

“Utopia has an ironic sense of humour, doesn't it?”

# Horizon Destination

by Katherine Oktober Matthews

Count down from 10. You are getting sleepy. I whisper the word 'utopia'. What do you see?

Is it the Garden of Eden, that ancient template for paradise lost? Or are you perhaps surrounded by pristine glass and metal surfaces, jetpacks, cybernetic implants?

6... 5... 4... keep counting. Let's get deeper into your unconscious, past those archetypes. Perhaps you find yourself now in a deluge of ideas absorbed over time, images internalized – movies merged with memories, friends' faces airbrushed like advertisements, nature manicured like the bastard son of National Geographic and Better Homes and Gardens.

It's all muddled up. The dream machine hijacked a direct line to your desire. Keep counting!

3... 2... 1... Clear away those notes on a Better Life that people have been trying to sell you since the day you opened your eyes. Are you getting closer to your imagination, that dusty, dreamy, silly thing?

Do you see it? The utopia that's yours, and yours alone? Does such a thing even exist, or is it a contradiction of terms? Let's try this: I'll show you a photograph of what I want, and you can show me one of what you want. And everyone else, too. Utopia in photograph form.

Photography turns out to be the perfect medium for expressing our wants, because it marries two persistent but elusive human constructs: reality and desire.

Some create images out of a desire to keep something that cannot otherwise last, while others show us images in order to convince us that something is worth wanting. By the end of the slideshow, we still won't agree, not entirely, but we'll probably all be a little more dissatisfied with the way things are now. Utopia has an ironic sense of humour, doesn't it?

Utopia is a dream of a collective, and yet, we can't agree on everything. Divided we stand, but we're united by one thing: wanting.

And images instruct that desire.

This wanting, this hole in the soul of our being, is one of the great defining features of the human condition. And images capitalise on it, exacerbate it. They feed us with more desires before we even know we've consumed them. They leave us, aside from brief blips of contentedness and enlightenment, with unyielding yearning for something more.

Want begets want. Our imaginations, drawing on images, create ever-bigger wants, more elaborate desires, more ostentatious fantasies. And, inevitably, we are left disenchanted with a reality that does not deliver. But is that reality's fault? Can satisfaction ever be achieved?

Utopia itself is a horizon destination: even if it were reachable, our arrival would mark a new point of departure. Yet this gap between reality and desire is what prompts action. If we, as people, are defined by our discontent, then perhaps those of us who are the most dissatisfied when we look around at this world are the ones who will be inspired to create the most beautiful things.

Perhaps we had it backward: maybe discontent is the thing you should want the most. And not as part of a passive state of complaint, but rather, imbued with energy and passion. A desire to create the objects and images that inspire and instruct, the fantasies that offer consolation and hope. A restlessness that leaves you forever looking around the world and thinking: I can make this better.

1... 2... 3... You are awake. You are surrounded by reality. You are here and now, filled with desire.

What will you do?



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