



## **G. Paolini, *Black out*, Lugo (Ravenna): Exit Edizioni, 1996.**

The second volume of the trilogy begun with *Lezione di pittura* (1994) consists of eight folded sheets: four of them are the writings “Controcampo” [Reverse Shot], “Aria condizionata” [Air Conditioning], “Libertà provvisoria” [Provisional Freedom] and “Vivo o morto” [Alive or Dead] while the other four are plates.

“Controcampo” and “Libertà provvisoria” are reprinted from *La verità in quattro righe e novantacinque voci* (1996); “Aria condizionata” and “Vivo o morto” appear for the first time.

### REVERSE SHOT

For some years now and with increasing frequency I have been receiving, though without wishing to, news about events and episodes on the contemporary art scene.

In particular I am called upon, once more against my will, to follow step by step the career of an artist, almost make enquiries about him, who by a curious coincidence bears my own name. So it's impossible not to feel a certain solidarity with him, although I don't think he needs it (he won't even be aware of it) since for some time “his works have been in the main collections and most important museums in Italy and abroad”.

I find myself reading these accounts with passive humour, head in hand and with an ever more absent gaze. When I realise this I try to make myself comfortable, cross my legs, think of other things... try not to appear an over faithful copy of the solitary figure portrayed by Dürer in *Melencolia*, or the gloomy personage on the left in Poussin's *Et in Arcadia Ego*.

Why, how come... Even though I avoid asking myself explicitly, I'd now like to make out this strange contradiction, seek to explain it, given my casual but close familiarity with the artist in question.

Various hypotheses crop up on the subject. I've often heard it said that the artist painfully separates himself from his works which, in brief, belong to him: yet the acknowledgement, the generous welcome extended by that certain collection ought to be enough... True, it remains uncertain where the work will end up, but it's always better than abandonment in a corner of the studio to gather dust.

Others hold that the artist attributes something absolute and universal to his works: preferable to the illustrious walls of a prestigious museum? And then the spreading of reproductions will contribute to ensuring that work's survival...

But there must indeed be something, something subtly problematic if not actually catastrophic. Perhaps, thinking about it, and contrary to what they say, the point is that the work really exists, has its own effective (and relative) material existence which is *there*, visible to all, to all the others and not only to him (to its author).

For him it had ceased to exist, replaced to the advantage of an afterwards (the subsequent work), sole and universal heir to that image. There is no problem of good or bad light, suitable space, felicitous setting... The question is another one: the artist, at least my namesake, would like everything (or nothing) for himself. Of *his* work (and maybe even of his life) he alone would like to question himself and be able to exclaim: “Is that it?”.

[p. 10]

### AIR CONDITIONING

Now this letter comes, marked with a peremptory “confidential” which underlines my identity and announces something strictly personal.

“I noticed my name (but it was yours) in the address book of an art gallery I usually frequent. Surprised (that it wasn't me) I first of all cast doubt on the authenticity of that name. I was hardly able to believe that I was once more spectator, and not author, of that interminable representation which – eternal, solitary protagonist – I had for some time been accustomed to interpreting.

A representation always has an author and at least one spectator: well, as from today I am that *one*. As from today (3 October 1996) I shall resume my place or relinquish it, depending on whether I must consider myself the one or the other of the two terms in question.

But I won't hesitate any longer. Of course I'll be obliged to renounce shaking hands – sooner or later it might have happened – with one of our ministers or some other authority of the moment. Besides, the more illustrious ones don't deserve greater regard: it appears that kings and queens go to the stadiums in person and step onto the field to shake the athletes by the hand, and that episodes of the kind are normally shown on television, especially on Sunday.

“No gentleman ever does gymnastics”, said Oscar Wilde to my consolation. I must in fact acknowledge that I can still retain the privilege of staying away from gyms and airports, museums (certain of them reduced precisely to resembling airports), school halls and parliamentary halls, gatherings, committees, Olympics, jubilees, referendums and elections, public bodies and prize-giving ceremonies... Of avoiding metropolitan hells and natural or artificial paradises and – be it said *inter nos* – internet and Omnitel.

Mine is therefore a disappearance, paradoxically conspicuous since on certain public occasions (openings, receptions, reunions) an unforeseen absence runs the risk of raising more noise than a showy and loquacious presence. But a justified absence, if my albeit worn out instinct of preservation advises or actually orders me to take certain safety measures.

Switching off (from) communications does not exclude, indeed it regenerates and renews that élan essential to the exchange of ideas *and* of persona, such as for example the exchange constituted by these words of mine which you, dear Giulio Paolini, have now given proof of reading with attention and patience”.

[pp. 11-12]

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Translated from the Italian by David Smith.