



## **G. Paolini, *Contemplator enim*, Milan/Florence: Galleria Christian Stein and Hopefulmonster Editore, 1991.**

Texts and images are subdivided into seven chapters preceded by a foreword: "I. Pro memoria" [Memorandum], "II. Rovine future" [Future Ruins], "III. La città proibita" [The Forbidden City], "IV. Fuoco fatuo" [Will-O'-The-Wisp], "V. L'ospite" [The Guest], "VI. Fuori l'autore" [Author], "VII. Contemplator Enim". The first and third sections reprise already published writings while the others consist chiefly of unpublished pieces. The seven illustrations correspond to the lithographs in the portfolio of the same title, created on the occasion of this book's publication. The iconography centres around an image of the entrance to the artist's home which provides the setting for each of seven different interventions.

Paul Blanchard's English translations of the texts are included in a separate enclosure.

### FOREWORD

#### *No More Exhibitions*

I live here, I'm writing to you from here, and from now on I intend to stay here.

This doesn't mean I'm opening or closing those doors (they'll stay ajar, as usual) or taking attention off the phenomena and activities of the institutions engaged on the front of contemporary art.

Art, however, must be old.

Perhaps something is opening and closing, at least for me. A different phase is opening, a new area of reconnaissance stands on the horizon: and in order to observe it, the practice of the "grand tour", the precarious conquest and consequent abandonment of "exhibition spaces", sterile, short-lived colonies of a homeless *Aleph*, must be brought to a close.

Attention is concentrated between those four walls. The seven studies, the logs of a solitary, aimless journey, are the projections of a centripetal point of view aimed at considering, or interpreting, the loss of direction: they do not constitute one or seven exhibitions.

[p. 7]

### II. FUTURE RUINS

Years of (legitimate) complaints and (well-deserved) invocations seem to have filled the void. The justified, widespread, and long-repeated worries about the fugitive condition of the museum as an institution, especially in Italy and even more especially for contemporary art, seem now almost suddenly to have fallen silent, to have touched the limit of saturation.

Almost suddenly, it seems, huge formations of anonymous or (what is worse) original pavilions created with a view to support the function (mention has even been made of the "fruition") of the work of art – of that something, that single thing, perhaps, which claims not to have a function – have grown up here and there, almost everywhere. In short, the best intentions (adequate tools and modern structures, as it is customary to say) probably have not contributed to a correct frequentation of the places of art.

At Rivoli we witness, in a certain sense, a singular exception: for its and our good fortune, the castle already possessed all the requisites of a museum of contemporary art, without having to be invested with them *ex novo*. The building was extant but had never really existed – for it is well known that the complex was not completed and hence was not effectively used either when it was first built or subsequently.

Thus exempted from the suspicion of having been built for the purpose, it has revealed its perfect, natural adequacy (magniloquence and discretion, nobility and detachment) for hosting an exhibition.

In this way it re-evokes, in full scale, the echoes and dizziness of the huge vaults described by Hubert Robert in his *Vues du Louvre*. One of these, the *Vue imaginaire de la Grande Galerie en ruines*, a fascinating variation on the theme of “future ruins”, seems to point out two parallel destinies, by means of which the works and the spaces that contain them pursue one another in time, to the point of reversing their roles, of “ruining” each other, of revealing the spaces and the works that inhabit them.

“Museums never were, and I think never will be, the absolutely right environment for works of art. I don’t think works of art are at their most interesting when separated from the whole fabric of life. It makes it possible for more of the public to see them, it’s convenient, it’s good for art history – especially as it preserves them – but it is a compromise...”.

“Modern art differs from that of the past in its phenomenal multiplicity of styles – a function of its more individualistic, less collective, less institutional character...”.

“A museum is a museum, and you can’t pretend it’s an apartment...”<sup>1</sup>.

“En désertant les lieux publics, cadres de son ancillarité sociale, l’art a perdu son caractère institutionnel et désormais entre les démarches les plus individualistes seule l’histoire de l’art semblerait pouvoir introduire une cohérence, discerner une évolution. L’œuvre d’art ne répondrait donc plus qu’à la seule quête esthétique des artistes et de leurs amateurs et n’aurait d’autre lieu de destination que les appartements privés des uns et des autres. Ainsi est clairement effectuée une assimilation entre la fonction sociale de l’art et l’assignation des œuvres à un lieu...”.

Nevertheless, “L’exposition est ce par quoi le fait artistique advient et si l’on veut pouvoir en rendre compte, il faut s’en donner les moyens et en tout premier lieu ne pas considérer l’exposition comme un langage second véhiculant un signe lui préexistant, car ce serait rendre inaccessible ce que les modalités d’apparition de l’art impliquent dans la production artistique...”<sup>2</sup>.

I am increasingly convinced that the rule of the personal museum is the first and perhaps the only rule to apply to such a delicate subject as the work of an artist.

There alone, from Fiesole to Urbino, from Rome to Paris, Aix-en Provence, and Ferrara, the Muse visits Angelico, Raphael, Poussin, Ingres, Rousseau, Cezanne, and De Chirico.

The monographic focus hits its mark: in addition to the specific effect (the advent of “vision”) it includes, as a surprise effect, the echo that is liberated and fills the space destined to host the Muse.

Who here as elsewhere tells us nothing, but *listens* to us think (it is thus that she *speaks* to us).

A work of art, should it ever stand up and declare itself, even before wanting to be taken into consideration would simply ask to be, to stand alone where and how the intention that made it suggests. To welcome it with the habitual respect and honors would be useless; a correct and sensitive discretion – fitting, precisely, to the message that it does not deliver but asks to hear together with us – would be better.

[pp. 17-18]

<sup>1</sup> W. Rubin, quoted by J.M. Poinot, “Quand l’œuvre a lieu”, in *Parachute* (Montreal), no. 46, 1984.

<sup>2</sup> J.M. Poinot, *op. cit.*. I would like to point out, in this connection, my notes in *Giulio Paolini. De l’atelier à l’exposition*, exh. cat., Nantes: Musée des Beaux-Arts, 1987.

## V. THE GUEST

A strange person (I don’t remember his name) of indefinable age, his gaze fixed in the distance, confided in me one day (time and place escape me) that he felt possessed by a sort of frenetic inertia that led him to cultivate the idea of a curious, disquieting project.

He felt ready – but the longing to show it gave him a distracted and apparently unmotivated impatience – to apprehend by intuition, and to anticipate, any kind or number of images (was he an artist?), as long as he was not bound to realize them – that is, to see to the material definition of the work.

He added, still more paradoxically, that his urgency certainly was not dictated by a preconstituted intention. The perfect copy – “authentic”, he specified – of an old master painting would have been the exact equivalent, for instance, of the most unexpected – but expectable – vision of the future. The infinitesimal detail of any subject whatsoever, could suggest the secret code of a new language.

The activity would have developed in keeping with parameters that would not be pre-established, but would change each time, in such a way as to contradict the schemes delineated immediately before.

The idea of the avant-garde ended with its relegation to an archaic dimension, it was surpassed precisely because of its impossibility to acknowledge itself as such, to admit its implicit destination to the past.

I said at the beginning, “I don’t remember his name”, but now I recall it was he who did not remember it, perhaps he had never had one.

[p. 32]

## VI. AUTHOR<sup>1</sup>

In an interview a few years back I was asked to name the finest picture in the entire history of art. Without hesitation I said Jean-Antoine Watteau’s *L’embarquement pour Cythère*.

I was forgetting, or rather I couldn’t have foreseen, that I would subsequently be asked to say something about Diego Velázquez. I couldn’t say anything about him now without recanting and declaring that *Las Meninas* was certainly the finest picture in the entire history of art. And in effect it is, just as Watteau’s picture “also” is and, with equal right, as all pictures are which, from whatever side, offer transparent images, aware, I mean, of being nothing other than images.

If I happen to talk about “side” it isn’t at random: the reverse side, precisely, of the canvas that Velázquez is painting opens up the modern “front” of vision, from that instant illuminating the numberless tormented avenues, in part still unexplored, that enable us to look at a work of art today.

Too many times I have found myself insisting – over and over, I must admit – on a certain reticence of mine to go and lay down or offer up an active, conscious contribution to the search for “truth”, or at least for a meaning to trace on the boundless horizon of images.

Having laid my first stone (but I had not yet deposited a building plan) I continued to erect the scaffolding of an edifice awaiting construction, without a client or a consignee.

Yet to insist, repeat, and continue seems to be the only way to bear the full weight of a void that no one wants to fill.

*The Guest* is staying in this room, but beyond that door, okay, here we are at last...

*Fuori l’autore*<sup>2</sup> is not a representation of that which cannot be represented, it simply *does not* represent. It does not have an author but it will have a viewer, indeed two (you and me); it is neither a mirror of the world nor an object chosen at random to be “taken” as a work.

Having never seen it before, I will see it after you: so how will this painting appear to us? How will it ever be able to appear (to you and to me) if no one has prepared the prodigy beforehand? And if each of us, everyone for himself, can readily imagine it, how can we really see it? Can the work make itself, or make itself the echo of that which it might have been? Though there is not an author, there must be an artificer...

Is *Cecilia, volgi un sguardo* by Haendel, Rameau, or Monteverdi? Have De Chirico, Reynolds, and Manet not perhaps painted the same painting, different versions of the same theme? Nothing brings them together, or draws them apart, if the artificer is one alone: I am not speaking of affinity, but of *authority*; it is not a question of models (the epochs deny them) but of the continuous rediscovery of the same thing (the thing itself).

Those who would hesitate to venture down the short cut discovered by Beuys (“all men are artists”) would run the risk of being sucked into the equally indeterminate whirlpool of its opposite (“all artists reveal one alone”).

It is no use seeking a way out (no one compelled us to enter). The labyrinth is a perfect circle that conceals in its continuity a point of connection of which we have had to imagine the existence: the compass, consolation of the draughtsman, remains one of our most faithful friends, but we cannot ask it to take the place of the universe of our visions.

In a word, the point is that these visions are ours and I do not see why I should once again make them mine.

[p. 36]

<sup>1</sup> The title “Fuori l'autore” has a double meaning in Italian. It refers to the call for the author to come on stage after a successful theatre première, but it also means getting rid of the Author, literally: “Away with the Artist”. (T. N.)

<sup>2</sup> This is the title of a still-unknown painting. Without the exclamation point, the invocation loses its accent and becomes the acknowledgment of an absence. Not only of the author, but of the work: from here on the text continues, that is, without the knowledge of the work it is to illustrate. The frequent questions therefore are not rhetorical expressions, but point to the effective impossibility of describing an image, without for this reason intending to drift into the rhetorical sphere.

Translation of the paragraph on Velázquez by David Smith.

## VI. CONTEMPLATOR ENIM

*Contemplator enim...* “Observe the light of the sun when it filters through closed shutters in the darkness of a room. In each ray you will see a confused jumble of corpuscles seemingly lost in an eternal war come together in swarms and give battle, then separate and attack again, quickly and without respite. Watching, you will understand the nature of the eternal fall of the first things in the deep infinity of the void...”.

“It is a frequent, ordinary spectacle, but it has something hypnotic and mysterious about it.

Lucretius makes it a metaphor of the universe. The space between the shutters (*opaca domorum*) becomes the cosmic void. The grains of dust take on the distant and absolute dignity of the prime, indivisible elements of which all things are made, atoms (*primordia rerum*). And the energy that moves them randomly and endlessly in the void (*in magno semper inani*) is a blind universal gravity corrected by the deviations of chance. Chance keeps the atoms from falling parallel and solitary. Chance, inclining them with respect to the vertical, makes them meet and mingle to produce visible bodies”<sup>1</sup>.

Merleau-Ponty, in the summer of 1960, seems to continue: “Le peintre vit dans la fascination. Ses actions les plus propres – ces gestes, ces traces dont il est seul capable, et qui seront pour les autres révélation, parce qu’ils n’ont pas les mêmes manques que lui – il lui semble qu’ils émanent des choses mêmes, comme le dessin des constellations. Entre lui et le visible, les rôles inévitablement s’inversent. C’est pourquoi tant de peintres ont dit que les choses les regardent” and adds: “La vision n’est pas un certain mode de la pensée ou présence à soi; c’est le moyen qui m’est donné d’être absent de moi-même, d’assister du dedans à la fission de l’Être, au terme de laquelle seulement je me ferme sur moi. Les peintres l’ont toujours su”<sup>2</sup>.

Or furthermore: “The scene that will be constructed thanks to the insistent repetition of the [claim] ‘I see’ will reassume, in a sense (albeit the negative sense of exile), all the elements offered by chance and chaos. Thus traced out, the picture will have recomposed that which appeared and continues to appear as decomposition”<sup>3</sup>.

Thus we reach, as though by way of a return, these seven<sup>4</sup> images of an interior: each evokes, or announces in projection, the becoming of the work.

In short, those same frames of film which earlier were immersed in the darkness of the camera in order to be impressed by light, just *short* of the threshold (all seven photographs were taken without entering the room),

are now situated at the center of space (on the structure erected by multiplying the scheme of *Disegno geometrico [Geometric Drawing]*, 1960) so that they might give up to us, in the ray of light of the projector or in the trace marked out on the wall, the image that by perspective effect lies *beyond* the limit of the environment that surrounds us.

Thus the author leaves the scene. The work is elsewhere, untouchable.

[p. 40]

<sup>1</sup> Lucretius, quoted by Saverio Vertone in *Corriere della Sera* (Milan), 24 June 1990.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Œil et l'Esprit*, Paris: Gallimard, 1964. I had already cited another passage by M. Merleau-Ponty in my "indirect" contribution to *Gennaio 70*, Museo Civico di Bologna, published in the catalogue of the exhibition and in my *Idem*, Torino: Einaudi, 1975. Also, I had imagined Lucretius' house in an exhibition entitled *Casa di Lucrezio* at Palazzo Rosari Spada in Spoleto (cf. *La casa di Lucrezio*, exh. cat., Casalecchio di Reno (Bologna): Grafis Edizioni, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> J. Starobinski, *La Mélancolie au miroir*, Paris: Julliard, 1989.

<sup>4</sup> On the reason for this numerical choice see my text "Le regole del gioco" in the catalogue of the solo exhibition at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome, 1988. See also "Sette note", in *A.E.I.U.O.* (Rome), no. 3, 1981, subsequently reprinted as a comment on the figure of the *Guerrier hermétique*, in my *Figures/Intentions*, Villeurbanne: Le Nouveau Musée, 1984. Finally I would like to recall the fourteen pictures of *Un quadro [A picture]*, 1970, and the twenty-eight versions of *La Doublure*, 1972-73.

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