

OF DOLPHINS AND MEN

L'Interview pour *Moslenta* newspaper.



(As our two interviewees often interrupted one another during our talk, continuing what the other was saying literally from the middle of a phrase, and they sometimes spoke almost simultaneously, we didn't isolate their different answers. Instead we are providing their answers as a unified text)

You're anthropologists, rather than marine biologists, which is to say that you deal with people, rather than dolphins. What led you to start working on dolphins?

We don't work on dolphins, we work **with** dolphins. When a child studies at school, he doesn't work on teachers, he works with teachers. And we work with dolphins. For our entire lives up to this point, we were interested in man's abilities and capabilities, his interaction with the world and his own life. For a long time we searched for answers to these questions within the framework of our former occupations – psychology, culturology, history and so on. In parallel, we studied the practices developed by various cultures, trying it all on ourselves, and at some point, having "collected" a sufficient volume of the most varied scientific data, practical skills and mystical initiations, we hit a wall. It was a hotchpotch that

didn't provide us with the sense of a miracle, a premonition that we had welling up inside us. We couldn't find the bearers of the meta-language that we were looking for on a horizon that had been densely occupied by personal growth trainers and all manner of gurus, but we still wanted to move forward. So, following the advice of several wise friends, 12 years ago, at Christmas, we headed off to the Red Sea. And there we met the dolphins. And in just one week, that entire fragmented mosaic came together into a holistic picture that irreversibly changed our worldview.

And you decided to create the Dolphin Embassy?

At first, just as a concept and an image. We organized several exhibitions to various oceans in order to have the opportunity, each time, to live as guests among the dolphins, and a little later among the whales, even if it was just for a few weeks. And on the masts, from the very outset, there was a flag flying bearing an ancient image of a dolphin that, to this day, is the Embassy's symbol. Telling ourselves that dolphins are eternal wanderers, we assumed that the Embassy would be a nomadic project that didn't need a postal address or any formal attributes. On our travels we met wonderful people, we were joined by scientists, thinkers, musicians, ships' captains; questions arose that we wanted to work on, the framework of reality became more fluid. The first "Chargé d'affaires" were Ray Bradbury, Masaru Emoto and Ravi Shankar. Ever since, there have been three intrinsic ingredients in any of the Embassy's undertakings: wonder as a world principle (from Bradbury), water as a condition of life (from Emoto) and music as an incantation (from Shankar).

In 2012, we conceived the idea of going on a round-the-world, international expedition, which would "go I know not where" in order "to find I know not what" – a certain unification of ancient knowledges of the world with the latest evidential facts. The fifth element, the philosopher's stone, the Holy Grail... Umberto Eco suggested a route to us – the 30th parallel of the northern latitude, uniting all the centers of ancient human civilization (Cairo, Lhasa, Kailash, Delhi, the holy mountains of China and other locations) and all the world "dolphin capitals" – Hawaii, the Bahamas, the Canaries, the Japanese islands... This concentration of centers of knowledge on the planet can't be a simple coincidence, and we set off on a year's "Archaeology of Possibilities" voyage. We came back with trophies, we realized that, whilst remaining nomadic, the Embassy, needed a permanent headquarters in which all this would be developed. We opened it in Tenerife – a tiny volcanic island of dry land in the midst of a vast ocean, populated by dolphins and whales. Atlantis...

What is the Dolphin Embassy today?

As with any other embassy, it's a mission that works on the presentation of the interests, culture and way of life of one people on the territory of another. As far

as we know, this is the first center in history to represent another species of intelligent, self-aware creatures. The Embassy Residence is a permanent research, cultural and information center that holds closed events for specialists and open events, the largest of which is the annual Dolphinity World Festival, which will be held for the third time this June. The word “Dolphinity”, by which we mean a way of life and worldview that is founded not on the consumerist system of values but on a harmonious and joyful interaction with the world, already exists in at least five languages.

The Embassy, this year, announced the commencement of a new, major expeditionary project. What is its purpose?

We intend to show that, instead of a wasteful, expensive search for our intellectual brothers and sisters in deep space, which changes nothing, here and now, in the most literal sense, we are living in the midst of an environment that is (and was, long before our appearance here) the home to an astonishing type of intelligent creature. That contact with them, although it requires a rejection of a lot of stupid things that we've invented and made axiomatic for the ordering of the world, is possible and capable of giving us colossal benefits that in the most direct sense are capable of leading humanity out of today's civilizational dead-end. We're preparing a series of unprecedented experiments that will confirm this. Their novelty isn't down to the fact that previously it had been impossible to carry them out, it's down to the fact that previously no one had raised the issue in this way. All of the experiments that have been carried out previously, in the open sea, with free dolphins, were founded on the principle that man is the peak of creation and the only intelligent being on the planet, while all other forms of life, even in the best-case scenarios, don't even get close to man. For example, the language of dolphins is studied in much the same way as the language of an exotic people living on another continent – the assumption is that constructed in much the same way as our own. But what if its structure is unlike ours in any way? Dolphins, in the direct sense of the word, see sound – the zones of their brains that deal with the analysis of audio and visual information aren't separated. This isn't a conditional code, it's a fluid language, capable of directly conveying feelings, concepts, images...

And capable of influencing the surrounding environment, as represented by the most incredible substance in the universe, water, which is entirely material (you can touch it with your hands), but is governed exclusively by the laws of waves. This language in this environment is a direct contact with the world, it is participation in its creation. Miracle-working...

Another goal of the project's that is linked to this is an attempt to understand what they do. What is their work, and how do they go about doing it? If they've preserved their gigantic brains for millions of years (they're much larger than human brains), that means that continually – and right now – they are needed for something that goes far beyond the requirements of simple survival. They don't

create cities, they have no economic systems, they don't produce anything that you can touch – what are they doing? We think that the answer to this question is capable of transforming existing concepts about the world as a whole and human capabilities in particular.

The project consists of several expeditions. The first stage was just carried out in the Canary Islands with pilot whales. In two weeks' time, a program starts in Mauritius with sperm whales. They're the largest predators in the world (they weigh ten times more than elephants), they have the largest hearts in the world and a vast brain, weighing in at over 20 kilograms, with a very complex organization. Attracting its conscious interest and trying to understand one another's emotional sense – that's a real task.

If they're so intelligent, why don't they seek contact with us?

They say that that question was once put to Jacques Mayol, the first person in recent history to have said that they are not only intelligent, but also that in many ways they surpass us. He gave an immediate reply: "Because we're of no interest to them." Imagine – you've lived in your house for 50 years. And then, a year ago, somewhere up in the attic, you get a new guest. He developed out of whatever was up there, and does as he sees fit, smashes something, turns something over, makes a terrible noise, makes a mess and whenever he meets you he tries to scratch your eye out. He's still wet behind the ears, and doesn't know what he's doing. You don't have any desire right now to engage in conversation with him. There's no point in trying to talk to him sensibly, and there're no grounds to try and nanny him. Even trying to seriously teach him is pointless for the time being – he's so preoccupied with his toys and himself that he doesn't hear anything. In fact, there's even a growing probability that if he carries on like this he's going to destroy the entire house. But you put up with that and you wait. Because you have a very good understanding of the fact that he is an opportunity for reason. And you are obliged to give that reason a chance to come into being. Even if, judging by his behavior, that chance is very slim.

Nevertheless, you're saying that contact is possible. What happens when you meet with them? What are the conditions?

This is nothing like a run-of-the-mill meeting between two people at a seaside resort. Here, it doesn't matter how many diplomas you've got or what your plans are for the development of your business. What's important is that you are completely authentic – that you don't try and be someone that you aren't. It's important that you're really attentive, that at that moment the most important and fascinating thing in your life is that contact, rather than any thoughts about stock exchange listings or whether you look good or not in these flippers in the photographs. That's how people dance the tango, make love, or pray. If you're not entirely within that contact, it won't take place. The dolphins will leave, they

only need a couple of seconds to do that. And it makes no difference how good you are at swimming. We've seen lots of professional swimmers who have never come into contact with dolphins, and then people who can barely keep themselves afloat with whom the dolphins stay for hours. You have to need this contact, otherwise they certainly won't need it. But it's up to them to decide. They never interact simply out of some practical need, or because of some hypocritical form of politeness or because they're bored – they're not bored, and they're not looking for some sort of practical benefit.

But if the contact takes place, with full respect being paid to them, you get the most valuable, awesome experience of your true, authentic self. The full version of yourself. Unfathomably brighter and more powerful than anything else you're used to. Being far from consumption, that experience is like a revolution, it changes your life. If only because lying after that becomes equivalent to self-destruction. And because now you know that you aren't divorced from the world, and now you're not alone. It's all down to the fact that contact with them is equivalent to contact with the creation of the world, and to contact with your true self.

Is contact like that possible in a dolphinarium?

A dolphinarium is a maximum security prison camp for those who have wound up there through no fault of their own. Creatures intended to swim hundreds of kilometers a day in pure sea water and to dive to hundreds of meters are incarcerated in concrete pools in a chlorinated slush. Perhaps the most social beings in the world, linked to their families for their entire lives, are separated from those families. Living exclusively on live fish, they're forced to eat carrion. Orienting themselves with the aid of echo-location, they are placed in the continual reflection of their own signals, which is like a person placed inside a mirror ball. It's only every fourth dolphin caught that reaches the dolphinarium alive, the rest die en route. The survivors go insane, or, at a minimum, suffer from deep depression. It's a revolting business, an exact copy of our society's approach to the world. So, no, that kind of contact is impossible in a dolphinarium. Although, of course, because of what dolphins are, when people are there, because of their ignorance, they sense an extraordinary flow of strength, of joy and the like. The same is true of so-called "dolphin-therapy." The only being capable of engaging in that, as the name makes clear, is the dolphin itself, on the basis of its own decision, rather on that of the person who has incarcerated it in the pool with the aim of extracting profit from it.

Your new film is called "Intraterrestrial" – what's it about?

Intraterrestrials are "earthlings." In counterpoint to aliens, we have non-aliens. Galileo wrote a book that created a foundation for a new worldview – "Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems." Our film is a dialogue of the same

kind. Dolphins and people, two worldviews: rigid and fluid, consumerism and harmony, artificial and authentic. This film is about the way out of a dead-end being a change in worldview, and for the majority of people there's nothing that could be more terrifying and traumatic. It's also about how wonderful dolphins are, about their love, their beauty, their authenticity and their strength.

What is the Third Dolphinity Festival dedicated to?

Every year it's something new. This year, it's going to be a kind of game, an experiment. Let's imagine that the round building of the Embassy in Tenerife is a flying saucer. Inside it, an expedition of aliens (all of the Festival's participants) flies to Earth in search of intelligence, and it lands on the border between two environments – the land and the ocean. Each of them is habitable and populated with species of creatures that are incredibly similar to one another in certain ways, but are also incredibly different in certain ways. We – the "Martians" – know nothing about them. And we have to work out from scratch what is going on. There will be a special day dedicated to Whale Watching – the close observation of whales and dolphins. And there will be a special day dedicated to Human Watching – the observation of people. At the beginning, both species are just a capability of intelligence. But how intelligently are those two different species living? Which of them is intelligent, or sensible, in essence? That, no doubt, requires that you take a step that hasn't yet been taken by modern science: to agree universal criteria for intelligence. For the time being, unfortunately, they are incredibly indistinct and contradictory. If they appear, it's possible that we might look at dolphins in a new way. And at ourselves too.

You think that now, when the quantity of our own problems is forever growing, the subject of dolphins is really so important that it could change something?

We believe that it has to be understood immediately that the avalanche-like growth in our problems is the result of one cause. It's down to our worldview which has led us into a dead-end, in a view of the world where the material is recognized as being self-sufficient, and all values are set out in accordance with this reductionist fallacy. Within the framework of the previous paradigm which gave birth to all these problems, there are no solutions left at all. There's only one way out – a change in the paradigm. And the existence of alternatives has been confirmed not by sci-fi novels, but by a different type of intelligence that exists within arm's reach. Until now, it was too early to be able to see them, and tomorrow it will be too late. We've used almost everything up, except ourselves.

In different cultures, dolphins have been symbols for salvation, as well as strength, love and joy. Are they the most important things now?

In science there's something called the mirror test. The ability to recognize oneself

in the mirror and to acknowledge this proof of the presence of self-awareness. When the test was invented, dolphins were among the first to pass it. A human child usually passes it at the age of a year and a half. Dolphins are a mirror test for humanity. We're hurtling along an "abyss in the rye", centimeters from the edge. And if we are quick enough to recognize our potential selves in ourselves today, then anything is possible.

Is there something concrete and specific that can be done in this field right now?

A year ago we began the Sanctuary project in Tenerife. Essentially, where the Embassy is now located, there's just a normal human territory, like everywhere else. But whales and dolphins have been living just a few meters away for millions of years. And in the most literal sense they've got transport ships running over their heads. Our constructions, radars and echo-sounders drive them insane, they get caught in fishing trawler nets, tourist boats chase after them, and all of that is increasing. Nothing personal, just business and politics. So, a year ago, the participants in our Festival, from fifteen different countries, said publicly – from the stage, into microphones, and in front of cameras: "We're declaring this zone our personal Sanctuary". Irrespective of what the businessmen and the politicians decide to do, we're going to behave here, in our beloved site where we are at the moment, as if we're in a nature reserve or a place of worship. Speaking at that site, Giacomo Rizzolatti, the genius who first discovered the mirror neurons, proving that we're not formed out of hatred and fear, but out of compassion and love, said: "You must understand – you, me, all of you, all of us – we are one essence." The recognition of that fact and, as a first step, the recognition of dolphins as individuals, would be a colossal leap forward in humanity's moral development. After all, it's not so much about them as about us – as we are today, and as we could be. About the end of the world, or the end of the darkness.