

ON 'NOTES FROM THE UNDERDOG'

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ABSTRACT

This article talks about the social impact of economic collapse on marginal territories and on the ingenuity of these new settlers, in the context of the visual essay of "Notes from the Underdog", by Alexandre Delmar. Forced to find new alternatives, these settlers are not only inventing new methods of constructing terraces, of fashioning aqueducts from plastic, of making their own tools, and of defining their own plots, but are also inventing new methods of constructing terraces, of fashioning aqueducts from plastic, of making their own tools, and of defining their own plots, thus changing the surrounding environment and landscape of these marginal areas.

Keywords: Photography; Social; Economy; Boundaries; Politics; Environment.

If a dog could have written this, it would likely be more objective in a way that I am not capable of. Porto, as with many other cities around the world, has exhausted its capacity to cater to the legitimate population residing within its boundaries. The most deprived are the pensioners without adequate means to pursue their livelihoods and the unemployed: in short, marginal citizens. In Porto these marginal people discovered the margins within the grounds of the city. Not at the external edge of the city, but at the inner edges, along the sides of railway lines, freeways, bodies of water, electrical lines, swimming pools, etc. There, in the most marginal and neglected territories, they have begun to cultivate in a way that nobody has done before. On these sites, they give us all a lesson in ingenuity. They are inventing new methods of constructing terraces, of fashioning aqueducts from plastic, of making their own tools, and of defining their own plots. Alexandre Delmar, photographer, and Luís Ribeiro da Silva, architect, have stumbled on this phenomenon which until now has been totally ignored and neglected by the authorities to the relief of those concerned. These marginal individuals supplement their meager diets with a supply of vegetables grown on these unregistered patches. The worker who lost his hand in an accident at a marble workshop had to reinvent his tools; he has created a universe of labor all his own. The man who discovered the drainage canal for a public swimming pool has developed an ingenious method to purify the water for use in his own garden. These individuals should be celebrated by us all as exemplary human beings in their refusal to comply with their allotted destiny and in their ability to forge their own unconventional existences. What stands out here is the degree to which they are reinventing themselves, turning themselves into cultivators of a kind. These interventions remind us that the concept of “culture” is derived from the word “agriculture”; the actions taken by these gardeners force us to reconsider the ancient agricultural origins of the modern culture that their interventions have helped to humanize. The philosopher who finds himself living like a dog thereby restores his own human existence to himself: he is thus very near to us, as in each and every one of us there is the dog-like existence that guarantees our humanity in the absence of human institutions or in times in which they are unable to function. These marginal cultivators have restored their own humanity to themselves and to us indirectly. To sing their praises to our fellow citizens is our duty, the duty of the witness who will restore the dance of the fireflies (cf. Pasolin, 1975), who will redeem the collective and restore our trust in mankind.

REFERENCES

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