

YOURI GAGARIN REVISITED

(an allegory)

"...let us flee towards countries that are analogous to Death."

(Charles Baudelaire in 'Le spleen de Paris', p. 213)

In 1961 the Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin circled the earth from an orbit in space and kept the globe as a whole in a gaze.

Consider a time in the future when the earth is lost, when the environment starts to collapse, while world politics and economics and also science, technique and cybernetics loose control. When the earth is tormented by major disasters: earthquakes and volcanic eruptions; temperature rising and melting of the icecaps, moving of the poles, rising of the sea-level causing floods in the metropolises; the ozone layer disappearing. Life on earth vanishing, extinct in a matter of time.

Everybody starts pondering on this every once in a while, when being confronted by all the articles in the papers about disaster, nowadays. Especially in California, paradise come true, this mind-game is played day in day out, and nobody takes it serious they say..... Because they have so much to lose? Disaster awareness is a common psychological feature of the los-angelites, for instance. They live with the fact that everything can be lost at any time, by illnesses like AIDS, economic criseses or a major earthquake expected anytime. They still live in a wonderland, projecting away their unbearable thoughts about an uncertain future in fiction and films about disaster.

One morning a strange person stands at your doorstep. An undefinable being, all too good-looking. It says it is coming to collect you. You have to leave your house at once! You are hypnotized and follow, leaving everything behind. You enter into a purple haze and this strange being keeps saying and stressing it is your mentor. Sedated you are taken to a place somewhere in the Pacific Ocean.

You are told that you have been taken to a deep-sea space-base. It belongs to an extra-terrestrial community, it appears. It will be your hiding place for the next coming years. Gradually your mentor gives you more and more information but is very detached and shows no sympathy towards you, only emphatic resignation.

You live in a comfortable cabin for 4 years, without seeing any other humans other than your mentor. And only high

skilled humanoid robots who are very gentle and adequate. You are instructed how to cope, getting all the support you need. At your disposal is an advanced computer, programmed with knowledge you can't imagine. It is an encyclopaedical computer. Everything you ever wanted to now is recorded. You start asking and you get all the answers. It's obvious: you have to learn, it's the only thing you can do.

You are intrigued by all the knowledge, documented very precisely. You start to learn about the facts of life, about the history of mankind, about the development of the human race. The history appears to be quite different from what you thought it was. And even the most secret facts are there, most of them not very sensational but showing only vanity and haughtiness in an irresponsible children's-game. The only game that ever worked was illusion: the designing of the world was the only productive force, for better and for worse! And while you learn you start to untie yourself from the life on this planet. It's obvious, it is extinct and nothing can be done, the computer gives no schemes for action. Everything is the way it is. It doesn't give any explanations either. There seem to be no valid theories, only recorded theories part of the facts.

You get depressed. Life is just fate turned to the worst, conscience obsolete and human knowledge nothing more than a war-strategy against mankind and his environment. A war that will be lost.

You start to suffer from loneliness and watching very closely what the facts are about earth withering away. You start to truly realize, an all beloved world will get smoldered by the sun, tormented by chaos, diseases, disruptions and violence. Tormented by natural laws in a different sense: nature seems to be taking revenge for the vanity of Western Man for wanting to control and exploit, especially by knowledge, every square-inch of the planet for mere practical reasons. But this is not true, only as-if. Because man is part of nature himself. And everything seems an illusion, as-if. A disappearing fathom that ends on the blackened and bleached surface of the earth, in serenity after a firestorm. And for some reason you don't know if you care or don't give a damn about it. Your emotions are deep but totally confused and opposing each other. But even that seems to slip away.

Your mourning seems to be as-if, even your staying in the cabin seems to be as-if: you are becoming completely disconnected.

You suffer even more when you start realizing that you are one of the very few who come to know and by that are allowed to live on under cosmic conditions. You are one of the chosen.

You are also instructed to the backgrounds of your hosts. They are human, more human than you. They are your timeless ancestors!

They come from a planet near the Star Sirius, 11 lightyears from the sun. Their world collapsed 50.000 years ago, torn apart by chaos and pollution. Their technical skills were much more advanced than on earth nowadays. From the total population of 80 milliard people, 12.000 were chosen to escape from their disaster-stricken planet. They looked for other planets to resettle in new colonies. They went into deep-space, finding 11 possible planets with livable circumstances. Earth was the most fruitful, with an ecology in great diversity and tranquility and a humanoid species dying out. They settled in 3 colonies in Africa, Asia and Antarctica. The global settlements were left to the colonizers, only to be watched from afar. Every 11 years the earth was checked upon. Antarctica disappeared in the last Ice age. The other colonies had to adjust to the global ecology. For the colonizers, their advanced skills were of no use any longer.

All the races on earth have that same background. And all their myths are a reminder of that fact. All the races have developed in a different way, only influenced slightly from afar when necessary. Their background was forgotten. In the meanwhile technology in space advanced rapidly.

For 2 years you learn to enjoy what is left and recorded to be at your disposal. You learn how to live all by yourself. In the meanwhile you watch the earth go to pieces. And you learn how to take a distance. Then your mentor gives you a choice. It will instruct you for a life in outer-space, because life on earth has to be given up. You are one of the chosen, to become a relic of a disappearing offspring, of a failing enterprise. There is no other way!

You don't have to go along, but there is no way back but dying with your fellow-men. The alternative is living in space-crafts with no goal or destiny. You get the picture, you're left to suicide. You start to bargain with nothing to offer. You're feeling totally disarmed, being dependent on some kind of ultimate charity. You're getting insurgent, blaming them for putting you in their straightjacket. You would be inferior forever, being an underdeveloped infant amongst superhumans. A caged humanoid-animal in their cosmic-zoo. You choose to die, when your rebellion has no target. The most painful fact is that they don't even leave anymore motives for phantasy. You're life-breath is taken!

But then it tells you that the extra-terrestrials have gained total control over matter. Not even have they advanced the Einsteinian revolution by far, and managed to travel much faster than the speed of light. They have found the key to the

ultimate force always looked for in quantum-mechanics. The Force of Immediacy and direct influence. They know how to teleport, which is the same as telepathy. Energy is existence. The Ultimate Force is a dive into the non-existent, into plain Mind-power. As simple as that: illusion come true!

As an intellectual you are flabbergasted, feeling nullified! If this is true it is untrue in the same instant.....

You do not pose any more questions, and stop thinking even about getting crazy!

But more reassuring is: they gained control over death.

They've learned how to prolong life forever by constant rejuvenation even of the brain. The techniques for that were known on earth already in a fetal stage: genetic manipulation and cell-transformation.

You give up your resistance, you will apply to their demands. A sense of guilt is haunting you, aren't you being a coward? But nevertheless what does it matter: it's your life and it is starting to get quite amusing suddenly: you have become something special for them so they might treat you accordingly. From that moment on you are treated differently. You are examined thoroughly and put in a smooth capsule in which you fall asleep.....

You are gradually rejuvenated and modelled to the features of a super race: the common looks of your ancestors. You are programmed for a life in space where everything to support your eternal life is available and at your service. You become one of them, will there ever be any difference? Your former life on earth loses every meaning. It remains only recollection, stuffed in your mind. That does not make you different any longer. You had a personal experience, but this experience has become just a story not determining your psyche any longer so it seems. Isn't it a nice way to die and entering eternity. Isn't this the illusion of every religion realized? But you start thinking profoundly about the implications of the state of mind that's brought about. At least you know you're not alone anymore. You will be travelling together, able to put yourself in the service of a common venture.

It doesn't look that bad after all!

This is what you figure out as a philosophy to commence your infinite existence on a journey to the cosmic worlds you will encounter. A life with only a beginning and an ending endlessly postponed until the treasured life-force is annihilated by cosmic disaster. Because surely after nature on earth, matter will take revenge on the scandalous exploitation of its final mystery. Life has become a struggle between matter and conscience.

And you are sure this is not planted in your brain, not part of your instructions and reconstructions. (At least you keep reassuring yourself that this is not the case. Because if it would be, it would make your adventure into eternity some sort of watching television day and night without the possibility to turn it off, because the knob is broken. There has to be some real danger, or at least you have to believe in it, to feel some real excitement and challenge to play with from the start. Forever watching television is a torture after a while because the screen-reality doesn't have any effect and is lethal for that reason within a week, causing numbness in the brain, for which rejuvenation would be no cure. You imagine.)

By means of rejuvenation your whole mental state is transformed. You are no longer determined by background and bonds, by experiences and their remembrances. Life-time loses its meaning and is just a host of stored stories in an endless chain. They become accidental. The only things that count for your mind are games of wisdom, knowledge and pleasure. First of all in your thinking about the appearance of the universe. Secondly about your dealing with your 'fellow-travelers' which you couldn't choose. But you can thrive on the Age-old Thought of your hosts and on the fact that you have become your ancestors alike. They have always guided the extinguished human race, by instructing certain outstanding individuals. Maybe by appearances in the case of the visionaries or by telepathic influence, whatever the outcome would be. So the interplay between the human development and the instructed masters of Thought founded a profound string of philosophy and wisdom. From Lao-tse to dha, from Moses to Jesus, from Buber to Levinas, from Muhammed to Rushdie, from Eckhardt to Nietzsche, from Descartes to Bohr, from Kant to Lyotard. From Freud to Jung. And all the nameless seers in Africa and America. Name all the others, they were not alone!

But always was wisdom perverted, and perversion turned into wisdom. Thought always was dichotomous. The extra-terrestrials never made any conclusions, only choices. They just recorded the process and the circumstances, and broke into the system to steer into a better direction, leading to survival and tradition. Always were they amazed by the outcome, things rolling out of hand after a while. By the simple fact that thought always had a one-sided effect after all. And for the planet Earth in the end it was lethal. Could they be held to be responsible?

No, they couldn't because contradiction can't be overcome. And most of the time not even expressed.

For instance: Prince Gautama was in love and rejected. His beloved chose a guy from a lower caste. He went berserk out of passion and terror. He was inspired to very delicate thoughts to overcome the shattering of his ego and deal with his violence. He discovered that the Conscience is not tied to the bodily

existence, but to everlasting and evolving thought and influence. He founded the first human concept of the phantasmagoric Immediate, the Nirvana, within the world of the direct real, Samsara. But never did he accept his violence. His whole system in the end was an ingenious method to curb his injured spirit and inkling to murder-out-of-passion. Buddhist wisdom is elaborated, but never were the simple truths about the intricate games between the sexes revealed. They were banished out of reality, which was the Divine Thought in the long run. In reality the Buddhist monks banished temptation, a feared drawing of attention by the other sex, or the working of lust itself within one's soul. What is the primal source of living never was elaborated in thought, because thought seemed to be an overpowering of that primal source, maybe?

Looking from above, the extra-terrestrials learned to know better. (Though animism does, too.) They explored the earth as an experimental garden, not for their own concepts, but for the working of their a topical creative inspiration. Never did they try to understand. Implementation of the development of thought and culture on earth, on board of the spaceships as a kind of temporal new fashion, had surprising effects. And compared with the globe where everything was taken too serious, it led to a modality always to be amused about. But it kept things going. Only intrigue and curiosity was the spirit that kept them coming back to investigate, sometimes cynical sometimes anxious.

So the extra-terrestrials do not give you a clue. They only offer you an immense amount of contradictory possibilities to hang on to. Their only message is: They did for millennia, so why not you. What matters is what you make out of it, now facing the Infinite for real, beyond the chain of generations and thinkers. Not only has as-if become fundamental. But your reality has gone beyond. Beyond space and time. Beyond good and evil.

Life on board a space-ship will be no problem from the start. There the culture that is fashionable gives you an opportunity to find your place, how relative it may be. And as a former earthman you have a strong identity to entertain for a long time. The problem is the everlasting! On board the ship you have a fixed place in time and space, as real as matter. But confronted with the possibilities of the phantasmagoric Immediate you are nowhere and everywhere all the time forever. That is what blows your mind. A real headbanger! Let us investigate the true implications:

You are stuck with all the others on an endless trip without a goal or final destination. You are totally dependent on technical skills of a species, but not anymore determined by genetic processes. You can let each other live forever. But you

can decide to die and to destroy too. But the possibilities are sheer. The craft and its humanoid robots are programmed to prevent that. And an overwhelming life-lust is instilled in the ventricles of your brain. What could cause any molest any longer? Maybe mere uselessness?!

There are no more family-ties. Pro-creation has become obsolete. There is no need for new humans anymore and at least this is one thing that is restricted very carefully. Isn't this becoming a grotesque nightmare, an eternal hold, now?

Your only real diversion lies in the cosmic spatial happenings which are mapped and scanned, gauged and discussed over and over.

But there is nothing to achieve that lies ahead. Just consuming of one-another and devouring the cosmic existence-experience. Just playing games with the boundaries of its physical laws. It's the cosmos that reigns and you all have become its worshippers in an attempt to control it ultimately.

If this is too much, you could choose to withdraw, but that would surely be suicidal. They would notice, but you are allowed that freedom. Without a reason for living, if only it could be fake, life becomes a burden. When you could die, heaven was supposed to offer you eternity. Now that eternity is accomplished you tend to wish for an immediate death.

Surely you will postpone suicide, you've got all the time to think it over.

You have lived four years in seclusion and now you see the reason why: To train yourself to live a life, ultimately without Reason, being totally on your own in everlasting dependency. Your body is programmed genetically with impulses, even one towards the future. But your mind loses the will to power, the desire to whatever. They were products of a culture faced with the knowledge of Death, which could not be prevented. Now it can!

And this is dying an eternally stretched death.....
Incredible!

No one will remember you, so there is no need for an identity, being perfect already in the form you chose and can alter as a fashion. Identity has become a game, a frozen form, a fashion. In the end everybody is living nowhere, coming from nowhere if you can go anywhere, with everywhere and anytime in the outlook.

And who can you blame as an excuse to find a scapegoat for the benefit of differentiation from the others? If shortcoming can be remodeled the only shortcoming is being different itself. But everybody is, so you can only blame yourself. What, then, could it be that could make you go on, besides postponing death.

What about love? It becomes as meaningless as the pounding of your heart in an endless cycle.

You start to understand why there seems to be no more difference between men and women, though they do exist. After the need for procreation was diminished, strange things happened between the male and the female. Birth and motherhood appeared to be a safe hiding place, a female possibility for an identity beyond mimesis. Woman didn't need man as a mirror, and in his mirror she disappeared.

Suddenly she entered the world of man as a partner and an opponent. The play of seduction started all over again and now as a play of mimesis: of mutual opposition and attraction, within each other's terms. But at first these terms were still set by men, who suddenly were more dominant than ever. It all seemed a trick played by men on women. At first women protested all confused. Living forever meant losing their womanhood, while liberating them from a natural task.

The play of seducing macho-man in trying to persuade him to conquer her seemed to be decisively challenged by his appeal on her to be like him. (And if she would fail she would be no more than a whore?)

But men discovered their female part, while women their male.

Starting to understand each other in the games they play with each other, an equilibrium was reached already after a relative short time. The need to be independent in the face of eternity was much stronger than fighting dominance from both sides. And sexuality became just no more than a fixed quality by which jealousy could be overcome in order to reach a strong independence.

Then, what is left is a simple choice: to live or to die! And suddenly you get the ultimate picture. It's all a matter of making up stories!

It always was, and it always will be!

To imagine and construct worlds. That is the Force and they developed it on Earth as an experiment. Earth was made-up, as-if.

And so was its downfall. Or at least let's pretend. That's what every one of them is doing all the time. Making up worlds gives you a secret life in which the world can be like you want it to be: 'any way you wanna'! Make up your own world and forget about the future: that makes eternity bearable! And so the circle closes. You have found the key to start living a new kind of life by yourself. To live with relativity, to let the Force of Immediacy work and create a separate existence apart from your cosmic duties. Why care about time. What is the difference if a world exists only in your brain or in the reality that is projected in your brain. What is the difference between what you see with your internal eye, or what you see with your external eye. An eye for phantasy for an eye for reality. If you think

hard enough the difference disappears. Worlds that are imaginary could exist anyway, somewhere.

So what you do is: secretly starting to design a phantazised world evermore complex and divers. In the meanwhile you travel through space and start telling yourself stories which become real when your sense of time vanishes. When life is dull you escape into your other world, made up out of imaginary matter. A supposed Totality. You watch over your world, you examine and experiment. Just like the extra-terrestrials used to do with the world you came from, for millennia. What is the difference between the reality of this story and the story of your reality. You've managed to master the Ultimate Force. Did you enter into madness, into nothingness?

Nobody can tell in the world of Solipsism.

After 4 years you leave for a base in outer-space. You start living the life of a space-traveler. A dull life so it seems, from which nothing much can be said. A life of endless chains of cosmic happenings, altered by endlessly made up events and stories. And you disappear in between the Cosmic Real and the Mental Made-up. Hasn't it always been like that and won't it be like that forever?

In the face of the Infinite your subject dissolves in between two realities. And your body becomes a mind-machine that switches between two internal disc drives connected to the eye screen.....

.....Still dizzy you wake up. You had a terrible dream. You fell asleep behind your tiny laptop-computer. For days, now, you have been playing 'Space-quest' every evening. And every time there was this eerie feeling. As if the game was threatening for some reason. While the white walls of the room were getting darker and darker, maybe because of the shimmering light of the screen.

You must have been taken over by the game, as if it contains some hypnotic force. The screen seemed to draw your attention already when you entered the room every evening when you returned from roaming around in New York City. You look at your watch. It's 11.30 p.m. You look outside at the city-hall tower. Gleaming like a diamond up in the black-blue sky, in transparent red, white and blue colors, the building looks supernatural. You shiver and shrug your shoulder in order to get yourself together.

You have fallen over and the liquid screen of your computer is crushed. That's it, 2000 bucks down the drain. No, use crying over spilled milk. Anyway, you were not in control of the damn thing. You'd better use a notebook again. Throw all

your books away about cyberspace and stop the music. (Sonic Youth is still softly whispering in the earphones you're still wearing: Daydream Nation.) And you're staying on the 14th floor of a megastorey-building with the 13th floor missing in order to avert bad luck. Is this a joke, a nightmare or just the beginning of a trip through America, all by yourself.

Of course it's the latter. You take a stroll around the block. Manhattan by night is much nicer as you expected. It has a mystic but cheerful atmosphere. For the first time since ages you feel very well all alone. You wonder what this dark and bright, amiable city does to you. The size and the shape of the city make you grow, though the buildings make you shrink. Grow over anxiety, while shrinking in the face of sublime human building performance.

Only the silly computer-game is scary. You were not used to spend your evening without a telly, probably. So, no telly next month! For some reason the New York-experience is like being hyper stoned. You look at your surroundings: the sizes of the buildings seem to multiply from street mansions to hills of barrack blocks to sky-high constructed mountains. At least it's all finitely to be overlooked! And you are sure, infinity must be unbearable, so don't look at the sky behind the -scrapers.

Eternal responsibility makes one wish to live in dreams. And America is a daydream nation! A daydream about travelling to the other side in many aspects, creating an eternal human urge, a travel syndrome.

Gagarin was - all alone once in space - the first to see all sides together, seemingly united from there.

'All alone am I.....' (Brenda Lee , 1962, theme from 'Never on Sunday' by Melina Mercouri, 1960)

With an eye-wink to Nietzsche, Ayn Rand's 'Atlas Shrugged' and Rem Koolhaas' 'Delirious New York'!

Johan Meijer; New York, October 1990