficient 'material' to be able to organize our life in a rational *and* happy manner. Secondly, if this is the case, then the name of the agenda is above all: *primum non nocere*; man does not so much have to bring about 'progress', as he ought not to get in the way of the immanent development of nature. Put differently: human beings are not only able to help along the development of the force of natural beauty, they can also prevent this force from becoming effective – as they have unfortunately done for the better part of history. Progress is conceived negatively, if at all, and means first and foremost: to lift that which blocks the path of the natural development.

The first point is crucial for understanding Manrique's utopia. The concept of progress that we have previously adumbrated, which locates the longed-for state of utopia at the end of time, can be considered an anti-thesis to his understanding. The deconstruction and rejection of this naïve notion is one of the most important components of the philosophical critique that the concept of progress underwent in the 20th century at the hands of critical, unorthodox Marxism. There is, on the one hand, the figure of Odysseus as he is portrayed in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* – who stands as the cipher for the modern individual –, who constantly sacrifices himself by repeatedly postponing his satisfaction and happiness to a later time in the uncertain asymptotically-unattainable future. The retardation of happiness (of utopia) contains, on the one hand, modern rationality with its utilitarian means-ends-consideration, with the economy of drives and their satisfaction. On the other hand, progress, with its promise of individual freedom and emancipation, is unmasked as one of the means of repression against the substance of individuality – against its own, inner nature. Odysseus who screams "I am nobody" defeats the chthonic

mythical powers only thanks to his self-denial; likewise the modern individual who clings to the emancipatory promise of progress despite the fact that this progress potentially turns into a means of repression – with a voracious appetite for self-sacrifice – against the living substance of this individuality.⁵⁵ This critical insight into the 'terror of the future' is supplemented by Walter Benjamin's unmasking of history as a victim-devouring process (in his famous interpretation of Paul Klee's '*Angelus novus*'). The fear-stricken angel, whose back is hurled against the future by the tremendous vehemence of the wind of progress, has to watch on as the mountain of history's victims that rises between the beginning of time and his eyes is growing higher and higher. Benjamin's warning seems to be that if anything awaits us in the future, it is not the longed-for utopian final state but the mountain of victims that has evidently grown even higher.⁵⁶ After Benjamin's death, world history vindicated this sinister prophecy beyond any doubt.

It is important to note that the Frankfurt thinkers of modernity by no means intended to disavow the promise of emancipation and the idea of utopia. Their aim is rather to call into question the teleological interpretation that pictures the state of utopia as the historical fulfilment of the original assurance of freedom and happiness that is ever farther pushed forward. But what would be the alternative? Adorno's and Benjamin's answer seems to be tied to a one-time transformation of the temporal perspective on the basis of which the concept of progress is

⁵⁵ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 26 ff.

⁵⁶ "This storm {that is blowing from paradise} irresistibly propels him {i.e. the angel of history} into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress." (Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, transl. Harry Zohn [New York: Schocken Books, 1969], 258.)

interpreted. For Benjamin, the teleological interpretation of the dynamic of history is replaced by a 'kairological thinking' – a thinking that revolves around the concept of *kairos*, the *critical and opportune moment*. With respect to the transformation of the historical situation it would mean that this transformation would be achieved not as the result of a gradual, infinite approximation, but already now, in this moment, through the irruption of the right moment. If we conceive of the utopian aspect kairologically, we have to assume that utopia would be possible here and now – which, to be sure, also entails that one can miss the right moment for entering into the realm of utopia. The other Frankfurt critics of the naïve concept of progress suggest in many places, without making use of the mystical-seeming concept of *kairos*, that utopia be understood not as a distant goal but as a possibility, a possibility that is not being perceived but that nevertheless exists in reality. We find this in the introduction to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which begins with the question of how it is possible that humanity is falling victim to a new kind of barbarism even though the establishment of a happy, humane life would already – precisely in this moment – be possible. We find a very similar thought in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, where in a passage the possibility of utopia is described as the circumstance that "given the level of productive forces the earth could here and now be paradise".⁵⁷ The Frankfurt thinkers show that it is possible to conceive utopia not according to the teleological paradigm – as the time that will not arrive for a long time, or that has already been lost for a long time – but as the really existing but unperceived and *obstructed* possibility. Utopia would be possible here and now. We are surrounded by it. However, since we do not want and are not able to actualize it, we descend into the unhappy state.

⁵⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 33.

Manrique evidently also conceives of his utopia in this kairological way. He declares unmistakably, "the time has already come to start living the utopia"⁵⁸. Manrique does not picture visions of the future for the next generations but rather calls on his contemporaries to recognize utopia and to actualize it – here and now. What is needed for this is already there, the substance of utopia waits for us to discover and shape it, as the following succinct words attest:

"Everything in the universe has already been discovered. All that is now left for us, is to be more modest, to recognize our own limitations and to do our utmost to try to adopt the lessons that result from the experience of the millions of centuries of this magnificent equilibrium of natural perfection."⁵⁹

In the sentences that we have just quoted it also becomes very clear how the kairological conception of utopia is related to Manrique's concept of nature: everything that we need in order to make the state of utopia possible has already been supplied by nature itself, through the superabundance of its creation. Man's role is to discover this enormous reserve and to turn it (carefully) into the foundation of the happy human life. At this point one cannot help but wonder how the perception of the utopian possibility that he demands is supposed to proceed. What is necessary is obviously a change of perspective that resembles the aesthetic transformation of the gaze that has been described earlier. If the state of utopia does not constitute a final state in the history of the universe but is already possible right now, then what is at stake here is not the teleological transformation of the universe but, for the time being

⁵⁸ Manrique, 47.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

and first and foremost, the transformation of the perspective through which we behold the universe today. Just as a change in perspective can turn the terrifying landscape of Lanzarote into the stage of natural beauty, the transformed consciousness of the historical subject and his transformed perspective are able to see the universe differently and only as a result of this are able to grasp it as the place of the possible utopia. The logic that currently dominates us, which ignores and disavows both nature and the possibility of human happiness, has to be replaced with "the logic of a better vision of the world"⁶⁰.

Surely by now critical consciousness will interject and express a doubt as to whether this could be achieved so easily. Is it really sufficient to make man aware of the possibilities that he has hitherto ignored in order to effectively transform his current situation? Could it be that the risk of a utopianism in the fatal sense of the word looms at this point, of a wishful thinking that ultimately appeals to human beings as individuals in order to conjure up the longed-for social (i.e. collective) transformations? Does aesthetics arrogate something to itself that in its own domain is perhaps quite possible, but that in the social domain remains completely unrealistic without the interplay of other – economic, political, historical – factors?

In light of these critical questions it is not surprising that at this important juncture Manrique's path permanently diverges from that of the critical-aesthetic social theory of the Frankfurt stamp that we have regarded as our guiding thread. Even though we have seen that for Adorno as well the possibility of a utopia state is given 'here and now', the tragic element in art consists precisely in that "art must be and wants to be

⁶⁰ Ibid., 65.

utopia, and the more utopia is blocked by the real functional order, the more this is true; yet at the same time art may not be utopia in order not to betray it by providing semblance and consolation. ... Art is no more able than theory to concretize utopia, not even negatively."⁶¹

This unequivocal refusal of any kind of 'reconciliation' with the existing world that would be brought about by art has profound consequences for the tasks and possibilities of art as it is described in this paradigmatic modern aesthetic theory. Even though art can never be imagined without the happiness-affording aspect of desire, in the face of the fact that "In the false world all ἡδονή is false" – "happiness is renounced"⁶². Thus, the following judgment is passed: even if art retains an essential reference to the utopian aspect, it is irrevocably barred – in the sense of the modern re-interpretation of the biblical ban on images – from attempting to actualize utopia. Every utopia that is allegedly actualized by art is only 'semblance and consolation' and thus a betrayal of the original promise. Such an art affirms the existing social and political order and thereby ceases to be art; it is, at most, entertainment.

If we search for the causes of this radical-seeming judgment, they appear – at least at first sight – to be anchored in a thoroughly realistic diagnosis of modernity. The provenance of this diagnosis is Lukács's thought. It says, in slightly simplified terms, that in a comprehensively unjust order (in the 'false totality') it is not possible to change the entire order through just undertakings that are restricted to isolated, individual, and/or concrete areas. *Furthermore*, it says that in light of this impossibility the well-intended undertakings will necessarily fail. Just as Marx held that an individual

⁶¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 32.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 13.

capitalist is unable to change the totality of the relations of production by arranging his factory justly, art is not capable – even if it remains emancipatory, or especially if it only remains emancipatory – of conjuring up the longed-for change. It does not lack the power or the truth for it but the comprehensiveness. Since the good totality is no longer possible and the false totality has a stranglehold on us, even the most progressive art remains infected with the effects of alienation⁶³ and, therefore, cannot possibly fulfil its promise of freedom and happiness. “Great works {of the authentic art of the past} wait. ... A liberated humanity would be able to inherit its historical legacy free of guilt.”⁶⁴

What Manrique opposes to this radical and unconciliatory aesthetic position is a model of art that aspires to bring about utopia, albeit only ever in an uncertain, fragile way. According to this model, art – though, as we will shortly see, not art alone – can spur the developments that are capable of removing that which blocks or obstructs utopia. Manrique is able to claim this especially because in contrast to the Frankfurt position that we have reconstructed he does not think in the categories of a ‘lost’ and ‘unrestorable’ totality. The idea of the living totality, which, as we have seen in the chapter on nature, is quite present and effective in Manrique’s thinking, is transferred not so much to the theoretical diagnoses as to the conduct of individuals, especially of the artists. It is the artist who ought to act in a totalizing manner. Only by doing this does the artist come close to his greatest ally – nature – which always already proceeds in a totalizing manner. “Total creation offers a glimpse of the future of art.”⁶⁵ Manrique

⁶³ See Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 57.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁵ Manrique, 56.

renders his utopia more concrete: Even though the artist has to act 'in a totalizing manner', he will not comprehend reality as a totality that, as a whole, is either true or false. Art does not have to wait for liberated humanity; it does not only remain "consciousness of plight"⁶⁶. Rather, it can make an essential contribution to the mitigation of human needs, even to their elimination. The 'totalizing' approach that Manrique expects of the artists entails first and foremost that they generate works that are not removed from reality and that are not brought into the world 'for their own sake'. But this also means that in their creation the artist should pay attention to the social and ecological aspects, as well as the ones that are conditioned by tradition and culture. It is only by including in their artistic creation the totality (of the social and cultural contexts) that forms the basis of their work, as well as the totality of effects that their works ought to generate, that artists can become the harbingers and co-authors of the longed-for utopian transformation.

In Manrique's view this aspiration is not merely one possibility among others; it is rather an obligation. In several passages he says unmistakably that he regards the actualization of the state of utopia as the true, comprehensive task of the artist. A particularly explicit formulation of this conviction can be found in the following statements:

"We have the duty to start constructing 'utopia' ... {It is necessary} to establish other foundations of coexistence that are based on culture, intelligence, and the uncompromising protection of the environment that we inhabit."⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 18

⁶⁷ Manrique, 62-64.

"I am convinced and have a profound feeling that all {of us as} contemporary artists ... have a moral and ethical duty to save everything that surrounds us and to denounce everything negative that concerns life and its own development. I believe that this the most important mission of the contemporary artist."⁶⁸

In these two succinct quotations the view that the artist's obligation consists in his working towards the utopia is linked to an interpretation of this work to which we have already alluded previously: it involves primarily the active liberation of life from all obstacles that inhibit its own development. In addition to the negative aspect of this task ('removal of obstacles') we also find positive indications of how the state of utopia would have to be arranged. First of all it is important to point out that the passage does not refer to an artist but to artists – plural. This signals that the 'construction of utopia' is a task for the community and not for the individual. Manrique also mentions important prerequisites for the creation of the "other foundations of coexistence". Among them he counts culture, intelligence, and an "uncompromising protection of the environment". These keywords suggest large areas in which certain developments have to occur if the actualization of utopia is to be possible at all. Culture does not only mean art but also tradition and the cultural heritage of a people. The protection of the environment essentially involves much more than the 'ecological thinking' that has become so self-evident for us today: it is about the process of becoming aware of man's essential rootedness in nature that we have reconstructed above. It is precisely this awareness that the keyword 'intelligence' refers to: not just the awareness of the citizens who have become enlightened about

⁶⁸ Ibid., 49.

their tradition and their prospects, but also the awareness of politicians and statesmen who decide the fate of their fellow citizens.

This broadens the community of those who can and ought to endeavour to actualize utopia: it defies social and political differences. The initiation and advancement of the various, parallel developments that lead in the direction of the utopian reality only when taken in unison thus proves to be no task for artistic loners, even if they were geniuses. The change of perspective that was announced earlier and that constitutes the prerequisite of the perception of the possibility of utopia needs to begin with the transformation of the consciousness of the citizens. The citizens have to both perceive their own tradition, their cultural heritage, and be able to understand (and clearly recognize) which prerequisites need to be fulfilled in order for a humane future to become possible at all. What is necessary in order to achieve this is not just the aesthetic activity of an exemplary artist, like Manrique was for Lanzarote, but also a sustainable, well-considered and universally accessible education. Today this may seem like one of the most trivial postulates of every successful social politics. However, in retrospect Manrique's insight was, in its time, both wise and forward-looking: he never ceases to repeat that the best that a state can do for its citizens is a solid education: "The best business of a state is education."⁶⁹ Even though there are certain passages in which Manrique casts doubt⁷⁰ on the power of comprehension of the masses, passages which admittedly seem elitist, he usually holds an enlightened view of a Kantian stamp according to which the lasting capacity for autonomy, whether individual or collective, is fundamentally unattainable without

⁶⁹ Ibid., 38.

⁷⁰ See *ibid.*, 94.

reflection and education (*'Sapere aude!'*). The first prerequisite of utopia is the citizens' knowledge of its possibility and the reflective fathoming of the developments that lead to it. Manrique's undertakings, for instance the refusal to reconstruct the traditional style of Lanzarote's architecture, which instead he taught to all of Lanzarote's citizen, thereby ensuring its survival and its proliferation on the island, is a clear expression of this conviction. And if Manrique is convinced that the possibility of utopia has been achieved on the island, this development is owed primarily to the islanders' becoming aware of the sense and significance of their own tradition and of the conditions of their own development: "all good-natured inhabitants of Lanzarote have become aware that the task of salvation {*la tarea de salvacion*} is a collective undertaking".⁷¹

The widespread awareness among the citizens of the potential of the tradition and of the prerequisites of the development in the direction of a humane life cannot be imagined without universal education ('intelligence'). This is primarily the task of the state and its politicians: it is their first task whose execution (or neglect) will show their intentions – with respect to the question as to what kind of citizens (aware and autonomous or helpless and heteronomous) they want to deal with:

"We believe that every government has the obligation to protect the space that serves the unfolding of our lives, of education and culture, of our wealth and especially of the 'permanence of this wealth'".⁷²

Thus, the irruption of utopia cannot occur as the result of undertakings of loners, nor can it occur behind the backs of the citizens. It will become

⁷¹ Ibid., 61.

⁷² Ibid., 68.

probable only when the citizens themselves, out of their own insight, stand up for the protection of the environment and their own cultural heritage, as well as for a sustainable, balanced development of their own social life. This involvement, in turn, is possible only on the basis of knowledge – which is where politicians ought to aid their fellow citizens. This is why for Manrique the concern for a comprehensive and universally accessible education for the citizens is the first and most eminent duty of the political class. At this point, several developments begin to show that are necessary in order for the actualization of utopia to become probable.

Of course many other developments are required to bring about the longed-for state. One of them is the creative force of the artist who is able to give expression to natural beauty through his art. Another is his courage to spread among his fellow citizens the insight into the significance of the preservation of the cultural heritage and into the conditions of true development. This is the only sense in which the modern artist can and should understand himself as the vanguard, as the spearhead of social transformation, and act accordingly. It is not only the relationship between the artist and his fellow citizens that is important here but also the relationship between the artists and the political rulers. Conceived along more Platonic lines, the political decision-makers can create the conditions for the eminent aesthetic projects that will transform and enrich the landscape considerably. What is decisive here is whether the decision-makers understand themselves as the representatives of the community and make decisions that have the protection of the environment and the sustainable development for the benefit of their own population in mind, or whether in practice they act like the executors of the interests of the 'speculators', hence those who want to enrich themselves quickly and with no regard for environmental and social consequences. On this point Manrique seems to adopt an unyielding position:

politicians either serve the sustainable development of their community or they serve the interests of 'speculators' – *tertium non datur*. In the triangle in which 'the citizens' and 'the artists' represent the other two corners, politics constitutes the irreplaceable third point because it alone has the power and resources at its disposal to actualize the large-scale aesthetic-social projects of the artists in the interest of the citizens. Accordingly, the aforementioned triangle – citizens, artists, politicians – is capable of ensuring sustainable development only when the conceptions of education and of reflection (citizens), of creation and of social responsibility (artists), of service and of vision of the future (politicians) provide the backdrop.

We shall leave aside the question of whether this construction is starry-eyed. The impression that it is abstract and naïve is slightly diminished by the decisive element that we have so far factored out of our discussion: namely, the economy. It is only the inclusion of the economic aspect that confers a down-to-earthness on Manrique's aesthetic-social conception of utopia. After all, the artist knows that in the future the population of the island, whose perseverance and industriousness Manrique very much admires, will no longer be able to subsist on fishing and the kind of agriculture that relies on the picturesque use of camels. Tourism is the ever more important source of income for the local population and will in the future likely be the only one. As we have seen, it is not tourism as such that poses a threat to the nature and the people of Lanzarote but only its massified, vulgar form:

"Already today the wealth of agriculture and of fishing hardly exists on Lanzarote. The only life {of the island} consists in an intelligent tourism industry that needs to be planned with love and talent. It is the only alternative."⁷³

⁷³ Ibid., 76.

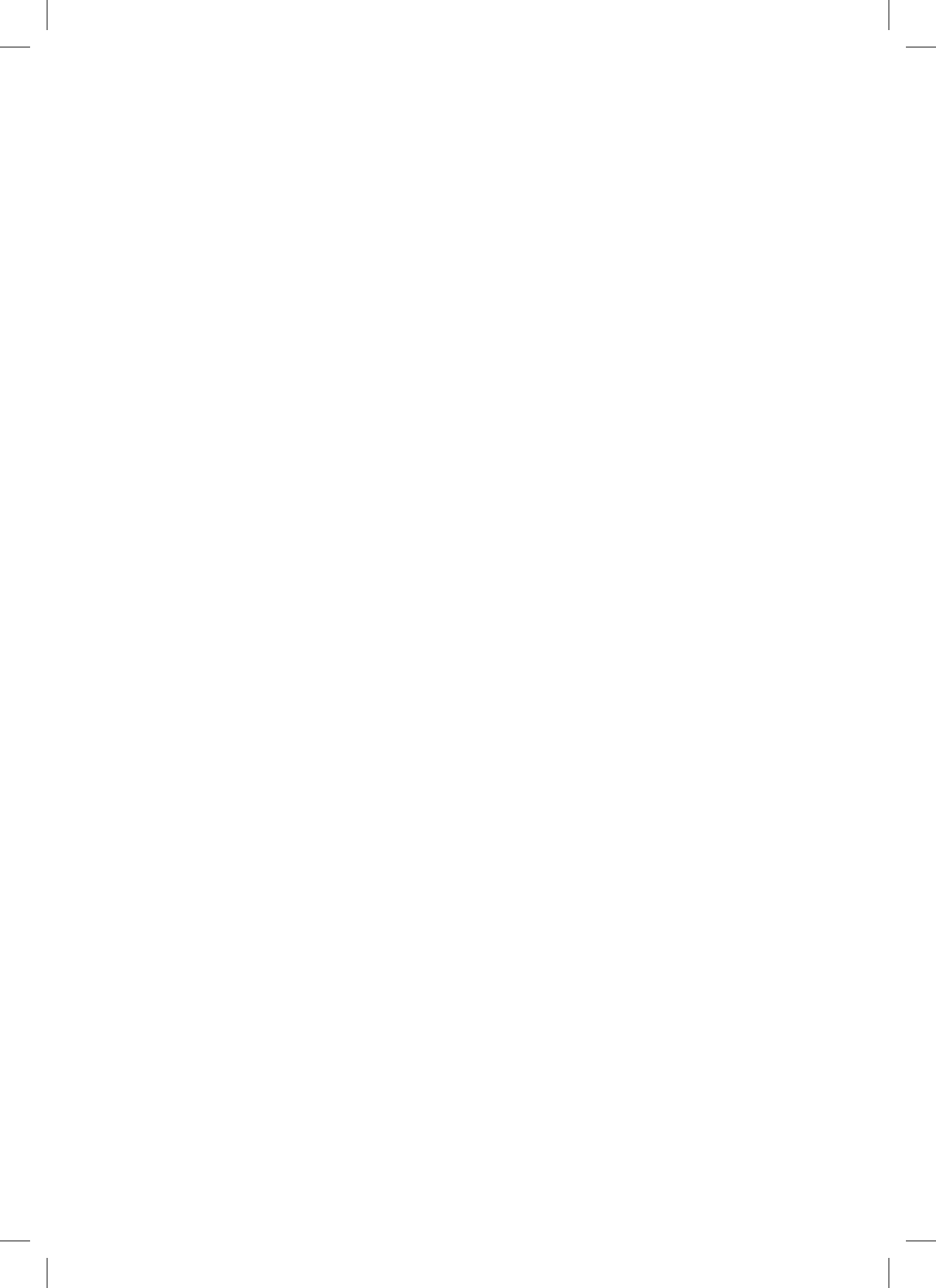
A qualitative, 'intelligent' tourism, as it has been described above, a tourism for guests who want to discover the nature and culture of the island constitutes the only chance for Lanzarote and its inhabitants to establish a happy, humane life lastingly. Hence, in Manrique's thinking economic calculation is an integral part of the concept of happiness. However, if there is an 'economy of happiness', it should not surprise or even startle us that Manrique's conception of utopia is also based on an economic foundation. At this point the utilitarian trait of Manrique's 'project Lanzarote' becomes manifest: the word "profitable" is mentioned repeatedly in his aesthetic-social plan, yet Manrique does not give much thought to the question of whether by doing this he forfeits art's autonomous character. Nor does he shy away from discussing the protection of nature or the aesthetic transformation of the island not just under the 'absolute' aspect of the 'obligation' or the 'continued creation', but also under the 'practical' and 'true-to-life' aspect of its profitability. It is not only necessary to protect the environment of Lanzarote and to secure the best possible education for the inhabitants; it is not only right to view art as the continuation of the natural force of creation. Rather: there is no better *investment* in the future of the island than the protection of the environment, education, and aesthetic projects. Environmental protection, education, and the aesthetic transformation of the island *pay off* – for the island and its people.

From the heaven of philosophical ideas we are suddenly brought down to earth where basic questions demand answers, like for instance: How many tourists can Lanzarote tolerate? How can a qualitative tourism be established in place of mass tourism? How should the hotel infrastructure be expanded without causing damage to the environment

and the architectural landscape? The utopia of Lanzarote is not a closed, hermetical project: what is unfolding here is not only something that benefits the inhabitants but something that also ought to be an enrichment for the guests. It is only in this context that the viability of the utilitarian argument becomes manifest: if Lanzarote is overbuilt in the spirit of a short-sighted mass industry that is oriented towards quick profit, the island loses its original character qualities to which it owes its attractiveness. 'Vulgar' mass tourism only pays off for the speculators. According to Manrique, such a tourism spells the gradual decline of the island and its population. Only a qualitative tourism that is based on the power of attraction of the aesthetic transformation of Lanzarote is able to guarantee the population a lasting and sustainable development. In order to evade the temptation of a quick profit and to make possible the slow but in return stable development of a qualitative tourism, the willingness of all three instances mentioned above to work together is required: the well-informed, aware citizens, the socially-involved artists, and the uncorrupted, future-oriented politicians. Social cohesion and economic profitability form a referential context in which one cannot be comprehended or established without the other.

Whether this vision of the development that is meant to lead in the direction of the state of utopia supplies a universal, abstract recipe for all geographic latitudes, for all political and social contexts, is a question that we will confront in the next chapter. To answer this question means to explore whether Lanzarote can be considered to be the model of an actualized utopia or only an isolated case.

**Chapter V.
Fifth Approach:
Tradition**



A distinct motif that is reproduced in many formulations permeates Manrique's theoretical statements like a red thread. This motif is the deeply-rooted conviction that the protection and the evolution of the tradition of a people is one of the most important, necessary conditions of its continued existence. In the following quotation, which can be considered as representative of countless similar passages, this conviction gets to the heart of the matter in a clear, laconic, and radical manner:

"A people without a tradition is condemned to die."⁷⁴

In every political scientist, sociologist, and historian of ideas this motif immediately calls up the association of the rhetoric of conservatism, which very frequently sets against the abstract proposals of the professional do-gooders (read: the philosophers) the concrete, historically, culturally and religiously anchored traditions of a particular community. In the previous

⁷⁴ Ibid., 52.

chapter we have presented Manrique's notion of the development that is supposed to lead in the direction of utopia. Is the present chapter perhaps a kind of 'conservative corrective' of these possibly abstract notions? Or, put differently: Does Manrique's aesthetic-social thinking contain a 'conservative' aspect that counterbalances his progressive utopianism?

These admittedly obvious questions imply an interpretation of the main concepts of Manrique's aesthetics that fails to do justice to its overall concern. One of the reasons that prevent one from speaking of a traditionalistic-conservative 'corrective' of Manrique's utopianism is that he nowhere wants to oppose tradition to utopia. Rather, as we have seen in the previous chapter, utopia cannot be conceived of and cannot be had without tradition. And conversely, tradition is not taken as dead stock but as a dynamic factor that is capable of setting in motion from out of itself the developments that lead in the direction of utopia from. Instead of applying ideological labels, it would be worthwhile to examine the supposed self-evidence of the concept of tradition and ask some fundamental questions about the meaning of this concept. What is tradition for Manrique? How is tradition born and passed on? Why is it indispensable for the survival of a people? And: What does it contribute to the facilitation of utopia?

Throughout his life Manrique demonstrated his respect for the laborious work of the simple inhabitants of Lanzarote. This admiration pertained primarily to the tenacity and endurance of these people in the face of the difficult conditions in which they still had to work during Manrique's lifetime, especially during his youth. The issue is not the scarcity of water resources that, to be sure, poses a threat to man as such, but that is downright catastrophic for the farmer. Agriculture in the context of the

prevailing drought amounts to a hard, exhausting struggle. This constant struggle naturally shaped the culture and the character of the people who inhabit the island. To generalize a little: one could say that the culture of a people is always primarily a *response* to the conditions under which it is forced to live and under which it must survive. The customs, the rituals, the virtues of a culture constitute a context that can be conceived as the collective coming-to-terms with the challenges of the surrounding nature. This coming-to-terms may take on positive (mimetic) forms or negative (dominating) forms. In either case, the culture of the people in question is essentially determined by the imperatives of its environment.

This claim is not tantamount to the wish to reduce culture to nature. In Manrique's view culture constitutes an autonomous domain: culture's reference to 'its' nature can be very complicated. Nevertheless, every culture remains, at least with respect to its genesis, related to its surroundings in which it developed. This provides at least a rudimentary answer to the first question: Culture emerges as the collective (not individual or trans-individual) response to the conditions of the nature that surrounds this collective and to the challenges that result from it. As such, every culture is a historical phenomenon: it is born in time, evolves, shows symptoms of aging, and in some cases it can even die; hence: it can disappear from the stage of world history. All this belongs to the basic insights of every cultural anthropology, just like the observation that the continuation of a tradition is not an eternal repetition of the same but constitutes a process of constant transformation *and* continuation. However, there are certain limits to the alternating tendency within every culture. By all appearances Manrique would locate them in the original conditions of nature that constitute the background of a given culture. The original conditions of nature survive, as it were, in what is genuine

in a culture, its heart, even if they are not given in reality. For instance, a culture can hold the virtue of frugality in especially high esteem even if the 'nature-dependent' causes of this frugality have diminished or even disappeared in the meantime.

Does this perhaps mean that the value of a culture depends on the nature of its place of origin, insofar as this nature is enclosed in the culture like a crypt? This thought seems too reductionist. Even if this is philosophical sophistry, it is likely better to say that what makes up the value of a culture is what is genuine in the answer that a people gave in response to the specific conditions of nature. To live a culture means: to live in a culture and to live from a culture. It is a more or less natural attitude of the people who grew up in this culture. One's own culture becomes problematic (in the sense of its becoming the object of reflection) only when this culture is confronted with other cultures or with factors that threaten it. Only at this point does the tendency to *defend* one's own culture arise. Such also seems to be Manrique's intention: he wants to appreciate and protect Lanzarote's unique culture. The intention of defending a culture is typically a conservative one. In most cases it is set in motion as a reaction to the decadence of this culture, its decay or its disappearance. In order to know whether Manrique's thinking contains a conservative element that is becoming apparent here (and: in order to know what kind of conservatism we are dealing with), we must first clarify why the culture and tradition of Lanzarote ought to be defended. To jump ahead a bit: for Manrique the reason is the distinctness, which in the eyes of the artist evidently constitutes a value in itself. The strength of every culture resides in its difference that distinguishes it from other cultures and that makes it a unique phenomenon.

At this point the poles between which the tradition acquires a dynamic and polemic sense for Manrique are beginning to show. For him, to defend the tradition of a place, of a people, means first and foremost: to oppose the deflationary implications that, in his view, go along with the abstract and all-encompassing internationalization:

"Every day the identity of the art that could be characteristic of each state is increasingly lost a little more; unfortunately the same is happening to the customs, to the architecture, paintings and sculpture due to a particular kind of internationalization and the fast communication through airplanes, television, radio, etc."⁷⁵

We see at once that evidently not every kind of internationalization necessarily produces such effects. However, the one that Manrique has in mind does have these consequences. It is surely not an exaggeration to call Manrique an early critic of the assimilative effects of a superficial globalization; of a globalization that robs local cultures of their identity by hollowing out the specific meaning of particular customs and traditions and by replacing them with non-descript, banal forms and contents. At this point we can wonder whether Manrique's protest is only the result of an aesthetic dissatisfaction, or whether its roots go deeper. From the determinations on which Manrique had based his understanding of nature we can see that it is the latter. As we have already seen, for the artist from Lanzarote nature's distinguishing mark is its enormous productivity from which countless forms and characteristics result. Instead of continuing and potentiating this tendency of nature, the trivializing type of globalization works, as it were, against it. All places and regions of the world are being reduced to a schematic form that is

⁷⁵ Manrique, 38.

imposed without any regard for the locality of the surrounding nature and the traditions and needs of the population. This contributes to the aesthetic degradation of the landscape, but also to the cultural erosion of the communities. The inescapable consequence of this degradation is the slow onset of *aburrimiento*, boredom, which can be described as the dulling of the sensitivity of the spectator. Manrique would surely feel vindicated in his assessment by phenomena like the artificial holiday island not far from a European metropolis that we have already mentioned. We would likely regard this not as the triumph of 'experience culture' (often diagnosed today) but rather as the hollowing out of the meaning of 'experience'. In such an 'experience culture' the aesthetic experience, at least in the Manriquean sense that we have reconstructed above, is out of the question.

Ultimately, the frivolity with which this international 'aesthetic' standard (in the bad sense of the term) is introduced everywhere also affects the economic perspective of the community in question: what is negated by it is precisely the genuineness that was supposed to attract tourists. That is why Manrique credits the 'speculators' with this catastrophic strategy, the speculators whose only goal is to achieve shortsighted profits without giving any thought to the balanced development of the given local populations. As soon as all 'holiday destinations' look alike, it will no longer seem so strange to bring the 'aesthetic standard' of the holiday destinations home: one obstructs the cloudy sky with a roof, makes sure the temperature is pleasant, groups exotic trees around an artificial island, and then the vacation can also be 'experienced' close to one's place of residence.

In the face of these processes, the preservation of what is in each case specific is declared the indispensable basis of the utopian project, indeed

of the basic safeguarding of the survival of a people. And once again it is the artist who is called on to take on the task of this preservation. Naturally, as we have already discussed in the previous chapter, he cannot fulfil his task without the support of his fellow citizens and the politicians in charge. Yet, it is primarily incumbent on the artist to draw his fellow citizens' attention to the uniqueness of the local culture, which he does by continuing and developing this uniqueness in his aesthetic creation. The task of the artist is hence to increase, as it were, the genuineness of his natural and cultural surroundings in the face of the all-levelling tendency of the process of internationalization:

"I believe that the characteristic traits of every place on the planet urgently need to be intensified {*potenciar*}, given the standardized and boring culture without creative fantasy that will prevail already in the near future."⁷⁶

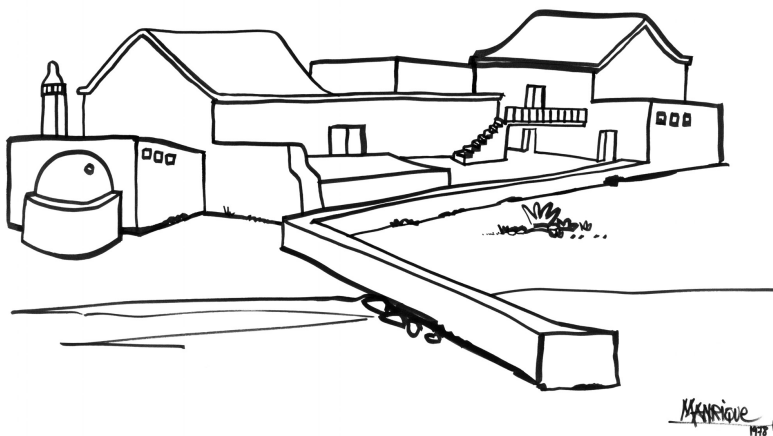
How this task is to be accomplished can already be gleaned from what we have presented in the chapter on art. The publication "*Lanzarote – arquitectura inédita*"⁷⁷, which wants to showcase the local architectural style, gives a succinct example of the way in which the continued creation of the artist (which is conceived as the continuation of nature's creation) goes hand in hand with the protective activity vis-à-vis the cultural heritage. Together with other authors, Manrique embarks on a journey across the island to salvage the preserved examples of local architecture from decay and from forgetting at least through the medium of photography. By retracing the buildings that he has found, he brings

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ See César Manrique, *Lanzarote, arquitectura inédita*, 2nd ed. (Lanzarote: Cabildo Insular de Lanzarote, 1988).



César Manrique
Untitled, 1978



César Manrique
Untitled, 1978

out the traits that are characteristic of the local architecture and turns them into a kind of standard for the further development on the island. Indeed, the first impression that most visitors gain when they arrive on Lanzarote comes from the uniformity of the architectural style: the white colour and the low height of the buildings. Mind you that one ought not simply to build copies, to reproduce the original buildings. Rather, the architectural style that was deciphered in them ought to (co-)determine the path of future construction projects on the island. Manrique's projects stand testament to the fact that this undertaking has nothing to do with the 'slavish' imitation of the traditional style. In these projects the tradition is always blended with fresh, creative elements and is melted into a unique synthesis.

A possible criticism – on the one hand we have a struggle against the 'international standardization' while, on the other, a local standard is being introduced – can be answered by pointing out that we are dealing with two distinct meanings of the term 'standard'. The misdirected 'international' standard consists of a number of ready-made forms that can simply be imported and installed with no regard for local conditions, requirements, and traditions. By contrast, local standards, like for example the architecture of Lanzarote that Manrique typified, are about creating a reservoir of aesthetic impulses for one's own artistic (or architectural) creation; the artist himself has to set about this creation each time afresh. While the 'international' standard, with its boring repeatability, leads to a growing fatigue in the spectator, the second standard, which is drawn from tradition, ought to be conceived of merely as the source of inspiration for projects that will always lead to surprise, wonder, and thereby the transformation of the gaze described above:

"Folk architecture is never repetitive, unlike the deplorable and already existing cases in which a small house is built and afterwards it is replicated forty times. That is cheap, monotonous and arouses absolutely no interest among our visitors."⁷⁸

As such the architectural style that is fostered by Manrique contributes to the landscape's being shaped in such a way that the characteristics of the natural environment, which are already present even though they are not visible (for everyone) at first sight, are revealed. In the case at hand the white colour of the building stands in contrast to the black ground of the island and to the green colour of the flora. From this contrast a dynamic landscape emerges that is filled with inner tension and that leaves no room for *aburrimento*, for the boredom of the fatigued spectator. Moreover: this landscape invites the eye of the spectator to become active, to synthesize the contradictory elements; thus, it involves this spectator in the continued creation of natural beauty, which can show itself only to the active spectator. In any case, we can say that the creation of a unified architectural standard on Lanzarote can be regarded as a textbook example of the 'potentiation of specificity' that Manrique postulates.

But this raises further questions: How can this task of the potentiation of specificity be reconciled with the postulate of the sublation of the 'divisive ideas' presented earlier? And: Does every place in the world contain this potency that can be increased still further? Put differently: Does Manrique draw up a recipe that is valid only for his island or for any other region or any other culture?

⁷⁸ Manrique, 53.

The first question is likely easier to answer than the others. The idea that every place and every culture has its specific essence that distinguishes it from all others is in itself not a 'divisive' idea. It is very likely that 'distinction' goes hand in hand with a certain exclusion of everything else. Using a quotation by Adorno, we have already indicated that every artwork (which inherits the attribute after "every individual object of nature that is experienced as beautiful") presents itself "as if it were the only beautiful thing on earth".⁷⁹ Fichte and Hegel already knew that the positing-of-itself of a phenomenon implies the opposition of the positing-of-an-other. Both philosophers also knew fully well that identity is not possible without reference to the other, nor that the boundary that is thereby posited between the one and the other remains unsurpassable. To put this point in simpler terms: to assert and care for one's own identity does not yet imply the disregard, degradation, or destruction of other identities. Mutual differentiation must not be equated with mutual combatting. What the artist from Lanzarote apparently has in mind is a world that is populated (and that shall continue to be populated) by a great many cultures that assert themselves and evolve while remaining fundamentally open and open-minded towards the other. In all likelihood, we are dealing with the idea of cultural diversity. This diversity is to be protected and defended without a hint of *völkisch* or national arrogance; the liberal "live and let life" (mind you, with a conservative stress on the uniqueness of every culture) rather than some notion of the 'clash of cultures'. The following passage from Manrique's writings succinctly summarizes the identity-related, aesthetic, and economic factors:

⁷⁹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 70.

"[T]he essential ethics of survival is the clear vision of the true significance of the traditional characteristics of the island, which are the source of truth from which have to draw and learn in order to be able to continue in this spirit. The irreparable mistakes that are being committed due to the disregard for this simple ecological axiom lead to nothing other than the absence of differentiation and of the formation of identity of the island and especially to vulgarity and poverty resulting from the lack of an elementary vision of the future. Nothing is more profitable than to distinguish oneself and to differentiate oneself in a world that tends toward total standardization."⁸⁰

Of course there are many doubts and questions that are linked to the position expressed in this quotation, for example: Is it possible to assert one's own identity and to distinguish it from other identities without valorizing it, i.e. without placing it in a certain hierarchy? Is it not the case that a certain state of isolation – one that is especially characteristic of an island – is needed in order to maintain the vision of peacefully co-existing but autonomously developing cultures? And: Is it not true that it is more typical for cultures to develop in a much more entangled way, namely by constantly absorbing *and* repelling impulses from without in order to fashion themselves in this constant tension vis-à-vis the other? The insular location indeed favours a more or less pronounced isolationism.⁸¹ It is no coincidence that utopian projects (like More's eponymous project *Utopia*) are typically envisaged to be actualized on islands, where they

⁸⁰ Manrique, 74–76.

⁸¹ The phenomenon of '*insularidad*' (insularity) and its connection to, on the one hand, mythical narratives and, on the other, utopian projects is a much-discussed topic in the literature. On this complex of problems in relation to the Canary Islands, see for example: Alberto Navarro González, *El mito marinero de las islas* (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Ediciones del Excmo. Cabildo Insular de Gran Canaria, 1964); or also: Antonio García y Bellido, *Las islas atlánticas en el mundo antiguo* (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Universidad Internacional de Canarias, 1967).

take advantage of the isolation of the island for the actualization of the utopian plans, true to the maxim: where nature itself has set boundaries, there is no need to apply any artificial 'divisive ideas' introduced by man. To put it in slightly casual terms: if the world consisted of many (small) islands on which the respective specific culture that is clearly separate from other cultures could develop and potentiate, then maybe Manrique's vision would have remained conceivable. However, today's world, which is becoming smaller and smaller, is marked by the "fact of pluralism" (J. Rawls), irrespective of how we judge it and irrespective of which positive *and* negative consequences this may bring.

These reflections lead us in the direction of the already mentioned question of whether Manrique's cultural-theoretical idea of utopia is meant to have only a local meaning or whether it claims universal validity. The conception of Lanzarote's aesthetically and economically sustainable development, which we have already presented at length, ultimately rests on the favourable natural conditions that already exist on the island and that only need to be discovered and 'potentiated'. Is this a recipe for every place in the world, for every culture, and for every people? In the context of his aesthetic theory Adorno wrote down the following blunt thought:

"As true as the fact that every object in nature can be considered beautiful is the judgment that the landscape of Tuscany is more beautiful than the surroundings of Gelsenkirchen."⁸²

There are more than a few passages in Manrique's writings in which he suggests, at least at first sight, that his conception of the potentiation

⁸² Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 72.

of the aesthetic, natural conditions is universally valid. Above all he formulates his remarks in a general form, like for instance:

"Every place in the world without a strong tradition, without personality, and without a sufficiently poetic atmosphere is condemned to die."⁸³

Furthermore, we have already seen that according to Manrique even the island of Lanzarote does not appear beautiful at first sight. Quite to the contrary:

"Upon his arrival {on Lanzarote} the visitor is visually assaulted by an extremely harsh and unhospitable landscape."⁸⁴

As we have already discussed, it requires a true, aesthetically-motivated transformation of the gaze to bring the initially concealed, quasi-subterranean beauty of the island 'volcanologically' to the surface of the earth. What this idea suggests is, to put it in somewhat casual terms, that even the proverbial 'surroundings of Gelsenkirchen' can become 'beautiful' in the Manriquean sense, provided that the artists who were born and raised here can and want to continue the natural creation that is typical of their home [*Heimat*]. If we follow this line of reasoning, it seems likely that Manrique's conception of utopia claims universal validity, hence that it would be possible to actualize this conception in every geographic latitude.

On the other hand, being the reflective artist who he is, one can certainly *not* attribute to Manrique the intention of constructing such a world-

⁸³ Manrique, 32.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

wide conception. What we find in his writings is always the description of the attempt to actualize an aesthetic utopia on his island of Lanzarote. We are apparently forced to understand this form of presentation as the expression of a certain intention. Put differently: the fact that Manrique proceeds concretistically does not mean that he wishes to interpret a general idea of the aesthetic utopia in a more or less randomly selected *example of Lanzarote*, but rather that he develops this conception *on the basis of the case of Lanzarote* in the first place. After all, Manrique is not a philosophizing artist or an art-creating theoretician. He is Lanzarote's artist *par excellence*: his creation is, according to his own self-understanding, volcanology, hence the very essence of his island of Lanzarote. In countless places Manrique expresses his firm belief in the uniqueness of his island as the place of a possible utopia. For example:

"Lanzarote is a fortunate island ... {today it is one of the} most interesting regions in the world."⁸⁵

"I knew that Lanzarote was a unique place and for this reason I carried within myself the responsibility and the obligation to transfer the works that I have accomplished into practice."⁸⁶

These reflections show very clearly the strict connection of Lanzarote's tradition and the utopia that is to be actualized on this island.

On the one hand, utopia is unthinkable and cannot be actualized *concretely* without the dynamic that is concealed in properly understood local traditions. If the utopian project continues the creation of nature, then this project cannot be actualized without recourse to the tradition

⁸⁵ Ibid., 26.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 53.

in which this creation has inscribed itself as if it were a book. On the other hand, the reverse is true as well: a dynamic that points to the future is inscribed in the tradition itself; more concretely: it points to a possible future in which human beings, their needs, and their happiness co-exist with nature. Yet, in the case of Lanzarote (and more generally of the Canary Islands), this connection is still more concrete. In the introduction we have already pointed out the Atlantian background of Manrique's project of the actualized utopia:

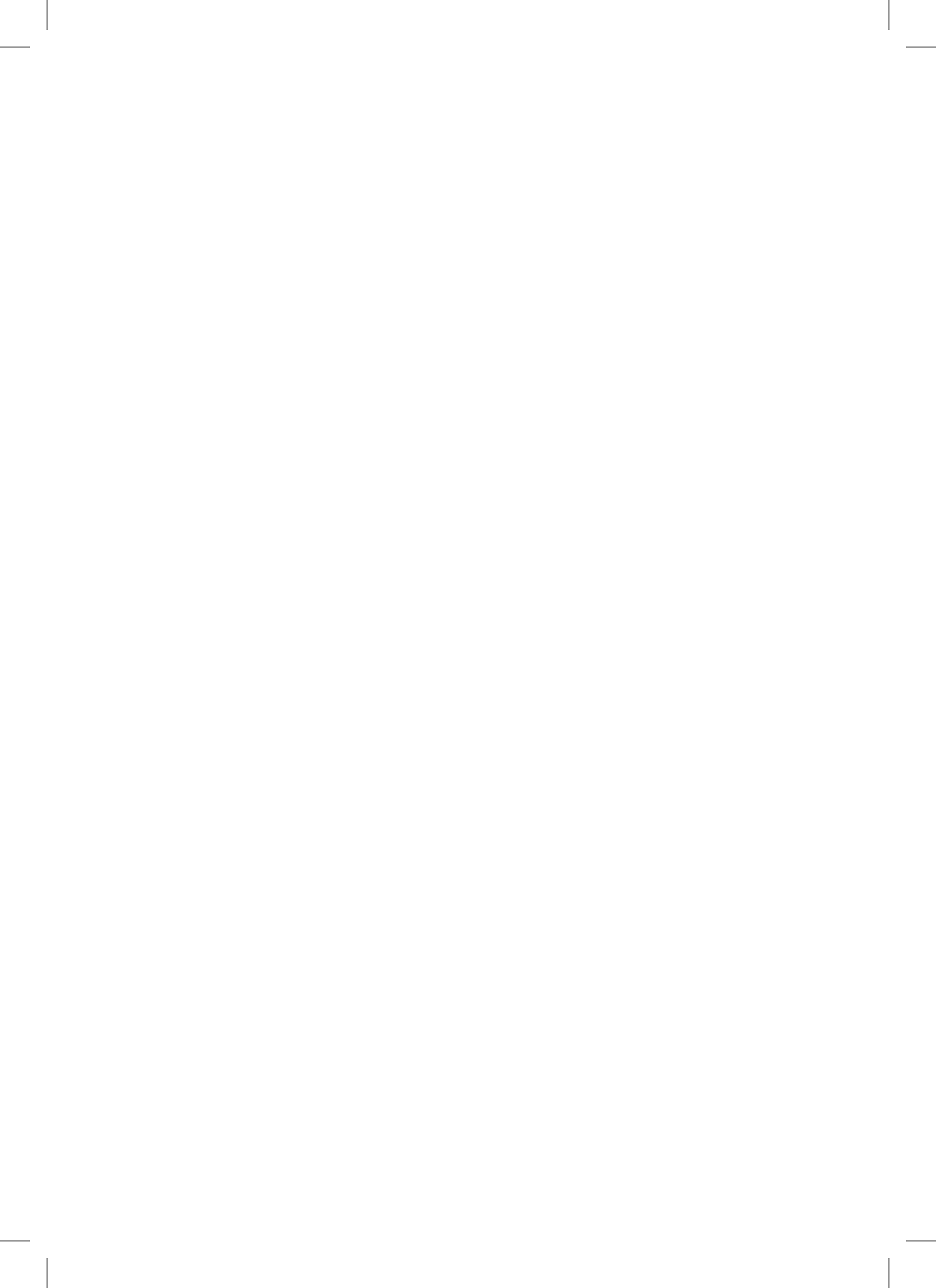
"We have managed ... to live in a volcanological space of Atlantis that is unique on this planet."⁸⁷

According to legend, the Canary Islands are the remnants of the lost island of Atlantis, whose catastrophe, according to Plato's mythological account, was the result of the spread of greed for wealth and power. The mythological pre-history of the Canary Islands thus conceals the utopian seed: the notion of a possible, attainable and yet fragile utopia. Manrique takes up this idea with his conception of the 'volcanological' resurrection of the space of Atlantis thanks to the aesthetic-social transformation of the island. As such, the present and future of Lanzarote would be rooted in the deepest, mythical layers of the past and tradition.

Does this in turn mean that we cannot draw any inferences about the actualizability of the aesthetic-social utopia from the 'case of Lanzarote'? This would perhaps go too far. It is much more likely that Manrique regards the attempt to execute the plan of an aesthetic and social transformation on his island as the decisive case that is meant to show whether this would be possible at all. To be even more precise: if one succeeds in creating a

⁸⁷ Ibid., 82.

place on Lanzarote – an island that has been considered 'uninhabitable' and 'detering' for too long – where a happy life can be achieved that is at the same time modern and in accordance with nature, then this would, in principle, be possible in every region of the world. Whether such a place was in fact created – or more precisely: whether Manrique held the view that it was created on Lanzarote – will be the subject of our reflections in the concluding chapter of this book.



Epilogue



Éxito

It appears as though Manrique never found a definitive answer to the question of whether his own undertaking of the actualization of utopia on the island of Lanzarote had succeeded. Numerous statements express his belief that this goal was indeed achieved. In the following passages, for instance, he claims quasi-euphorically that Lanzarote already lives in the state of utopia:

"Thanks to the prophecy of destiny, the miracle of the utopia has been achieved on the island of Lanzarote. For the first time in history, the people of Lanzarote acquired the universal consciousness of aesthetic concepts, thanks to the exemplarily realized works."¹

"Lanzarote is reborn, has made an enormous leap. Thanks to the well-planned arrangement of all its spaces, thanks to the great and conscientious care for its volcanological landscapes, thanks to the transformation of its most characteristic places into attractions of

¹ Ibid., 67.

enormous beauty, {Lanzarote} has passed from a state of anonymity to a recognized presence that has achieved international success."²

All this sounds as if the state of utopia had already become an actuality on Lanzarote. Of course Manrique does not want to say that his island has been transformed into a kind of miracle. Rather, he considers some of the *concrete* purposes mentioned above to have been achieved: the aesthetic planning and the bringing-to-appearance of natural beauty that is made possible by this planning, the participation of the people in this transformation of the landscape, the opening of perspectives for a qualitative tourism and along with it for the sustainable development of the island. All this was possible thanks to the fulfilment of many conditions. As we have already seen, the state of utopia, as Manrique conceives it, does not occur in a mythical or extra-temporal space; it has to be conceived of as a temporal arrangement. In order for this temporal arrangement to be successful, many efforts have to come together:

"The planning of what was {later} actualized began on my return from New York, born from the close cooperation with the president of the *Cabildo*, José Ramírez Cerdá, and his vice-president, Antonio Álvarez. Every Saturday, together with the team of Jesús Soto and Luis Morales we surveyed all the works that had been realized, which was a miracle of the realization. I have put my entire soul into this work and the enthusiasm of all, knowing in advance of its enormous significance."³

However, what is needed here is not just the close collaboration of artists and the politicians in charge. As we have explained in the 'Development'

² Ibid., 74.

³ Ibid., 53.

chapter, in order for the state of utopia to be established lastingly the participation of the population is necessary as well:

"I have fought eagerly ... so that the entire people can help with and collaborate on the development of order and style and thus unfold the enormous wealth that could belong to this island which is unique in the world."⁴

It is only because it was historically possible to create all of the aforementioned prerequisites that the idea of utopia was factually actualized on Lanzarote. From this it follows that the continued existence of the state of utopia depends on the continued collective effort of artists, politicians, and citizens.

Let us abstract from the perception of the artist and behold Manrique's island as a visitor. Lanzarote is not an island for everyone: some are deterred by its lunar (moon-like) landscape, others are fascinated and attracted by precisely this landscape. The consistently constructed buildings are another striking feature of the island: the white paint and the rigorously observed height of the buildings (the famous exception being one of the hotels in Arrecife) make the island clearly distinguishable from its sister islands where the architecture is at times quite colourful and chaotic. It is immediately clear to every watchful visitor how markedly the personality and the works of Manrique are inscribed in the identity of Lanzarote. Manrique's works have become the veritable brand of Lanzarote: starting at the airport of Arrecife, the visitor is constantly confronted with the objects of his creation – with the monuments that he conceived (for example the *Monumento del Campesino*) and the

⁴ Ibid., 74.

houses recommended by travel guides that Manrique restored and/or designed. Manrique's impact even transcends the works that he created himself: the administration of every refined hotel tries in some way or other to fashion some elements of its facilities in a 'Manriquean way' – the swimming pool, for example, is modeled on the swimming pool facility of the *Jameos del Agua*. Today, Lanzarote is unthinkable without Manrique. Just as Manrique could neither explain himself nor his works without the influence of his native island, the Lanzarote of today is in many respects an aesthetic project from the hand of its greatest artist. This relation of *a place* and *its artist* is in fact so unique in the world that even the tourism industry on the island has learned to use Manrique the person and his artistic creation to its own benefit. This unparalleled influence of a *modern* artist on his home, which can perhaps be compared only to Antonio Gaudí's role in Barcelona, suggests that Manrique's utopian efforts can be considered a success. What more can an artist ask for than that his home be transformed in accordance with his ideas; a transformation that is, at least in part, the reason why Lanzarote has become a sought-after place for a visit or vacation.

Fracaso

Yet it was no one other than Manrique himself who called this success into question, sometimes in fairly dramatic fashion. Starting in the 1980s statements become more numerous in which Lanzarote's artist speaks of the accomplished utopia again and again as a thing of the past. He voices ever more forcefully his frustration about the destruction of what had already been accomplished. In what follows we quote a somewhat longish passage that contains only some of these laments with which Manrique

certainly did not make a lot of friends (and which some even took as a justification for reproaching the artist with harming his native island):

"What the government does not want to see is the fact that if the territory of the island is ruined, which is done by massacring its geography, by destroying its volcanological systems, and by annihilating its life expectancies, the existence of the inhabitants of Lanzarote will be in danger in the very near future, because the survival of a people cannot be based on the total extermination of its natural wealth."⁵

"What is truly tragic is that after the efforts and undertakings that there carried out with the enormous enthusiasm of the love and the understanding for the concealed and unparalleled beauty of our volcanology, as well as with the aim of elevating this beauty to the highest possible level, now a whole lot of 'personalities' appear whose sole intention is to exploit the prestige that was attained by our people, and the ruin of the island does not matter them in the least."⁶

"And just when it seemed as if the battle was won ... it becomes apparent that everything is suffering under the lack of a vision of the future of these corporations from the sectors of industry and trade whose sole purpose is monetary gain, a short-lived monetary gain; they are totally unconcerned about the future of this natural space that has succeeded, in its own interest, to distinguish itself {from all other places}."⁷

"What has happened on the island of Lanzarote is a clear example of a lack of visions of the future and of the present. The government of the island has done nothing to counteract the overflowing of an island by masses of people that, as a world heritage site, could be one of the most distinguished and beautiful islands in the world. The only thing

⁵ Ibid., 65.

⁶ Ibid., 68.

⁷ Ibid., 70.

that draws interest is {the possibility} stuffing one's pockets with money as quickly as possible and afterwards to wait for the deluge."⁸

"The loss of prestige and the decline {*la caída*} of Lanzarote is being planned with the sole aim of the unabashed and fastest-possible exploitation – in order to make millions at the expense of the image {of the island} that took so much work and so much love {to achieve}."⁹

These words of lamentation speak a clear language, and it does not require much exegesis to see how Manrique reacts to the developments on his island. The thrust of his accusation is also abundantly clear: the ones who are to blame for these undesirable processes that will prove catastrophic in the long run are the 'speculators', by which he means all the people and corporations that want to establish a low-quality tourism industry on Lanzarote. Ultimately, this kind of tourism only generates a profit for the 'speculators', but not for the local population, which is being exploited and taken advantage of in the process, just like the natural environment. What stands out in the passages quoted above is Manrique's conviction that a quasi-diabolical reversal of those processes is taking place on Lanzarote that in the past had led to the constitution of the state of utopia. Just as it took 'thoroughly planned' endeavours to get to this state, the destruction of Lanzarote is also the result of the planned overbuilding of the island with the infrastructure of a quantitative mass tourism. Here and there the concern is voiced that the diabolical reversal could lead to 'irreparable' changes. The result would be that utopia would never again be possible on Lanzarote; it would only be a thing of the past.

⁸ Ibid., 104.

⁹ Ibid., 121.

Even if these laments seem exaggerated, it is nevertheless not surprising that Manrique utters them with such acerbity. All his life the native son of Lanzarote fought against the prospect of Lanzarote's suffering the same fate as its Canary sisters, and he did so in accordance with his great aesthetic-social vision. Manrique's island, which for reasons that we have already mentioned several times appeared belatedly on the radar of international tourism, was supposed to turn this delay into an advantage. That means: the mistakes of the chaotic and massified touristic overbuilding that were made on the other islands were supposed to not be repeated here on Lanzarote. And just when it looked as if a qualitative tourism had successfully been established, this project is being destroyed by people who lack any vision of the future and whose sole idea, it seems, is that Lanzarote had to make up for its 'backwardness' in tourism. Those who are responsible for this are the businessmen and politicians who lured and manipulated their fellow citizens with the illusion of quick wealth, whereas in reality they are only interested in their own profit. What is shameful about this is that as soon as the father of the miracle of Lanzarote speaks out critically, he of all people, who had created the foundations of the success, is accused of treason and is denounced as someone who does damage to the international reputation of the island.

Once again it would be advisable to distance ourselves from the perception of the artist and to assess from the perspective of the visitor to what degree Manrique's worries and laments are justified. But I will leave this to the readers: they may judge for themselves the correctness of Manrique's diagnosis – provided that they are able to get their own picture of the situation of the island today and of the quality of the local tourism industry.

San Borondón

At the beginning of the book we interpreted the great myth of Atlantis as a narrative that contains the promise of utopia. Admittedly, this promise is tied to the warning that utopia, once achieved, could become undone very quickly, namely through certain forms of human *hubris*. In a passage that we have quoted repeatedly, in which Manrique talks about the 'miracle of utopia' that has been actualized on Lanzarote, he refers at the same time to the mysterious 'prophecy of destiny' thanks to which the actualization became possible. Does this prophecy of destiny perhaps refer to the 'Atlantian' promise of utopia? If we take into account the formulation that we have repeatedly quoted, in which Manrique links the utopia on Lanzarote to the 'volcanological space of Atlantis', this seems very likely. There is much to suggest that the artist considered the 'Atlantian' promise to have been actualized, namely thanks to the aesthetic-social transformation of the island that he had set in motion.

On the other hand, the myth of Atlantis contains, as we have already mentioned, not only a promise but also a warning. Perhaps then the 'prophecy of destiny' has become actualized more completely than Manrique suspected: not only did utopia come about again, but so did the eruption of human *hubris*. The destructive greed for power and money annihilated once again the already actualized utopia. Perhaps Manrique did not want to read the story of Atlantis to its bitter end. And yet, as we have seen, the events that took place on Lanzarote fit (according to Manrique himself) the pattern of the success and failure of utopia that is well known from the myth of Atlantis.

Is there, accordingly, a succession of utopia-actualization and utopia-annihilation? Does this succession have a circular form? Can it thus repeat

itself – again and again? Will there be other artists who through the mobilization of nature's potential and the return to the 'ecological axiom' will one day again initiate the renewal of utopia, without, however, being able to prevent the subsequent annihilation of utopia through shortsightedness and the lack of visions of the future? Or should we, after all, risk the presumption, built on a linear view of time, that the establishment of the state of utopia on Lanzarote was a one-time opportunity that became an actuality for a certain period of time, but that was eventually lost? In that case, we would have to say that it cannot be ruled out that the utopia on Lanzarote is irreversibly a thing of the past. We would view the matter along similar lines as Adorno, who once remarked with respect to music that it could not be ruled out completely that truly 'great' music had been possible only during a certain period of history.

We cannot and must not presume to have answered the questions posed above. Why should we know better than César Manrique himself whether the state of utopia on Lanzarote is a thing of the past, the present or, after all, the future? To go a little more into detail: Lanzarote was indeed not able to protect itself for long against the rush of the mass tourism that Manrique criticized and feared so much. Yet, on the other hand, who can deny that as a place of tourism Lanzarote has traits that set it apart from all other Canary Islands and that it owes to its great artist? The utopian island of Lanzarote thus becomes a gleaming phenomenon that shows itself as an actualized utopia, only to disappear again the next moment.

With this analysis we have perhaps discovered the path to the metaphorical decipherment of the secret of the island of San Borondón. As is well known, the island of San Borondón is a strange piece of land that for a long time

belonged to the Canary archipelago and used to be charted on many maps, yet it could never be discovered. There are several reports by individuals who claim to have spotted the island from other islands – from El Hierro or from Tenerife. There are reports by sailors who allegedly even reached the island of San Borondón and spent a short amount of time on it. Furthermore, there have been several attempts to finally discover and colonize the island by means of organized expeditions. And although all of these attempts have failed, some people continued to believe and some still firmly believe – even in the age of the 'global village' and technological possibilities such as GPS – in the actuality of the 'unreachable' island of San Borondón. Some believe that the island of San Borondón exists in a dimension that is not ours; one that is very close to our world, even contiguous with it. From time to time we catch a glimpse of this other dimension and these are the moments in which San Borondón shows itself to us. And then the dimension closes again and along with it San Borondón disappears from our world. This description – which, at least for us, is purely poetical – exactly fits utopia. For this reason, we consider the name San Borondón to be one of utopia's many names. And we do not shy away from using the name San Borondón as the mythical appellation of Lanzarote, insofar as on this island a gleaming phenomenon called 'utopia' has been actualized. Indeed, we consider it to be the poetic appellation of the place where people have tried to actualize a utopian project.

José de Viera y Clavijo, who engaged with the problem of the island of San Borondón in the diligent and conscientious manner that is typical of him, tries to explain the paradox of why otherwise credible people who gave reports on the (mostly coincidental, for example following a storm at sea) sighting of the island admitted, at the same time, that they were unable to reach the island a second time. Unwilling to consider these people

to be dreamers or victims of an illusion, Viera y Clavijo seeks a rational explanation and finally reaches the following thought:

"Nobody can prohibit us from imagining San Borondón as {an island} that is located in the middle of a very strong storm of the Atlantic Ocean like a rock that is located in the midst of a brook. That is a very obvious comparison. Who has not observed how difficult it is for a reed or for another fast body (that we can liken to the ship) to overcome the great power of resistance – which originates from the brook and surrounds the rock – in order to join the rock? Such a connection, at any rate, can be observed only thanks to a lucky coincidence or thanks to an inexplicable destiny."¹⁰

We can easily see that for Viera y Clavijo the brook symbolizes the sea, the reed symbolizes the boat, and the rock symbolizes the island of San Borondón. Through this comparison the Canarian historian attempts to provide a rational explanation for a mysterious phenomenon: if San Borondón is indeed surrounded by a strong oceanic current, then it is no longer surprising that the discovery of the island appears to be impossible. But let us try to understand this intelligent, if failed (as we know today), explanation rather as a metaphor that refers not to an allegedly natural phenomenon of an island that conceals itself, but rather to the cultural phenomenon of the promise of utopia. On this interpretation, the rock is the attempted utopia, the reed is the thinking humankind that attempts to reach the rock of utopia, and the brook is the incessantly progressing stream of time. Utopia has to be actualized in this time; which is the same time that separates us obstinately and consistently from the actualization of this utopia. As a temporal phenomenon, utopia is necessarily transitory.

¹⁰ José de Viera y Clavijo, *Historia de Canarias*, vol. 1, ed. Manuel de Paz Sánchez (Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Ediciones Idea, 2016), 273.

In this vivid metaphor that we owe to Viera y Clavijo one important element that plays a significant role in our reconstruction of Manrique's conception of utopia is missing. A short while ago we chose to illustrate this element by calling men thinking reeds (an expression we have borrowed from Blaise Pascal). Human beings who, like César Manrique and his collaborators, struggle to transform utopia into an actuality do so not in the manner of the unconscious reed but that of a swaying ship that is always in danger of sinking and that nevertheless forges ahead. Perhaps the reed's reaching the rock is solely the work of a 'lucky coincidence' and of an 'inexplicable destiny'; and yet the actualization of utopia depends at least in part on the collective effort of those who have a clear awareness of the fact that they are steering the same ship. This motif ran through large parts of our reflections: the artist César Manrique, who rightly considered himself as the architect of aesthetic-social transformation of the island of Lanzarote, realized through his work, through his reflection, and especially through the practice of the actualization of the utopia, that this task can never be fulfilled by the individual. The state of utopia is and remains conditioned not just aesthetically but also socially: it remains the undertaking of a conscious community of human beings who – each for himself or herself – dare to consider utopia to be something that is possible, and dare to act voluntarily in accordance with this belief. We conclude our wanderings through the labyrinth of the Atlantian utopia, through Manrique's Lanzarote, with the following moving words of the artist:

"We live on this planet for such a short period of time that each of our steps should take us further and further towards the establishment of the dreamed-of space of utopia. Let us construct this space together: It is the only way to make it possible."¹¹

¹¹ Manrique, 133.

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