

It can be done! (*as though it were nothing*)

by Paolo Sortino

Deleuze believed that we don't so much grow up in the world as rather *with* the world, and that the world's most fundamental demand is that it be perceived, confronted – framed in the terms of the idea we make of it and thereby acted upon. What idea of the world does today's art have? How has our approach to reality evolved in the face of the challenging perspectives – some of which truly riveting and enlightening – opened up by the farthest reaching artistic manifestations of this age, the neo-avantgardes? And what might it mean to ask questions about the nature of reality, when our Time has even mused about what the aspect of things might be when we're not looking? A concern with what the nature of the world might be when our look is turned away implies two things, at bottom: firstly, that we admit the world does have a state of nature, which we locate somewhere that is an *elsewhere* from where we are, *removed* from us (somewhere that is not *here*, but *now*); secondly, that we refuse all superadded constructs concerning the world, all forms of semantic distancing, anything that might purport to fill the gap between ourselves and the object – any form of rhetoric, that is (something that is not *now*, but is *here*). Baudrillard made the point with regards to the work of Andy Warhol, and I am convinced his analysis could lead to the foundation of a new civilization of art. Reality, for reasons that have been established conclusively (that it cannot be simulated, that it is not nor may be “fixed”, as the most obdurate exponents of formalism would have it), breaks free of whichever mould we cast upon it: it spills over, presses on all sides, and will ultimately always shine on the remains of the world's over-exposition, on every expression of power, on every elaboration of sense that attempts to depart from the plain and superior ethics we are called to with greater and greater urge every day. I cite Baudrillard in this connection because he fully recognized how any attempt to simulate reality will cast an indelible shadow; he realised how such attempts open a door that can only benefit the malicious gaze (a gaze bereft of innocence), and recognised in this stare the heedless adoration of every false miracle the real performs. This state of affairs arose when the neo-avantgarde initiated (irreparably so, we should say) a trend of boundless exploitation of the Image (the Text-Image); our only engagement with the real consequently amounts to a *suspended* perception, gapped by a void that cannot be filled, but within which the audience's simple enjoyment floats adrift. A trend has been set that unquestionably defines our contemporary age. Needless to say, when the above mentioned artistic currents began to manipulate the Image thus, they did at first succeed in their intent to expose the anthropological erosion of time, and equally succeeded in safeguarding their language from being subsumed by its medium. In the course of time, however, the medium prevailed on the language, so that it became removed from the Truth to which those artists had formerly testified.

It is frequently asserted that the reciprocal influence of art and design is so deep that, even if we don't go so far as to confuse them, we all too often find ourselves doubting the potential for representation which we have always associated with art. So we may even ask ourselves whether art hasn't finally, in this way, freed itself of all *ideal* involvement with our lives and engendered, at the same time, a form of involvement that is (more) real. What if we were finally faced with the plain assertion that reality quite simply cannot be foregone? Well then, we would at last be dispensed from the urge to impose our handprint on reality; we could lay to rest our long-standing and forceful attempts to compensate spiritual longings by triggering frantic and overwhelming stirrings of our bodies, of all matter, or by means of the self-regulated superabundance of our alluring narratives, which is to say, I repeat, the proliferation of rhetoric. If we wish to relinquish even this subtle form of power, and also be rid of the enticements of current media and conceptual systems, so as to attain a “sincerity” of art, we must revert the linear development of technique and de-structure technological implementation, because the only possible outcome of these (as occurs in design) is a re-visitation of all previous production in a desperate attempt to rob them of the living currents that run below the colour-surface. Such a liberating movement will not indulge in the appreciation of the

stratifications of culture as it proceeds in deconstructing it: its purpose is not, that is to say, to recover – and the to stop at – the state of nature (or other halfway stations, such as the state of Power, or necessity), but to reach an unexplored locus which is still and wholly comprised within things, is the locus *of* things. It may be portrayed as retracing our steps to where an open course departs that had previously escaped our observation, so that we may make a fresh start from there: retrain our eyes to a moment that's immediately antecedent the instauration of emptiness at the heart of the image, at the heart of the power the image exercises through the protracted suspension of the object it purports to relate, whilst neutralizing the object behind the arrangement of the surface.

The spell that casts the image of the object as immortal and yet confines it within the representation of its absence has to be broken.

At the heart of our times, in every debate that has addressed contemporary issues, and in the very notion that the present may already have been brought to its death, the investigation of Truth has failed to recover the body; the recovery of the body is something that no longer lies within the reach of a melancholy, of a nihilistic search. I don't expect anybody to question the assertion that current living conditions involve a certain stifling of the senses, and that compensatory attempts to refine our conscience are proving fruitless. It is tantamount to entering a back door without knowing what we're letting ourselves into.

The measure of meaning we're so heroically intent on projecting onto the world (whatever direction we take, be it perdition or enlightenment), the running machines, the cycles of industry, all such forms of contemporary automation may still yield a body whose novelty is the product of an *erosion*: an object that was contained within some other object. There lies the true essential of things. It is the form and meaning of that which was formerly unformed and meaningless. It lies, simply, in choosing the awareness of action over the exuberance of action. To join the ends of a strip of film together to form a cylinder, and then flatten its section by varying the angle until the cylinder collapses within its own schema; to trace the profile of a construction with a square until the only feasible projections coincide with its plan – the reduction, that is, of a volume to drawing (and of images to figure) is the most valuable gift the process of de-creation can afford; this manner of turning *back* and *away form* is the striking mode of the work of Fortuna. Made essential through such principle of “dismantlement”, his works are naturally open to an increase of meaning, naturally in the sense that it occurs independently of a will to represent, of stylistic perseverance, and is open to a widening of the semantic angle.

Everything was tremendously solid back then, majestic to my eyes. My father's shadow projected twice as long as mine, on the poster that said “Good!” and “Good!”.

Like everyone else, we entered, widening the slit between the velvet drapes with our fingers. Then there was silence. The lights went out. Pinocchio turned to mischief and I: I got afraid. I recall the strong grip, the contortion. The white-faced Liar lost his script. He made himself imposing, cast his mask. We saw, whole and speaking (a stack of tensed flesh), the Actor's profile: with a movement of the neck and of his wide open eyes he turned the stage – with all its depths – into a drawing. All became clear: it wasn't of our moods, certainties, technique, or true illusions that we lived, but of myriad restrained tears, and of the refusal to be there, the two of us, at that hour!

It is in his drawings, most and foremost, that the artist can set free the element, be it a door, a vase, a circumstance; it is there that all that resists meaning has a life of absolute luminescence. Through the art of drawing, once it has laid aside the burden of purpose, we are enabled to read the philology of reality – the patient deciphering of a destiny. Here is the body we had sought. At that point, when the body is recovered, Fortuna is finally free to dispose of it as he pleases: to kill it, to suppress it with and in itself, by a wanton blow, by gunshot or slashing, by surgical means.

The story of one's life primarily coincides with the intricate network of objects that have marked it. Freedom and oppression coexist in the tension of what the Gospels refer to as “the Old Law and the New Law”, the dialogue of two internalised elements. It is the interplay of de-creation and

edification, the intersection of the two axes we had begun with and return to: it is a matter of being *here* and *now*; not elsewhere, nor never.

We are all of us within History, the artist seems to be saying: no call for us to *do* something to ensure that we make our return from the most atrocious, devastating and bloody Exits that have been taken, from the experience of the holocausts that have been. Still we may touch and fold, tie, untie, and fear not. We may act, as long as we do so within the timeframe of question and answer, of continuing dialogue – within the moment in which we have a hold of tradition and have the sentiment of the present.

A smile brightens the inability to misconceive, to fake. Let design claim to itself the power to represent the world: art will be left with the salubrious impoverishment of sanctity, with the extraordinary energy that lies in losing. Let a plain chair speak out everything it was taught: the truth it carries shall be manifest when we catch it off guard, in the rendition of its profile from an more elevated enlightenment. Re-emerging from the waters of the spirit in which we will then have bathed everything, the world's lights and every other worldly illusion shall reveal their shadows. Like *Saulus*, we have all fallen – says Meister Eckhart, the German mystic. But we have fallen upon seeing the light of God, after which, when we return to the world of things and shadows – as these works attest – we shall discern reality from the world as it is. Moving beyond Good and Evil, we will have separated them. We shall live a life the heart of which is at one with this art, in which everything that is right and fair occurs *as though* it were nothing. The artist who operates inside the workshop shall stand as a man or woman in the midst of History. We'll know all that there is to know. In magnificence, all will be clear: we'll understand that everything that belongs to this world rejects the intermission of existence and our downfall. All things evolve around us and with us.