



G. Paolini, *Giro di boa*, Lugo (Ravenna): Exit Edizioni, 1998.

The third and last volume of the trilogy brought out by the same publisher (Cf. *Lezione di pittura*, 1994, and *Black out*, 1996) consists of eighteen previously unpublished writings and a text entitled "Giro di boa" [Rounding the Mark] which accompanies a loose plate inserted in the book.

HOLIDAY

Had I ever accepted an invitation to teach, there would've been no way out; I'd have been obliged to issue an immediate declaration of surrender: "It won't be easy to spend time together in the conviction that we're doing useful, positive work. Abandoned as we have been by the very subject we were supposed to deal with for the thirty hours of this course, we'll have to get by on our own, beguiling the time and maybe even ourselves too.

So, what to do if the guest doesn't speak, refuses to answer or has nothing to say?

The silent subject is art, precisely. Art, as seems evident to me, does not communicate: to put it better, it has nothing more to communicate since it has already communicated its existence once and for all, albeit without granting us an explanation... In brief, it has announced its existence without adding anything to this pure (or presumed) ascertainment. Which risks regressing to supposition if not borne out by some evidence.

So if its very existence is uncertain, called into question, all the less may its presence be confirmed. But as we were saying, art does not give explanations and likewise its ungraspable messenger, beauty, appears on the line of our horizon only rarely and in backlighting..."

This would have been the start of a voyage that was to follow an over-tortuous itinerary, scattered with obstacles and dangerous bends... Especially for the passengers, since the helmsman could give no assurance about not going adrift.

So, due to my conscious inadequacy, I found myself unable to accept the task with which they all too generously wanted to entrust me: a university course on contemporary art at the "Science of Communications" department. Instead, I have reduced what should have been a series of lessons to this brief and desolate monologue.

"Can a work survive, evade the scandal of communication?" With this I concluded (in *Idem*, Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1975) my divagations on themes tackled in the early years of my career. At a distance of time I find myself repeating the same words with a minimal but substantial observation: that I didn't "conclude" then (indeed, it was precisely in those years that I began most of my writings and the cycles of some of my most demanding works). But nor do I feel able today to argue and formulate conclusions that are organic and whole. If not in that sense which gradually, to date and henceforth, tends to emerge in the glow of the page, almost without my knowledge: the noble, silent detachment which art has always maintained conceals no secret. Art has no secrets and therefore nothing to communicate.

If we can't set ourselves to listen or to a sustained vision, we can't however avoid questioning it, attempting to penetrate its limpid and dazzling transparency.

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IF AND SELF

If politics is the art of the possible, art is the politics of the impossible.

[p. 16]

BEAUTY PARLOUR

On beauty, once again and always... Where is it, how to encounter it? And though we grant that it is there, how to establish its existence?

Beauty certainly has no headquarters (we can't set off on a journey to meet it) yet it *takes place*, it lives somewhere...

Beauty inhabits silence, it does not itself speak (a note of Rameau, a line of Shakespeare or the voice of Carmelo Bene, full and shrill sounds, do not make noise).

Beauty does not recount, does not refer... but reverberates at a distance, though continuing to be quiet, to inflict an exclusion on us... something at once irresistible and unbearable.

The murmur of admiration and the clamour of applause interrupt the silence, rush to fill a too dizzy void.

One does not get experience of beauty, does not get on the credit side...

One does not fall into beauty: it is not an episode, it is the epilogue.

[p. 15]

HE WHO EXPRESSES HIMSELF IS LOST

I feel I have to say it again: I've never wanted to express myself in the work. I've always left the work to express itself (always demanded it should do so), to declare itself, to speak out loud and clear about what it is and where it comes from.

The work of art, luckily and unlike ourselves, does not have a good or bad character and shares only one feature with us: memory (for this reason it has a far better relationship with time than we do). It alters appearance (it has a boundless wardrobe) and if it doesn't actually invent itself by itself, maybe like some obscure and inscrutable deity, it grows well and often even becomes immortal.

[p. 17]

MOMENT OF TRUTH

Alone,

faced with the unfinished fact.

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ORIGINAL SIN

"There's the famous story of the pact Aby made with his brother Max: at the age of twelve he declared himself willing to relinquish his rights as firstborn in favour of his younger brother on the condition that the latter undertook, throughout his natural life, to buy Aby all the books he should desire."

Ingrid Warburg Spinelli, "Lo zio Aby", in *Mnemosyne*, Rome: Artemide, 1998

We were all there at Gigi's that evening. All but not so many, although those six or seven voices were enough to fill the room with a clamour to which I, up to that point, had certainly not contributed. I think it was to draw me into the conversation that Sandro – glancing at me with increasing frequency – set to telling about a precious autograph manuscript he'd managed to acquire: the notes for a famous but now forgotten lecture that Giorgio De Chirico gave in Turin, at the then Cultural Union of Palazzo Carignano in April 1958.

"Of course I remember it, I was there", I said confidently, and I confirm it here with greater certainty, here in writing, clearly recalling that far off episode. My simple statement was followed by a strange and sudden silence.

Somebody, Saverio or Sandro himself, pointed out that maybe I was referring to another subsequent appearance of the Master, since at that time I was only 17 years old. It was my turn to remain silent for a few seconds, but it was precisely this brief verification that consolidated my certainty.

I remember perfectly: I'd shortly moved to the big new city with my family. Having left my childhood friends elsewhere I suddenly found myself adopting the behaviour and habits of an adult or precocious adolescent: I spent whole days alone in cinemas and theatres, on trains, in cafés, but especially in museums where I'd often stay until closing time. I was pervaded by lively excitement about all those aspects that stood for autonomy and modernity. This is why I remember that crowded lecture (I had to make do with standing room on the right hand side of the hall).

Now, having spared my friends that evening, I allow myself a consideration: two years after that episode, when I wasn't yet twenty (September 1960), I had already painted the first (and last) picture (*Geometric Drawing*) of what today as yesterday seems to me a strange "career"...

Moreover, even earlier I had won a wholly unexpected prize at the age of 8 in a national drawing competition for kids. Summing up, I find myself today, at 57, with a seniority far in advance of my actual years. And if, as may be surmised, I am to survive for a while, I really don't know how it's going to end up, since it won't be easy to start again...

In the meantime I've covered a lot of ground. At that lecture, delivered after the metaphysical painting exhibition at the Venice Biennale held without his consent, De Chirico went as far as to say that "all modern painting is a deceit, a nullity". I recall my boiling indignation, my impassioned refutation of his argument from the first word to the last.

Some time later I had to reverse my judgement: the one who'd seemed to be the enemy to strike down, the target to hit, was to become a personification of the idol, my illustrious model.

[pp. 25-26]

ROUNDING THE MARK

Everything, everything... (why repeat twice a word that already expresses "everything" once?) everything, I mean to say, proceeds along a one way street, towards a single destination. And everything dissolves on the horizon: an indefinable line, a hallucination of the end.

We are still travelling (outward or homeward bound?) on the only voyage still possible, the only one that can move us without shifting us: only art is capable of everything, that everything which it is enough to nominate but once.

Art distances us from the world, but for precisely this reason allows us to observe the world. It is capable of miraculous acts and it tolerates but does not acknowledge the sacrilegious acts increasingly committed in its name (a certain afflicted and conceit-ridden carelessness today risks making us nostalgic for a touch of ingenuousness). *Être nature* (an exhibition that recently opened in Paris) is against nature for an artist. Nothing is more unnatural for an artist than to join the choir of the elements. Just as the healthy and judicious precepts of another current exhibition, *Paris-Zoo*, so instructive and edifying, are actually boring and saddening.

In Italy too, especially in summer and in small towns (but with considerable backing from the European Community) numerous shows and conventions spring up which aim to tackle, or better to play down, the "problems" of the relationship with the public, meaning to narrow the distance between artist and spectator. A vast repertoire of words (openness, involvement, dialogue, understanding, vitality, reciprocity, aggregation...) has been mobilised to this end, in an attempt to make an undigested mixture of conciliation and populism appetizing to all.

And the world takes advantage of it, dressing up like a work and putting itself on show. Thus the world affirms and reproduces its image as many times as there are "visitors" who inhabit it.

We have bartered, exchanged the sublime of art for the small change of the art of living. The art-life equation doesn't hold water, it can't keep its balance for long: compromise, the disastrous attempt to graft one onto the other, will lead us to loss of the one and the other.

But the journey continues...

P. S.

A last observation about the plate printed on the front of this sheet. The area that appears in perspective and floats on a sea of notes is none other than a drawing of the floor of the entrance hall to my home, already seen in the series of plates illustrating another text of mine (*Contemplator enim*, Milan/Florence: Galleria Christian Stein and Hopefulmonster Editore, 1991).

And it is there, from that safety anchor, far from the shore but well to this side, at a respectful distance from the horizon line, it is there that I remain, today as then, listening in expectation of a signal. All at once something happens: false noises, indistinct echoes, subdued sounds, words in the wind...

We open our eyes wishing to sight the origin and reason of those ambiguous calls: the stars watch us, reflected in the silvery, scarcely rippling sea; light-years separate us from their uncertain existence and no one will ever avail himself of a response from them.

The more we inquire the less we know of them... until we forget everything, no longer know anything about ourselves.

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Translated from the Italian by David Smith.