

## **Jean Robert: To Free the Imagination and to Embody Erudition**

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The situation of historical epochal change, as Gonzalez Casanova points out, requires an epistemological collapse. The end of an era creates an embryonic reality that demands to be liberated. Each de-colonized praxis has felt the need for a new semantic field that allows to express another truth.

As a fellow intellectual friend of Jean's puts it, "To listen to Jean speak is to follow him as he constructs creative, lucid and critical interpretations of things so close to us that we do not notice their complexity."

This issue of the Journal presents a series of reflections by Jean Robert. In each reflection, Jean confronts what he called: "the strangeness of the obvious." He proceeds, with his incarnated erudition, pointing out critical paths towards those commonplaces, beliefs that are axioms of industrial society and that conform for us the normal, the natural, that which is not even perceived as possible to question. All of Jean Robert's work, although appearing as a thematic multiplicity, is encapsulated by its unveiling, presenting, and breaking down of these axiomatic proposals.

In this issue of the *International Journal of Illich Studies*, there is a selection of themes that I have chosen a bit casually. Any article of Jean calls to this reflection, to question the certainties of the capitalist modernity. Nothing is foreign to this critique. Above all, Jean directs his focus on those spaces that diminish our autonomy, our being rooted to the earth, our

embodied experience. These experiences become ungraspable by force of living constrained by the mandates/axioms of modernity and invisible to our lucidity—beliefs such as: motorized transport that favors the speed of movement; the subsistence economy that is backward; the economy based on the concept of scarcity as irreplaceable for surviving, for living well; “development” and “progress” whose immediate goal is the provision of a better future for everyone.

Let us listen to Jean, in the supplement *El Gallo Ilustrado*, explaining the transition of ideas from the realm of specialists to the general public: “The migration of ideas from the ‘esoteric’ circle of the specialized scientists to the ‘exoteric’ circle of the receiving public is a migration. This migration of ideas is not a simple ‘export of theories,’ but the *sui generis* reconstruction of emotionally charged images organized in such a way as to form a ‘world view’ (cosmovision) according to modern slogans such as: ‘Progress,’ ‘Energy,’ or ‘Production.’” “Such images,” Jean continues, “have no demonstrative structure proper to science, but point to domains of credibility to ‘Scientific’ authorities. These a-theoretical emblems are not invitations to understand, but commands to believe.”

As an aesthete of the incarnated word, Jean Robert elaborates upon themes such as: “An Epistemology for Times of Crisis”; “Anatomy of a Scientised Society”; “From the Republic of Wise Men to the Miller of Certainties”; and “The Social Construction of Energy.” This collection of edited texts forms a magnificent introduction to the vast work of Jean Robert and a selected incursion of his liberating critical thought of our autonomic practices in order to know and to be able to live them inspired by his thought.

With Jean, “To reason backwards and downwards...is to make sense of hope” ... to liberate the popular imagination.