BORDERS
OF THE VISIBLE • II

*Intersections Between
Literature and Photography*

edited by *Luigi* **Marfè**

SOMMARIO

BORDERS OF THE VISIBLE • II
INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN LITERATURE AND PHOTOGRAPHY

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Luigi Marfè
INTRODUCTION

Following up, and enlarging on *Borders of the Visible: Intersections between Literature and Photography - I*, the present collection of essays further explores the paths meandering between these two fields of artistic expression, adding a few essays devoted to tackling questions related to contemporary literature, art and culture.

As in the previous volume, this collection presents a selection of the papers of the international conference *Borders of the Visible: Intersections between Literature and Photograph*, organised by the Centro Studi "Arti della Modernità" and held in Turin in November 2017. Both volumes explore the ways in which the borders traditionally separating the language of literature from the language of pictures are crossed and bridged, giving rise to all sorts of interactions, contaminations, hybridising which are examined from various scholarly angles, in a comparative and interdisciplinary way.

This issue opens with a new section, ***Headlines***, which will host, from now on, a choice of essays by international leading scholars focusing on theoretical questions that may have been at the heart of a lively critical debate or displayed particular relevance to current events.

W.J.T. Mitchell, the author of our first "headline", has contributed an essay focusing on the "images" and the "affects" that surround "temporality". The author reflects on time as an "experiential and qualitative category", placing his theme in a period of American political culture that has become "tense, uncertain, 'interesting,' and (above all) crazy".

Our ***Focus*** is explicitly devoted to "borders of the visible" and the critical questions related to the intersections between literature and photography. The essays of this section investigate the meaning and uses of photographs in different literary genres, such as autofiction, historical narrative, fictional representation of places, and experiments of visual poetry. They focus, among the others, on the works of such authors as Roland Barthes, W.G. Sebald, Giorgio Agamben, Ohran Pamuk, and Michael Ondaatje.

Angela Breidbach analyses the images inserted in W.G. Sebald's *Schwindel. Gefühle* (1990). At first sight, they work as their stories' devices, but they soon

reveal a manipulative power. Sebald's intermediality is more than a mix of genres. Images deploy their own critical impact, while the story meanders around them: absence does not come as abstraction, but through ostensive figuration.

Epifanio Ajello explores a zone of life writing which is still almost uncharted: the photographic memoir, whose authors collect and order pictures to shape an autobiographical narrative. His analysis takes into account a prototypical text of this literary genre, Giorgio Agamben's *Autoritratto nello studio* (2017).

Margaret Owens comments on a passage of *La Chambre claire* (1980), focusing on an automaton in Fellini's *Casanova* (1976), to describe Barthes's notion of photography as a form of "shared hallucination." The automaton is linked to a longstanding *topos* in Western culture: a Pygmalionesque fantasy in which the artificial woman metaphorically embodies the allure of visual media.

Julie Gaillard focuses on the work of the photographer and writer Édouard Levé and on his poetics of the portrait as a genre on the threshold between the visible and the invisible. In works such as *Autoportrait* (2005) and *Suicide* (2008), Levé combines photographs and texts in order to reevoke imperceptible fragments of the past and thus to "translate time into space".

Ayse Erek and **Esra Almas** discuss Orhan Pamuk's use of photography in *Istanbul: Memories and the City* (2003), a portrait of the writer as a young artist accompanied with black-and-white photographs of the city. Photographs provide documentary evidence of the past and, at the same time, endow the melancholy of narrative with a reality effect that goes beyond words.

Federico Fastelli analyses the essential role of photography in Italian visual poetry. In the work of authors such as Lamberto Pignotti, Luciano Ori, Eugenio Miccini, and Lucia Marcucci, the combination of photographs and word represents a sort of interlanguage that is the opposite of advertising.

Laurence Petit examines Anita Brookner's *Brief Lives* (1990), a novel in which the inaugural "memory-photograph" is the starting point of the narrator's hermeneutic quest about herself, and the sudden irruption of the Real of death (in the Lacanian sense) comes to thwart the photographic apparatus.

Serena Fusco investigates the power of phototexts to reimage the past, focusing on Michael Ondaatje's fiction. Photographs are used by this author as agents, and photographed subjects as historical objects. Ondaatje's use of photographs—re-read through Benjamin—may be considered as an allegorical experiment, where fiction and history (co)exist.

Rodrigo Fontanari reflects on the relationship between photography and the art of the haiku, focusing on the work of Brazilian photographer of Japanese origin Haruo Ohara. According to this artist, the photographer's aspiration to "capture the moment" corresponds to a condition of suspension, close to that of the haiku: an image of immediacy that does not seek any teleological effect.

Percorsi, the third section of the issue, hosts essays that explore the intersections between literature and photography moving from general questions to the work of specific authors. The essays discuss the collaboration between Henry James and Alvin Langdon Coburn, Virginia Woolf's photographic imagination, the Italian translations of Bertolt Brecht's *Kriegsfibel* (1955), the images of Sylvia Plath's biographies, the visual poetics of Carla Cerati, the use of photographs in Siri Husvedt's narrative, and the presence of phototexts in postcolonial literature. This section ends with two essays on the narrative power of images in contemporary society.

Gabriella Bologna investigates Henry James's role in directing Alvin Langdon Coburn for the photographs of the New York Edition of his works. Not all of these photos, however, follow the writer's detailed instructions. The essay explores the reasons for the changes, and redefines the role of the photographer in the choice of the subjects and the composition of images.

Annalisa Federici focuses on *Orlando* (1928) by Virginia Woolf, a text that undermines the supposed faithfulness of the form toward its subject by presenting false photographic evidence. Woolf's combination of words and pictures determines the collapse of denotation: the concepts of "reality" and "meaning" crumble, and new definitions of "truth" begin to evolve.

Salvatore Graziano Spampinato focuses on the two most important Italian editions of the Brechtian *Kriegsfibel* (1955): the *Abicí della guerra* by Roberto Fertonani (1972), more literal and classical, and Renato Solmi's edition (1975), freer and more actualising. The essay focuses on the latter, which vividly captures the didactic and performative meaning of Brecht's phototext.

Sophie Mayr examines the role of photographs in the biographies of Sylvia Plath, describing how they shape collective imagination, despite their apparent referential meaning: some of them are sort of "pathographies" that concentrate on her mental illness; others support a feminist perspective; others focus on her relationship with Ted Hughes.

Silvia Mazzucchelli investigates the relationship between word and image in the work of Carla Cerati (1926-2016). A writer and photographer, Cerati tried to explore the world with her photos, while her autobiographical novels reflect on the contradictions of bourgeois family, criticising its conventions.

Spencer Meeks argues that photographs in novels distort narrative linearity to alter readers' perception of time. His essay focuses on the effects of photography in Siri Hustvedt's *The Blindfold* (1992). According to Meeks, phototexts mirror the postmodern refutation of master-narratives, problematising the dynamics of time, which is represented as duplicitous and subjective.

Jin-Young Hwang focuses on *The Elegy of Whiteness* (2016) by South Korean writer Han Kang, a book that mixes together writing and photography, since the text is intertwined with the work of the visual artist Cha Mihye. The combination of these two artistic languages symbolically represents memory as "whiteness".

Valeria Cammarata deals with a recurrent theme in phototexts, that of migration as a collective story of wandering and hope, looking in particular at two works that reflect on the issues specific to this type of memorial narrative: the recent *Incoming* (2017) by photographer Richard Mosse, and the *Récits d'Ellis Island. Histoires d'errance et d'espoir* (1980), by Georges Perec and Robert Bober.

Maria Festa investigates the works of some postcolonial authors, such as Caryl Phillips's play, *The Shelter* (1984), Andrea Levy's novel *Small Island* (2004) and Teju Cole's novella *Every Day is for the Thief* (2007). These writers use literature and photography to renegotiate questions of displacement and belonging, identity and otherness.

Emanuele Crescimanno explores the social and aesthetic meaning of photographic portraits. From Bertillon to Lombroso, mugshots have been used as a form of social control, but photography can also be subversive: when photographic portraits are not used solely for identification, they reveal the irreducible uniqueness of human faces.

Silvia Verdiani investigates on how language and images, since the advent of digital culture, work together in intersemiotic conglomerates. Just as image theory is investigating the role played by pictures in this new context, the essay reflects on a linguistic theory that may take into account the specific role of language.

The section *Letture* is, as usual, miscellaneous. It hosts the last three essays of the volume. The first one is a review of a recent book on photography and modernist literature. The second, is an essay on literary translation. The last one is a study on the political implications of H.P. Lovecraft's fiction.

Teresa Prudente reviews Adèle Cassigneul's *Voir, observer, penser. Virginia Woolf et la photo-cinématographie* (2018), discussing the notions of *photo-cinématographie* and *imageographie*, that involve considerations on how and to what extent images reproduce reality.

Lorenzo Devilla and **Rémy Porquier** analyse the Italian translations of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Their essay describes the way the translators dealt with Friday's interlanguage, representing oral interactions in a written form, and compares them with some French and Spanish translations.

Lee Herrmann discusses the relationship between H.P. Lovecraft's apocalyptic fiction and the contemporary political unconscious. Their fantastic subjects notwithstanding, Lovecraft's stories involve a meditation on violence and modernity.

HEADLINES

BORDERS OF THE VISIBLE

W.J.T. MITCHELL

PRESENT TENSE

Time, Madness, and Democracy

ABSTRACT: Focusing on images and affects surrounding temporality, the essay is an attempt to reflect on time itself as an experiential, qualitative category, in the midst of a time in American political culture that is by all accounts tense, uncertain, "interesting," and (above all) crazy.

KEYWORDS: Image, Madness, Present, Temporality, Politics.

> The present is real in a way in which the past and the future are not.
>
> Saint Augustine

> May you live in interesting times.
>
> Ancient Chinese Curse

> Insanity in individuals is somewhat rare. But in groups, parties, nations, and epochs it is the rule.
>
> Friedrich Nietzsche

This essay is written in the present tense about a tense present. It concerns the period leading up to the US midterm election on 6 November 2018, and it will no doubt continue writing itself after that date. It is not an attempt to predict the results of that election, which seem to become more uncertain every day but will be known by the time you read these words. The aim is to reflect on time itself as an experiential, qualitative category, in the midst of a time in American political culture that is by all accounts tense, uncertain, "interesting," and (above all) crazy. The craziness of the moment is threefold: (1) it is a collective psychosis, involving a pathological detachment from reality by large masses of the American population; (2) the individual pathology of a psychopathic and narcissistic sovereign who channels and exploits the collective insanity to maintain his power; and (3) a world order that seems to be trending inexorably toward the death of democracy and its replacement by authoritarian regimes led by strong men. If it has been clear for some time that Friedrich Nietzsche was right about the madness of "groups, parties, and nations," we must now turn our attention to the epoch, the swerve or tipping point in history that is experienced by many with a sense of astonishment, anxiety, and alarm. On every side one hears ominous predictions that if the Trump party (formerly known as Republican) is victorious on 6 November and holds on to the House of Representatives, Trump will reign

unchecked for at least two and possibly six more years. In that time he could deal a decisive blow to American democracy itself, and (in the longer *durée* of climatological time), deliver a death blow to the meager efforts to stave off a planetary crisis of rising sea levels, displacement of large populations, and increasingly disastrous weather events.

In view of the urgency of this moment, who has time to reflect on time? It might seem like it is time to act, not to think. But the only actions available to a private citizen (voting, canvassing, sending money to candidates and causes) seem like pinpricks on a runaway elephant. The knowledge that "the system is rigged" by voter suppression, gerrymandering, hacking of voting machines, dark money, foreign interference, and the inequities of an electoral system that makes a vote in Nebraska twenty times as powerful as a vote in California has the predictable effect of dampening any notion that "every vote counts." So it may be a good time to reflect on time after all.

Saint Augustine set the problem of time up beautifully, noting that when he wasn't thinking about time as a concept he knew perfectly well what it meant. It was when he turned to philosophical reflection, asking the question "What is time?" that difficulties began. I am going to avoid the question of what time is by turning instead to how we see it and represent it, and specifically to what sort of images of time, both visual and verbal, underlie the discourse of temporality. Instead of an ontology of time, I propose an iconology of time. I will begin with three pictures of time that I am sure will be familiar to you and that are everywhere in the way we talk about it, measure it, and experience it.[1] The first, predictably, is the image of the line, with all its associated notions of succession, sequence, flow, and directionality. This is the image that governs our individual experience of time, beginning with birth and ending with death, or our supra-individual time sense of line that extends from our forgotten ancestors in the distant past down to the present and leads on into possible futures. It is personified in classical mythology by the Greek figure of Kronos—the Roman Saturn—who devours everything, including his own children.

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[1] Henri Bergson also proposed three pictures of time (the "two spools," the "spectrum," and the infinitely small piece of elastic) much more complicated than the commonplace ones I propose here. What we share is: (1) the basic distinction between Chronos and Kairos, mechanical or clock-time versus subjective, experiential time; and (2) the need to avoid ontological questions such as "what is time?" in favor of iconological models, triangulated so as to orient our ways of experiencing and discussing time. See Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson (Mineoloa, N.Y., 2001). The triangulation of time seems to be an ancient obsession, as the triad of Chronos, Chairos, and Aion indicate.

Fig. 1. Giovanni Francesco Romanelli, *Kronos/Saturn with Child*. 17th c.
National Museum in Warsaw.

Fig. 2. Peter Paul Rubens, *Kronos or Saturn devouring his own son*. 1636.
Museo del Prado (detail).

Linear time is what underlies the sense that we are "ahead of our time" or "behind the times," part of the avant-garde or doomed to obsolescence. Raymond Williams's concept of historical periods as containing "residual, dominant, and

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emergent elements" suggests that the moment itself is characterized by three parallel vectors or lines of force, one pointing to the past (residual) but persisting in the present, one pointing forward to a possible future (the emergent), and one that is bidirectional, the dominant poised in "the floating now," a phrase that Jonathan Culler has proposed for the lyrical present. In this regard, we should not forget the linear character of language itself and particularly of the structures of discursive time, of speech spatialized in writing. This can be seen at the microlevel of the sentence, which proceeds in acoustical time and scriptive space, interrupted by pauses (that is, dashes, commas, semicolons) and, most notably, by periods, with full consciousness of the pun on units of language and of history.

The second image is of an expanding/contracting bubble, trivial and ephemeral or "momentous" and catastrophic (economists employ this metaphor to describe times of runaway speculation and the bubble's inevitable burst). This is a moment spreads out in all directions like an endlessly ramifying fractal, so that dimensions such as past, present, and future are seen as copresent, and multiple temporalities range all the way from the individual experience of time to the vast scale of paleontological "deep time" and the blinding speeds of machinic time measured in nanoseconds. It is the temporality that the Greeks associated with Kairos, the opportune moment that comes and goes and must be seized at the right time or lost forever. It is King Lear's "ripeness is all" or (conversely) Hamlet's sense that "the time is out of joint," wherein every action seems futile and unprofitable. In Christian thought, Kairos is the time of special grace and inspiration, when a given moment is seen as the convergence of distinct time scales ranging from the tiny, ephemeral moment to the momentous era. Kairatic temporality is invoked when a poet/prophet like William Blake declares that he can "walk up and down in Six Thousand Years," a temporal panorama that is equivalent to the "pulsation of an artery in which the poet's work is done." It is also the image that Walter Benjamin describes as a "constellation," when a pattern linking past and present in a moment of crisis flashes up in a dialectical image.

Kairos is personified by a winged youth who balances the scales of decision and judgment on a razor's edge. His most notable feature is a strange hairdo with a large, exaggerated forelock and a prominent bald spot on the back of his head. Kairos's haircut illustrates the commonplace that the opportune moment must be grabbed by the forelock as it arrives, because once it has passed by there will be nothing to hold onto. As should be clear, the figure of Kairos in our present moment is none other than Donald Trump himself, the clever opportunist who sensed so accurately the collective mood of the post-Obama era and leveraged it into the most powerful political office on the planet.

Fig. 3. *Kairos*. Roman work after the original by Lysippos, ca. 350-330 BCE.
Turin, Museum of Antiquities.

Fig. 4. *Kairos emphasizing forelock and bald back of head*.
The hair illustrates the proverb about Kairos as the "carpe diem" moment.

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Fig. 5. Nicolas Poussin, *Dance to the Music of Time*. 1634-1636.
Wallace Collection, London. The two headed pillar on the left is the figure of Prudence,
that looks both to the past and the future.

The third is the image of the circle, which emphasizes the repetition and return epitomized by the cycle of the seasons and the diurnal cycles of night and day. At its most cosmic scale, one is reminded of the image of the Ouroboros—the serpent with its tail in its mouth, Nietzsche's image of "eternal return"—or the Greek figure of Aion—the youth who stands in the center of the Zodiac wheel in the clouds in Nicolas Poussin's *Dance to the Music of Time*. Poussin combines figures from all three of our pictures of time. The chariot of Aion is led by the female personification of Fortuna, who rains money from above the clouds. The circular dance of the seasons is performed to the lute accompaniment of old Kronos or Father Time and is framed between a pair of cupids, one holding the hourglass that symbolizes time as something that is "running out," and the other blowing bubbles that will quickly expand and burst.

To these three pictures of time I want to add a fourth dimension that I will call the affective temporality that specifies the mood of a time, what Williams called "the structure of feeling" that characterizes a period, or the particular emotions and attitudes that arise in a specific moment or epoch.[2] The idea of affective temporality inevitably suggests that categories of individual human feeling such

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[2] Williams coined this phrase originally in his *Preface to Film* (1954) as an alternative to Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony. I am adapting here Marshall McLuhan's distinction between hot and cool media, defined as "high" and "low" resolution respectively, the hot medium bombarding the senses with information overload, while the cool medium invites the recipient to fill in and supplement the gaps in information.

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as anxiety, hope, fear, dread, shock, depression, happiness, and joy are also experienced collectively, as shared, common, and contagious "feelings of the time." There are numerous small-scale stagings of affective temporality, as in moments of panic and terror, or enthusiasm and hatred. Trump rallies, with their ritual performances of hateful mockery of innumerable enemies, are the most vivid examples of these moments in our time.

Other forms of affective temporality are even more visceral and long-lasting. We speak of hot and cold periods, times of normalcy and exception.[3] The Chinese curse "may you live in interesting times" suggests that the best, the happiest times are relatively boring, containing relatively few memorable incidents outside the ordinary. The "normal" includes a limited range of special or extraordinary events, mundane recurrences like births, deaths, and marriages, the punctuating moments in ordinary human life that mark a period, pause, or transition. To live in a hot period is to share experiences of crisis, trauma, uncertainty, and rapid change. It is to feel that history itself is pressing down on individuals' and groups' consciousness, disrupting lives and interrupting the normal cycles of daily life. Perhaps the most extreme version of the hot period is what American evangelical Christians refer to as "end times," when history itself will come to an end after a cataclysmic battle or holocaust and the revelation of an eternal order beyond time. This is also the affective temporality that Nietzsche's rule associates with the "epoch," the turning point or tipping point that feels like madness.

A period of hot temporality is one in which multiple scales converge in a singular present and the pace of events and crises seems to accelerate. For the purposes of this essay, the present is a historical epoch that began on 9 November 2016 and is rapidly approaching a critical moment of decision in the very near future—in fact a precisely datable future, the election on 6 November 2018. I call this a hot period first because its onset was widely experienced as a surprise and shock. Very few experts saw it coming or predicted it. Second, the ensuing two years have been widely experienced in American political culture as one of almost constant shock, scandal, and dramatic news events, ranging from threats of imminent nuclear war to revelations of criminal behavior among powerful political actors, rumors of treason by the American president, and shocking breaks with long-established customs, alliances, and norms. Part of the heat of this two-year moment is its contrast to the previous period, the by all accounts relatively cool presidency of "no-drama Obama." It is not merely that the previous eight-year reign of the nation's first African-American president has now been succeeded by the regime of an openly racist white-supremacist president. The contrast has more to do with the quality of temporal rhythms or what is called "the news cycle." The Obama era was almost completely scandal free. (As if in compensation for this "scandal deficit," one of the most popular TV series in the Obama era was *House of Cards*, the story of a completely corrupt president who ruthlessly lies, betrays,

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[3] See Thomas L. Friedman, "The American Civil War, Part II," *New York Times*, 2 Oct. 2018, http://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/02/opinion/the-american-civil-war-part-ii.html.

and even murders his way to power). During the Obama era, there were no new wars, no investigations of his administration, and no personal issues to speak of, other than a boringly perfect marriage. By contrast, the daily and weekly news cycle since the election of 2016 has been an almost constant series of shocks and surprises, a 24/7 reality TV show that has driven the ratings of cable news to an all-time high. Deplorable as Trump may be, he has produced huge profits for television and social media along with an overheated stock market fueled by massive tax breaks for the rich. The phrase "breaking news" is now joined by Trump's favorite line, "fake news," which treats the idea of objective truth, reliable information, and scientific knowledge as delusions to be abolished by fiat and arbitrary power. Every evening, the news begins with so many breathless updates of new or ongoing scandals that yesterday's events are crowded out of attention.

The affective temporality of the Trump presidency has been described in the language of insanity, mental illness, and madness so many times in the last two years that it has become utterly commonplace to think of this as the perfect fulfilment of Nietzsche's rule about "epochs" of radical change. Trump himself has been labelled by numerous members of the American Psychiatric Association as possessed by a pathological and dangerous "narcissistic personality disorder." I won't go into the debates over this diagnostic language (see my "American Psychosis"[4] essay for a fuller discussion). My only point here is to note that insofar as the affective temporality of an epoch is often defined by the sovereign figure, the most prominent image of power and the most powerful image of the time, Trump is the incarnation of one of the craziest periods in American history, comparable to the 1960s and the Civil War.[5] More important, he is not just a harmless lunatic, but a highly skilled demagogue and con man who understands crowd psychology very well. He is a genius at what is called gaslighting, the production of delusions, false beliefs, and outright lies presented as truths. So skilled is he at the art of manipulation that he openly brags about it in public—most famously when he bragged that he could murder someone in broad daylight and his followers would still stick with him.

And it is his followers who most potently transform his individual talent for the production of delusions into actual political power. This is where Nietzsche's rule about the madness of "groups, parties, and nations" comes into focus. Nationalism, tribalism, and the Party triumph over all appeals to common sense and ordinary decency, much less appeals to professional journalism or scientific fact. Trump's followers, taken individually, are precisely the "normal, decent" folks you encounter every day in the suburbs and small towns of America; it would be "rare"

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[4] W.J.T. Mitchell, "American Psychosis: Trumpism and the Nightmare of History." *Los Angeles Review of Books* February 16, 2017, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/american-psychosis-trumpism-and-the-nightmare-of-history/

[5] The origin of this phrase is credited to conservative columnist Charles Krauthammer, who coined it during the presidency of George W. Bush. It has been widely adopted by a variety of conservative and moderate pundits as a way of underscoring their own possession of a balanced, mature, and reasonable sensibility.

to encounter a Trump follower who is mentally ill. But as a group, and especially as a crowd, they are transformed in an instant into a paranoid, sadistic, and cruel mass that is ready to heap contempt on any target of Trump's abuse, most notably journalists who are denounced as "enemies of the people." And hovering in the shadows behind the crowds at the typical Trump rally are the political and economic elites who see themselves as beneficiaries of the political power he generates. Like Trump himself, they help to fuel the mass hysteria with the clear-eyed cynicism and opportunism he provides. As a representative of this Faustian coalition of fools and knaves, Trump has managed to give mental illness a bad name. Unlike most people who are mentally ill, and generally harmless, Trump does not suffer from his condition, but exults in it, particularly in his psychopathic lack of empathy for other human beings. As a final insult to common sense and the reality-based community, anyone who questions the legitimacy of the Trump regime is denounced as mentally ill—suffering from a completely novel diagnosis known as "Trump derangement syndrome."

The Trump epoch was launched by an election, and the long-awaited event that has the potential to produce a significant turn or break in that era is the impending election, just a few days in our future. How can we picture the temporality of this miniature moment, the days leading up to this election? What is the moment's structure and affective charge? Most obvious is perhaps the figure of the circle, explicitly named in the language of American election "cycles." There is also a sense of the linear progression from its onset to a critical instant of "punctuation," the first time the American public gets to make a collective statement and an electoral judgment about the Trump presidency. One might hope for a period, the emphatic punctuation mark for an ending, but a less decisive mark is more likely. The end is not at hand, only a hope for a slowing of the Trump juggernaut. Since the shocking day of Trump's election, the majority of American citizens have been waiting for an end, a punctuating event—indeed, a sentence such as an impeachment or indictment—that will bring an end to his presidency. So the Trump epoch is unlikely to come to an end on 6 November, and we can be sure the madness will continue. The best we can hope for is the application of some restraints on his behavior and that of his followers, in the precarious possibility that the House of Representatives will be flipped to a Democratic majority. We are in a moment when, much as we would like to predict and talk about the future, we are incapable of making any verifiable statements about it such as "the sun will rise tomorrow morning." But we are not quite in the condition that Aristotle described in *De Interpretatione* when, reflecting on statements about time, he said "It is necessary that either there will be a sea battle tomorrow, or there will not be." In fact it is necessary that, in the chronological cycles of democratic time, there will be "a sea battle tomorrow," in the form of the election on 6 November. What is not necessary or certain is the outcome.

So this moment has to be seen structurally as the convergence of all three of my pictures of time: the line that moves in a direction out of the past, into the present, toward futurity; the cycle of American democratic elections; and the

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bubble containing its network of different temporalities that are all concentrated in this moment. This last structure becomes visible if we simply remind ourselves of the matters that are at stake and will be at least partly decided on 6 November. The clearest way to imagine this is to contemplate the possibility that the Democrats will fail to take the House, and the Trump juggernaut will be free to push forward with little or no institutional opposition beyond street protests (dismissed by Trump as "mob rule"), professional journalism (denounced as "fake news" and the "enemy of the people"), and a rapidly diminishing number of "so-called judges" who will uphold the rule of law and the US Constitution. At the level of macropolitics, one has to admit that the fate of American democracy hangs in the balance, on the razor edge wielded by Kairos. If Trump reigns unchecked for two more years, he could well be fatal to the Constitution itself. Worst-case scenario: he could follow the example of the political leaders he admires most and declare a state of exception in which future elections are postponed, suspended, or hopelessly compromised by even more extreme forms of gerrymandering and voter suppression. He has joked about being "president for life," but we have learned the hard lesson that Trump's jokes are no laughing matter.

At a completely different level of temporality, larger than the fate of the United States and the Constitution, there is the question of the world. Admittedly, I have been sketching a dark picture of what he could do to my country, but we have already seen a sample what he could do to the rest of the world. At the largest time scale there is the question of climate change, which he has repeatedly denounced as a Chinese hoax, while pulling the US out of the very fragile international agreements that address this longest-term threat to the quality of human life. Our problem is the world's problem and is part of a global process of failing democracies, failed states, and the rise of authoritarian governments and warlords as the emergent tendencies of our moment.

Another way to put this in the terms of our discussion here is to see that Kairos and Chronos are converging in the coming days. Chronos—the irresistible force of time with his scythe—gives Kairos—the beautiful youth who personifies possibility and the potential to seize the occasion—a cut-off date. We tend to think of Kairos in mainly positive terms, as the opportune moment when luck and readiness might lead on to good fortune. But Kairos is also a figure of precarity, balancing uneasily on a globe holding scales that could tip in either direction. Kairos closely resembles the later figure of Fortuna, an equivocal image of uncertainty and risk. And Fortuna is haunted by her dark sister, Nemesis, who stands blindly over scenes of catastrophe.

The affective temporality that accompanies these structures and figures of time is one of peak intensity, a mixture of hope and fear, possibility and dread. It is, above all, a sense of what the Greeks called *parousia* and Christians call "advent," the inevitable approach of something that will certainly happen on a certain date but which has not yet shown its face. This moment stands in stark contrast to October 2016, when a majority of Americans were complacently sleep-walking toward a Clinton regime that would continue the cool temporality achieved under

Obama, with every expectation that Trump would fade into oblivion. This time is different, at least in the sense that the American public is awake, alert, and alarmed. We can only hope that this will make a difference on the day of reckoning, the "moment of truth," and decision that approaches.

The image of Kairos and his scales links him to icons of judgment and justice. It is notable in this regard that the weeks preceding the 6 November election in which these pages were written were marked by an even more literal crisis of justice, namely the tumultuous hearings over the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court of the United States. Judge Kavanaugh was credibly accused during the hearings of attempting to rape a young woman when they were teenagers, over thirty years ago. His response to the accusations was to engage in a tirade of counteraccusations, insulting the Democratic senators, claiming that the rape accusation was a political plot, and (even worse) dissembling and perjuring himself about his behavior during his high-school years. Within the larger moment of *parousia* leading up to the elections, the process of Senate confirmation provided a miniature passion play of the crisis of the Trump regime. On the day I wrote these words, the Senate approved Kavanaugh's nomination by the slimmest margin in history, voting almost exactly along party lines to give him a lifetime appointment. The right-wing effort to stack the courts with conservative judges succeeded in elevating a morally tainted liar and ideologue to the highest court in the land, with the high probability that he will be serving there for the next thirty years. The decision was widely regarded as a repetition of a drama that was played out twenty-seven years earlier in the confirmation of Judge Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court despite the credible allegations of sexual harassment by Anita Hill. This time was arguably worse in every way. Anyone hoping for a Kairatic moment with respect to justice in our time had to be devastated by this outcome.

I have no idea whether this essay on the images and affects surrounding temporality will have any utility in answering the perennial question of political crises and historical epochs, namely: what is to be done? Written in a present tense with uncertainty and dread, its only use may be as a message in a bottle. One can hope that it will be washed up on shore by the hoped-for "blue wave" that will check Trump's power. The alternative is too awful to contemplate. In the meantime, there is no time like the present to produce critical pictures of the times.

FOCUS

BORDERS OF THE VISIBLE

ANGELA BREIDBACH

BETWEEN ALLEGORY AND MODERN MONTAGE

The Images in W.G. Sebald's Vertigo

ABSTRACT: The paper focuses on the images in W.G. Sebald's *Vertigo*, based on an iconographic interest. Absence in those images doesn't come as abstraction, but by way of ostensive figuration. The deceased appear both allegorically and in person in their landscapes of death. The story of *Vertigo* follows Stendahl, Kafka and the narrator himself on their journeys through upper Italy. In Limone, the narrator tells his landlady that he is writing, as it appears to him more and more, a detective story. By coincidence, and against his will, he becomes involved: in Verona he meets a person named Carlo Cadavero, and on three occasions sees a scene with two men carrying a corpse on a stretcher, before the reader learns that it is Kafka's Hunter Gracchus on his aimless and endless voyage through the deeper regions of death. After this disclosure the reader meets the restless hunter twice again in Wertach of all scenes, a tiny village in the Allgäu and—as part of the book's third chapter – the narrator's place of birth. At first glance, the images function as devices of the stories, in which they appear. When looked at again, they can alter and seem to go through various transitions; they are both a riddle and a disguise, somewhere in a precarious state between objectness and rupture: a hidden reference to Leonardo Sciascia's multi-layered detective stories hints at their strategy of montage. Intermediality here is more than a mix of genres; the images have their own critical impact, while the story meanders around them—seemingly untouched by their resistance—in long laconic sentences.

KEYWORDS: W.G. Sebald, Vertigo, Iconography, Allegory, Emblem, Death and Montage, Franz Kafka, Leonardo Sciascia.

Introduction: Death Motifs and Death Practices

In the first of W.G. Sebald's four novels, *Schwindel. Gefühle* (English *Vertigo*) the first-person-narrator follows Stendhal and Kafka on their journeys through upper Italy. The narration follows Beyle's experience of war places in upper Italy, and Kafka's thoughts about death at Lake Garda, scenes of sadness and loss. It bequeaths to the reader visual and textual reminiscences of these places. My paper firstly connects the author's intentions regarding the Baroque image concepts of allegory and emblem. In a second step it shows how the somewhat absurd representations of killing and crime in the book are false leads, as their images refer to modern image concepts of cutting, clipping and pictorial

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montage. The book's iconographic program thus accords with Italian concepts of modernity: two novels by Leonardo Sciascia, an exhibition curated by Arturo Schwarz and a film directed by Francesco Rosi.

As an introduction, a clipping of Lejeune's painting *The Battle of Marengo*, integrated into Beyle's story, is an example of the alteration between the allegorical and the surrealist approach (Sebald *Schwindel. Gefühle* 22-23; *Vertigo* 18-19).[1] A scene with a tiny figure falling in the battle was cut out as a long vertical stripe from a reproduction of the painting. Above the figure—on the horizon like a raised index finger—there is a church tower, and beneath it on the ground, a collapsed horse with a broken wagon. On the first level the image's iconology and form suggest a Napoleonic column or Obelisk. On another level it is all a matter of technique: the image was cut out and clipped into the book in the way of modern montage. Its motif of the nondescript falling body is similarly truncated; the lower part of the man disappears into the dust of the battlefield—a material *border of the visible*. Modern montage corresponds with de-montage and thus transforms the triumphal column—whose motifs lead upwards to the emperor at its top—into an anti-war-memorial. Its vertical order goes all the way down into dust and the ground. What was a heroic battle scene before now becomes an allegory of death. In the German edition we read the word "Gedenksäule" in the first line of the page symmetrically above the illustration and the words "wie ein Untergehender", 'like someone who is drowning', below it (cf. *ibid*.). The narrow motif's few materializations inside "the vast field of the dead", as the text describes it, rest on each other in a way that Benjamin postulated by means of the *German Tragic Drama* (cf. Benjamin 1977 [1928]). As will be shown, in this technique Sebald follows Benjamin's approach of an interface between baroque allegory and modern montage, as Susan Sontag summarises it:

> Fidelity lies in accumulating things—which appear, mostly, in the form of fragments or ruins. ('It is common practice in baroque literature to pile up fragments incessantly,' Benjamin writes.) Both the baroque and Surrealism, sensibilities with which Benjamin felt a strong affinity, see reality as things. (Sontag 1981, 120).

1. Baroque Allegory: Figurations of Absence

The concept of Baroque allegory in *Vertigo* is one of the instruments used to represent absence. The reader finds the most obvious allegorical motifs, such as

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[1] Sebald's prose is quoted using abbreviated titles. Image-references are given, in the form of double pages, for both the German and the English edition, for reasons of their original layout and for comparison.

the *ex libris* plate of "one Dr Hermann Samson, who […] had chosen the pyramids, monuments of death, as his insignia" (Sebald *Schwindel. Gefühle* 153, *Vertigo* 136-137). The plate shows two plains of a model pyramid in front of an open window, outside a sun over a landscape with dark mountains, maybe again pyramids. An illustration in a prayer book from the late seventeenth century gives another glimpse into a landscape of death under a sun and dark clouds: a three-storey tower with arcades, internal flames and devils, some souls falling off, some climbing up in torment, to the region of the angels on the upper floor. The emblem's epigram says: "Für die abgestorbenen Seelen im Fegfeuer", "for the dead souls in the purgatory" (Sebald, *Schwindel. Gefühle* 245; *Vertigo* 225).

Allegory and emblem combine text and image. They relate to ambivalence and riddle. They hint at death, or rather from the region of death back into life. In this I follow Benjamin's thesis of baroque allegory, of emblem and of Rebus, again in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (cf. Benjamin 1977 and 1991a). Benjamin's concept is the main input for Sebald's use of images, in *The Rings of Saturn* (esp. Chapters 1 and 8; cf. Breidbach 2017, 129-169) as well as in *Vertigo*. Two short passages from Benjamin can serve as a methodical tool with which to understand the iconographic programs in Sebald's *Vertigo*: Benjamin states enigmatically that all history is a reconstruction from death back into a respective life: "From the viewpoint of death, life is the production of corpses" (Benjamin 1977, 218). Historical reflection begins with the residuals of catastrophe (Benjamin 1969, 1991b). Corpses and rubble are embodied, visual/material representations. Another of Benjamin's sentences about the allegorical image refers to its ambiguous visual meaning, distinguishing it from the sign or symbol, which instead suggest distinction:

> […] allegory isn't free from a corresponding dialectic, and the contemplative calm, with which it immerses itself into the depths which separate visual being from meaning has none of the disinterested self-sufficiency which is present in the apparently related intention of the sign (Engl. Benjamin 1977, 164-165; Germ. Benjamin 1991a, 342).

Another important source for understanding Sebald's use of baroque allegory is Monika Kaup's notion of "Sebald's recourse to [Sir Thomas] Browne and baroque melancholy, as well as to Walter Benjamin's neobaroque rearticulation of melancholy and allegory" (Kaup 2013, 693). Kaup localises Sebald's prose in the frame of a neobaroque rather than a poststructuralist, philosophy. She thus stands against formalism, and supports a critical-material form of modernity:

> In short, *The Rings of Saturn* illustrates that, unlike the postmodern, the neobaroque is a contemporary expression that is both critical-deconstructive and reconstructive. In a first

step, it lays bare the discontinuities and ruptures wrought by modernity in general and capitalist exploitation in particular. Yet it refuses to uncritically celebrate such breaks, as does Jean-François Lyotard with his claim of the delegitimation of master narratives, or to simply mirror them at the level of form. (*Ibid*. 689).[2]

1.1. *Carlo Cadavero*

In Limone, while the narrator is writing his text, he answers his landlady's question about what he thinks he is working on, by saying that he has "a growing suspicion that it might turn into a crime story, set in upper Italy, in Venice, Verona and Riva" (Sebald *Vertigo*, 94-95). By coincidence and against his will, he was already involved. In short scenes connected to crimes—scenes that vanish as quickly as they were evoked—corpses are occasionally carried from here to there. Funnily enough, the Topos of the Corpse appears as protagonist: in 1980, the narrator sits in a pizzeria in Verona (also named "Pizzeria Verona") and reads a newspaper article about a series of murders in upper Italy in the last three years. He finds out that the name of the innkeeper who waits on him is *Carlo Cadavero* (Italian for "corpse"), and thus fears that he might become the next victim. The reader sees proof of this meal in the pizzeria in the form of an inserted bill with the innkeeper's name printed on it and marked by the author as a found object with a hand-drawn line around it (Sebald *Schwindel. Gefühle* 90-91; *Vertigo* 78-79). *Cadavero* has written the bill by hand, while his colleague, Vittorio Patierno (the second owner, whose name is printed on the bill) has, so the story tells us, allegedly gone hunting: the motifs of corpse and hunter inserted here touch on the leading motif of the book, which reappears several times, before its riddle will finally be solved.

1.2. Days and Places of the Dead

'Riva' in Italian signifies 'the shore'. While the narrator follows the journeys of Beyle and Kafka between life and death, he himself dwells on respective allegorical *borders of the visible*: one of the metaphorical connotations of *riva*, the shore, is of course the classical motif of Charon's ferry across the river Styx to the other side, which is the afterlife. In Venice the narrator lingers in "a bar on the Riva degli Schiavoni between the Danieli and Santa Maria della Visitazione, in other words, near the Doge's Palace, [on] the very last day of October […]." (Sebald *Vertigo*, 59-60). There, he falls "into conversation with a Venetian with the name of Malachio" (from Mal'ach, Hebrew for Angel). The man thus transcended—a former Cambridge student of astrophysics, who now,

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[2] Other than the formal sign, the material allegorical image involves a certain resistance. For further reading about the political impact of Sebald's prose cf. M.M. Anderson 2003.

as we are told, often meditates about resurrection (*ibid*. 62)—will later confirm his Hebrew origin, by saying farewell as: *Ci vediamo a Gerusalemme*. Taking over the role of the boatman Charon, he takes the narrator—and with him the narration itself—over to the *Isola Giudecca* [either from middle-Italian *guide*, or from *giudicati*, meaning island for the Jews or island for the convicted]. They drive past the giant industrial monument of "the Stucky flower mill" (*ibid.*), today a hotel in the Hilton chain, whose name in this context again reminds of the River Styx, as if it were the journey's coherent destination. The transfer into an allegorical landscape becomes further supported by the appearance of the *inceneritore comunale* ("communal incinerator") on the "nameless island westward of the Giudecca. A deathly silent concrete shell beneath a white pall of smoke" (*ibid*. 61). It finally "leaves one wondering, whether it was only grain that was milled there" (*ibid.*). We are thus prompted to think, if not of grain, then of a bone mill, which triggers the image of the concentration camps.[3]

Two other Venetian scenes in the book correspond with this one. On the 21st May 1910, the mill's founder Giovanni Stucky was murdered at the Santa Lucia Station, Venice, by one of his former employees, with a razor blade. Echoing this history, and introducing the nocturnal boat trip, our narrator began his visit at this same station, going "to the station barber's for a shave" (*ibid*. 51-52). In German the act of shaving and its instrument, the razor, are etymologically related, so that the meaning here allows a connection to the later hidden reference to Stucky's murder: "Nach einer scharfen Rasur beim Bahnhofsbarbier" ("after a sharp razor-cut at the station barber's"). A later scene in the main station at Venice wittily escalates the supposed cut-throat scenario, when the narrator orders a coffee at a buffet, "surrounded by an infernal upheaval" (*ibid*. 66). After a long exhausting fight for his coffee, he feels that, behind the elevated marble counter "the people around [him] looked like a circle of severed heads" (*ibid*. 68). Here, the grave allegorical embodiment of the dead has already taken a turn towards the lightness of modern montage, where it is general practice with images to crop single body parts. The emblem of Stucky Mill, "the female figure of a reaper, holding a sheaf of wheat, a most disconcerting image in this landscape of water and stone" (*ibid*. 62) reappears later in the book as a childhood memory, of frescos by "the artist Hengge, [whose] murals, always in dark shades of brown, were to be seen on the walls of buildings all around W. and the surrounding area" (*ibid*. 205). The only art the child was able to see, is described as a fearful experience: "One especially, on the Raiffeisen bank, showing a tall reaper woman, sickle in hand, standing in front of a field at harvest time, always looked to me like a fearful battle scene,

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[3] Concerning Sebald's theme of remembering Jewish life, and his right as a German author to do so, cf. Taberner 2006.

and frightened me so that whenever I passed, I had to avert my eyes" (*ibid*. 206-207).

After his boat trip to the otherworldly bank, the narrator comes to his hotel. Here other bodies emblematically appear as if they were already corpses. It is the night of the 31st October, the night before *All Saints Day*, and together with the following *All Souls Day*, the two dates in the Christian year commemorate the dead, while "[…] the night porter […] was lying on a narrow bed in a kind of doorless den behind the reception desk, looking as if his body had been laid out" (*ibid*. 62). The narrator stays in bed during the whole following day, the 1st of November. He describes his increasing lack of movement, while slowly becoming colder and stiffer. When in the evening the waiter brings his supper, he reports in retrospect: "I felt as if I already had been interred or laid out for burial, silently grateful for the proffered libation, but no longer capable of consuming it" (*ibid*. 65). The alleged proof of this journey, also from life into the region of death, is again given as a material device, in the form of a calendar sheet, which shows, in a typography of its time, the numbers of the 40th to 44th weeks of October 1980, with handwritten entries: "Waterloo" (Saturday 18th to Monday 20th), "Wien" (Tuesday 21st to Wednesday 29th), "Venedig" (written over the printed entry "Reformationstag" on Friday the 31st) and in the next line: "R. d. Sch./M." (probably for 'Riva degli Schiavoni/Malachio'), written into the empty line beneath the month's last day, as if into gap before the coming *All Saints day* on 1st November (Sebald *Schwindel. Gefühle* 68-69, *Vertigo* 60-61). Here the lower calendar edge was torn off, indicating time that has already been consumed.

A leading death motif is inserted strangely into Beyle's story, from where it will be repeated in different contexts: two men carry a corpse on a litter under a cloth with flowered patterns from an old boat ashore. On their journey to *Riva*, Beyle and one of his lovers, Mme Gherardi, have allegedly come across this bizarre scene, after they themselves had crossed the lake in a skiff (*ibid*. 24-25). In German, *Bahre* (for litter) and *Barke* (for barge or skiff) are etymologically related and seem appropriate *vehicles* for the allegorical body as well as for its image.

In 1988, seven years after the narrator's first visit to Verona, he walks back to the same restaurant, *Pizzeria Verona* (the reader barely recognises the name in the neon letters above) and finds it closed down, when the dark vision of the corpse on a litter comes back to him: "[…] two men in black silver-buttoned tunics, who were carrying out from a rear courtyard a bier on which lay, under a floral patterned drape, what was plainly a body of a human being." (*ibid*. 140-142) With this vision of death, he walks over to a café nearby the *Arena di Verona* to meet with a journalist, named Salvatore (Engl. Saviour), whom he asks about a series of killings that have taken place in the region since the

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eighties, since the narrator had left Verona in panic. Salvatore calls reading prose his medium of salvation, while holding a book in his hands. It is Leonardo Sciascia's *1912 + 1* (Sciascia 1986). The narrator learns about its story and that its enigmatic title refers to D'Annunzio's avoidance of the number 13, for reasons of superstition. Of course, it is a story of crime again.

1.3. Emblematic Angels

The allegorical boatman on the Venetian shore was Malachio, the angel. Other angels appear: Salvatore, after giving an account of these interconnected, organised assaults, quotes, in extracts, one line from Verdi's *Aida*: "[Vedi?...] Di morte l'angelo [radiante] a noi s'appressa", in English: "[Do you see?...] Death's [radiant] angel hastens towards us" (*ibid*. 134). The illustration inserted here shows an angel in a quatrefoil, representing the border of visibility (Sebald *Schwindel. Gefühle* 150-151; *Vertigo* 134-135). His legs swathed in robes and naked feet float under wave-like clouds, the disguised upper body is at most only the vague contours of wings or a shield.

1912 + 1 equals 1913, the year of Kafka's journey to upper Italy, which began with his visit to the Prater in Vienna. Like Verdi's angel, here, in an oval cut out frame, a smiling Kafka and three friends show themselves in a state of levitation, in the cabin (actually a hole in the image) of a mock aeroplane appearing to be flying (Sebald *Schwindel. Gefühle* 160-161; *Vertigo* 144-145). The photograph is from Klaus Wagenbach's book *Franz Kafka. Bilder aus seinem Leben* (Wagenbach 2008, 184); it is referential of Kafka's predilection for early aviation and for its cinematographic display (for both cf. Zischler 2017; Sebald 2006). The analogy between the two illustrations is evident: two floating half bodies, with here the lower, there the upper part concealed. The elevated clipped figures in their emblematic cut-out frames—oval and quatrefoil —allow a comparison with baroque allegorical motifs. Some passages from Sebald's image-text-form thus closely resemble baroque emblem books, or rather, appear as emblem books themselves. In this sense the images do not at all come without captions, as often remarked.[4] While the images have a primary function in Sebald's intermedial practice as non-linguistic allegories, the long meandering sentences around them are reminiscent of *motto* and *subscriptio*, in the three-part baroque form of the emblem.

The motif of the hastening angel of death recurs when Kafka later arrives in Triest. Here, so it says, he is "aware that in the city there is an iron angel who kills travelers from the north, and he longs to go out" (Sebald *Vertigo*, 145).

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[4] Concerning Sebald's "release of the captive image" cf. Chaplin 2006.

1.4. Kafka's *Hunter Gracchus*

Later in the story of Kafka's journey, the repeated motif of the corpse, carried on a litter, finally reveals its literary source: "Behind the boatman, two figures in dark tunics with silver buttons carry a bier upon which lies […] the body of a human being. […] It is Gracchus the huntsman" (*ibid*. 164). The bark sailing over *Lake Garda* to Riva also finally comes together with its pictorial evidence (Sebald *Schwindel. Gefühle* 178-179; *Vertigo* 162-163), circumscribed by the following passage: "[…] lengthy shadows fell upon those autumn days at Riva, […] and from these shadows there gradually emerged the silhouette of a barque with masts of an inconceivable height and sails, dark and hanging in folds. Three whole years it takes until the vessel, as if it were being borne across the waters, gently drifts into the little port of Riva" (Sebald *Vertigo*, 163-164). Kafka's fragmentary narrative *The Hunter Gracchus* is retold (Kafka 1995 [1933]). The same named journalist, reader of Sciascia, in the previous scene in Verona, was reminiscent of the major *Salvatore* in Kafka's narrative, who meets with the allegorical figure of the dead hunter and interviews him about his state between life and death.

The figure of the hunter finds only indirect pictorial references in the book: his description of having "…wild, tangled hair and a beard […]"(*ibid.* 164), finds its figuration later in a photograph of a provincial stage performance of Schiller's *Die Räuber* in the narrator's childhood, showing an amateur actor, costumed in breeches and cloak (Sebald *Schwindel. Gefühle* 204-205; *Vertigo* 188). The dead hunter reappears twice again in the childhood story, his remembered embodied images there are supposed to be reminiscent of real hunters, who have lived and died in W., the narrator's birthplace. One of them refers to "Hans Schlag the huntsman", whose story is told loosely over ten pages towards the end of the book and of course ends with his death and transport on a wooden sledge, back to the village (Sebald *Vertigo*, 237-249). The other hunter appears as a tailor's dummy in an attic, a uniformed straw puppet, whose costume "must once have been grass green, and the buttons a golden yellow" (*ibid.* 226-227). The moment the boy touches the figure, "to his utter horror, his sleeves crumble into dust" (*ibid*.). The reference in this costumed figure to Kafka's *Hunter* strengthens when the boy later learns that the former member of the family who wore this uniform had belonged to the Tyrolean *chasseurs*, French for hunters, and had fallen in Napoleon's *Battle of Marengo*. *Marengo*, as a keyword, leads the narration circularly back to the beginning of the book, the story of Beyle and the related cut-out from Lejeune's painting, with the tiny figure drowning in the dust of the same named battlefield. Here, without knowing it yet, the reader had already met this Tyrolean hunter or, more allegorically, Kafka's *Hunter Gracchus* on his journey into the deeper regions of

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death. The vast network of pictorial cross references and repercussions creates the feeling of *Vertigo* in the reader that became the book's title. The net stretches into all directions of the allegory, its figures and landscapes of death and into the form of baroque emblems.

2. Modern Montage: Figurations of Alteration

2.1. Leonardo Sciascia: *Il Contesto. Una parodia*

I return to one branch of the story, the encounter between the narrator and the journalist Salvatore in Verona. From here I follow a possible hidden theme, concealed and revealed by its quoted sister story *1912 + 1*, for part of its image practice leads into modernity: another of Sciascia's detective stories, *Il Contesto. Una parodia* (Sciascia 2006, English: The Context. A Parody) from 1971 and its film-adaption by Francesco Rosi from 1976, titled *Cadaveri Eccellenti*, reverse the *topos* of the corpse from a tragic subject to a pictorial method. Neither the book nor the film are quoted in *Vertigo*, but the connection is evident: the whole plot of the book is built using *context* or rather *contextualisation*. The key to the alteration from pictorial motif to pictorial form is again the *topos* of the corpse, *Cadavero*. It returns, but it profoundly alters the heavy weight of allegorical meaning. Now the image and its manipulations are all that matters.

2.2. Sciascia and Francesco Rosi

Francesco Rosi's congenial adaption of Sciascia probably quotes Arturo Schwarz' famous surrealist exhibition of the same year, in his gallery in Milan, entitled *Le Cadavre Exquis, Son Exaltation* (Breton 1975). In his preface, Schwarz explains the method in three languages, one of them English: "Exquisite Corpse. Game of folded leaflets consisting of having some people compose a sentence or a drawing, none of whom is allowed to make use of the previous cooperation. The example, which turned out as classic and gave its name to the game, comes from the first sentence created in this way: *The exquisite corpse will drink the new win*e" (*ibid.* 5-8). Accordingly Rosi's adaption of Sciascia's political parody, with its ambiguous connotations of crime, is a story of montage. Not only are Inspector Rogas's observations created by building pictorial contexts (one of the scenes shows him in front of a pictorial montage showing the lives of the three judges: Varga, Sanza and Calamo). But he encounters serious issues with the body of evidence (another scene sets him in front of some fragmentary photographs, in which the person murdered is the person cut out of the picture). The surrealist method of *Cadavre Exquis* is

literally quoted using a criminological *phantom-image*—a face, later mounted from memory by victim or bystander from four stripes for hair, eyes, nose and mouth—and further hints are given regarding the mediated and combinatory quality of all evidence.

2.3. Cut Out and Cut Off. *Vertigo* and Arturo Schwarz' *Surrealist Exhibition 1975*

Pictorial analogies between Arturo Schwarz' Surrealist exhibition and Sebald's *Vertigo* can be observed as a result of these experiences. Here, cut off and collaged limbs are joint in fragmentary and mounted images with a different connotation, away from the dark topoi of crime and death.

Sebald mimics the surrealist method by inserting newspaper clippings[5] into the text (Sebald *Schwindel. Gefühle* 134-135; *Vertigo* 118-120), but he goes much further.[6] Metilde, another of Beyle's lovers, is portrayed by her cut off left hand—in fact its plaster model—held in a graceful gesture (Sebald *Schwindel. Gefühle* 24-25; *Vertigo* 20-21). This parody of the dissected hand shows similarities to a collaborative surrealist drawing by F. Hudečec, F. Gross and I. Chalupecky, dated 1934: a thick bone leans against a pole, spare shadows and a horizon line indicate a landscape above which, in the free air, floats a similar surrealist body-object, a foot and a raised hand on two ends of one equally measured limb.[7] Another of Sebald's illustrations repeats the pictorial technique of the dissected limb: the narrator goes for a walk with the poet Ernst Herbeck and notices that Herbeck holds his cap similarly to his grandfather, whose depicted left hand, while his head is cropped off, allows the same connection to modernist montage (Sebald *Schwindel. Gefühle* 46-47; *Vertigo* 38-39).

Coming back to the tiny figurine, who drowns in the battlefield of *Marengo* (Sebald *Schwindel. Gefühle* 22-23; *Vertigo* 18-19), it resembles another collaborative montage in Schwarz' catalogue, showing a man's upper body, megaphone in hand, with a rolling stool on three wheels as his legs.[8] In *Vertigo*, Giotto's three levitated, winged angelic beings (taken from Giotto's fresco cycle, the scene *Lamentation of Christ*, in the *Scrovegni* Chapel in Padua) are put in a row, and clipped so that they are little more than a head, wings and hands, showing strong facial expressions and gestures (Sebald *Schwindel. Gefühle* 96-97; *Vertigo* 84-85).[9] Their reduced bodies resemble a figurative element in

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[5] For the history of the newspaper cut-out, its materiality and its connection to Surrealism and Dada, cf. Te Heesen 2002, 175-223.

[6] For Sebald's use of the surrealist method in Austerlitz, cf. Ryan 2007.

[7] Pencil on paper, 30 x 21 cm. Breton 1975, number 23.

[8] By Bartovsky, F. Hudečec, F. Gross and I. Chalupecky, dated 1934. Pencil on paper, 19 x 15 cm. Breton 1975, number 24.

[9] Concerning Sebald's pictorial quotation of Giotto's frescos in Padua, cf. Fuchs 2006, 175.

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another surrealist group drawing, displaying something on a globe on a bottle on a table on an outstretched hand on a winged female head on crossed legs on stiletto-heeled pumps.[10] The motif of the eye can at last build this bridge between Sebald's method and surrealist modernity (Sebald *Schwindel. Gefühle* 14-15, 86-87. 128-129; *Vertigo* 10-11, 74-77, 114-115). It is comparable to a surrealist game drawing, where an open eye and a feather rest on a lock, tagged with a feather on a rope (holding a ring with a smaller open eye in it) and a butterfly, all of which objects are held gracefully by a woman's hand with bracelet.[11]

Conclusion: *Vertigo* (and Spoof), Labyrinth, Coincidence

Seen from the external reference of the surrealist method, the images in Sebald's *Vertigo* undergo a fundamental alteration, from allegory to montage and from gravity to spoof. Against the modern background, the narrator's repeated visions of the hunter's corpses have a completely different meaning. They appeal to the images themselves, become pictorial qualities of break and gap, riddle and joke. The corpse is both, the baroque allegorical body and the modern broken and interacting corpus of the image. In this modern context the narrator himself becomes another kind of hunter, on the prowl for new finds. His game of multilayered pictorial references offers several false leads. The German title *Schwindel* is therefore not only *Vertigo*, but also its other connotation, "flimflam". From a levitated position, the map of interconnected allegories allows something like a sublime birds-eye-view. In terms of modernity the map turns out to be a labyrinth, a general survey of its motifs is not possible. (Sebald *Schwindel. Gefühle* 122-123; *Vertigo* 106-109). Each of these two approaches is the reverse side of the other:

> […] I noticed on the front of the map's cardboard cover the black and white image of a labyrinth, and on the back an affirmation that must seem promising and indeed auspicious for anyone who knows what it is to err on one's way. (*ibid*.).

The labyrinth appears as illustration. For anyone who experiences *Schwindel*, the now following typographically designed affirmation can only be irony: "Una guida sicura per l'organizzazione del vostro lavoro. Pianta Generale Milano." ('A secure guide for the organisation of your work. General Map of Milan', *ibid*.) A factor in the vertiginous game of text-and image-making and a main motivation for the narrator's own journey is *coincidence*, half chance and half fate, and it

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[10] By V. Hugo, S. Dali, A. Breton, G. Dali, 1929-1934. Crayon on paper, 26.7 x 19.5 cm. Breton 1975, number 25.
[11] By V. Hugo, S. Dali, A. Breton, G. Dali, 1929-1934. Pencil on paper, 26.4 x 18.4 cm. Breton 1975, number 35.

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harbours a risk. The moment when two criminals, reminiscent of the two coffin bearers, approach the narrator and try to carry himself, like the hunters of his narrations, across to the deeper regions of death is when the narrator becomes aware of this. Unseen by anyone else and after he has defended himself against them, they vanish like an afterimage:

> LA PROSSIMA COINCIDENZA. I was […] gazing up at this message, thinking it might possibly be meant for me […]. LA PROSSIMA COINCIDENZA. None of the passers-by had taken any notice of the incident. I however watched my two assailants, jerking curiously as if they were out of an early motion picture, vanish in the half-light under the colonnades. (Sebald *Vertigo*, 108-109).

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EPIFANIO AJELLO
PER UNA AUTOBIOGRAFIA FOTOGRAFICA

ABSTRACT: The essay explores a zone of life writing, which is still almost uncharted: the photographic memoir, whose authors collect and order pictures in order to shape their autobiographic narrations. The analysis is exemplified taking into account a prototypical text of this literary genre, Giorgio Agamben's *Autoritratto nello studio* (2017).

KEYWORDS: Autobiography, Photography, Narrations.

> Dalla muta distesa delle cose deve partire un segno, un richiamo, un ammicco: una cosa si stacca dalle altre con l'intenzione di significare qualcosa… che cosa? Se stessa, una cosa è contenta d'essere guardata dalle altre cose solo quando è convinta di significare se stessa e nient'altro, in mezzo alle cose che significano se stesse e nient'altro.
>
> I. Calvino, *Palomar* (1983)

> […] disse Austerlitz, noi non comprendiamo le leggi che regolano il ritorno del passato, e tuttavia ho sempre più l'impressione che il tempo non esista affatto, ma esistano soltanto spazi differenti, incastrati gli uni negli altri, in base ad una superiore stereometria.
>
> W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (2001)

Come può definirsi, con cautela, un'autobiografia fotografica o fotoautobiografia? Una collezione di autoritratti? Una *mise en recueil* iconografica? Una collazione?

Partirei dalla definizione di collazione che in filologia significa confrontare con metodo diversi manoscritti di un'opera per ricostruire la lezione originale, e dove si determina una successione temporale. Con alcune foto si fa lo stesso, recuperandole e disponendole in un album (o nel ripostiglio di uno *smartphone*) e lasciando che si confrontino nel tempo con le relative successive "varianti", in quadri indipendenti e in sé conchiusi.

L'autobiografico si può costituire sia in una serie di scatti fotografici condotti sul mondo da un medesimo sguardo, oppure da un "me" più volte fotografato da

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altri. Entrambi questi tragitti, se uniti da una consistenza temporale adeguata, possono istituire una fotoautobiografia, la forma di una particolare "letterarizzazione" per figure di rapporti di vita, accompagnate talvolta da brevi appunti, date.

Le foto collezionate costituiscono, una volta "inserite in un nuovo ordine storico appositamente creato" (Benjamin), il percorso di un'esistenza, condotta – come dire? – per contingenze istantanee, per "punti brillanti" (Deleuze).

Non toccherei il campo singolare, molto affascinante, dell'autoritratto o meglio dell'autoscatto, oggetto autodiegetico esemplare e pertinente al concetto di identità come, ad esempio, l'istantanea di Émile Zola fatta a se stesso (fig. 1), oppure seguendo l'esercizio (illimitato) attuato da Karl Baden (fig. 2), o l'autoritratto fotografico di Moholy-Nagy *Composizione* (fig. 3).[1] Ma qui le immagini subiscono l'impertinenza del fare artistico e si mutano in altro registro e altra funzione; oppure si inabissano, per volontà del fotografo-fotografato, nella definizione sub-liminare di "quel che vorrei si creda io sia". Escludiamo anche ogni forma categoriale di *time-lapse self-portrait*, ovvero quella serie di autoscatti realizzati con lenta frequenza. Nemmeno toccheremo il convulso registro, o categoria, dei *selfie* oppure l'archeologico autoscatto a tempo, quando ci si allontanava di corsa dal suono del *drindrin* della macchina per le pose di gruppo.
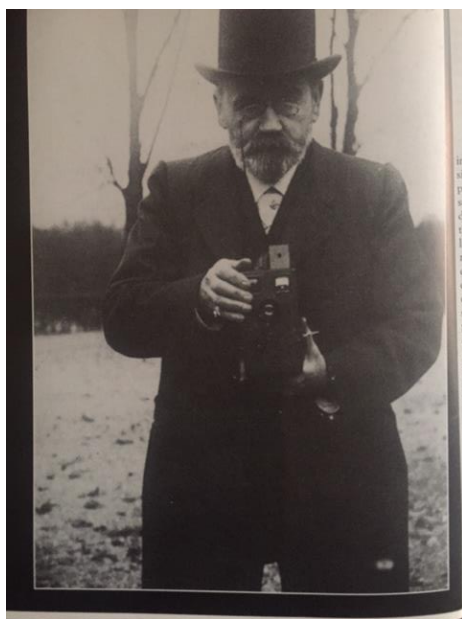
Fig. 1. Autoscatto di Émile Zola

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[1] In Moholy-Nagy 1987, 34: "Quale sorpresa ci verrebbe riservata se potessimo ad esempio filmare la vita di un uomo dalla sua nascita, quotidianamente, sino alla morte in tarda età. Sarebbe già una grande emozione poter rivivere in 5 minuti il suo volto nell'espressione lentamente mutevole di una lunga vita, la sua barba che cresce, ecc. […] l'osservazione al microscopio svela qui le relazioni profonde".
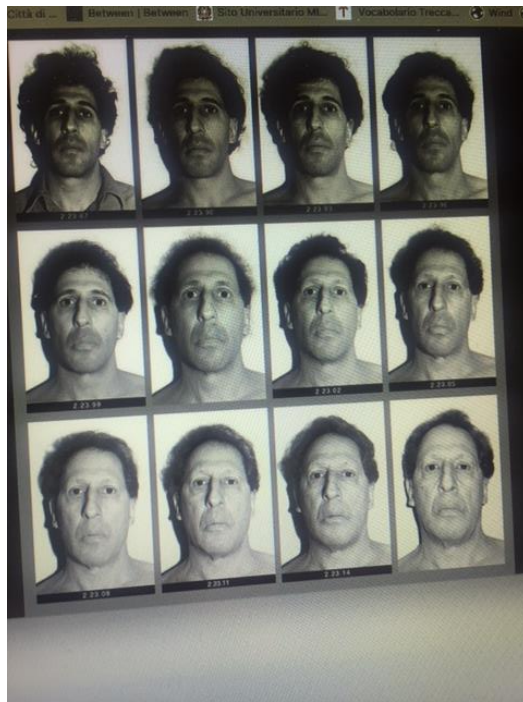
Fig. 2. Karl Baden, *Prison Photography*.

Fig. 3. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *Composizione*.

Perché si dia un'autobiografia fotografica è necessario un montaggio disciplinato delle parti e soprattutto dei tempi, compito che spetta al Narratore (colui che ordina le foto) e che diviene una sorta di regista scenografico, oppure – se vogliamo divertirci con Genette – vero e proprio personaggio, nel contempo extradiegetico e intradiegetico – e se insistiamo – talvolta anche deuteragonista.

Si forma in sostanza un montaggio di deittici (figurati), «questo, quello», messi in successione con l'unica traccia certa del noema barthesiano del «ça a été» (*ciò è stato*), fulminante abulico noema del fotografico, sola certezza notarile di quanto occorso in un luogo e in un istante (se al riparo da ogni *photoshop*).

La prassi è ovviamente differente da una autobiografia letteraria, anche se esiste una qualche forma di "patto autobiografico" da rispettare: il "contratto" di lettura del tutto privato che si stabilisce tra il Narratore e il "personaggio di cui si parla" (Lejeune 1986, 23), ovvero se stesso. Al "nome proprio" si sostituisce la "figura propria"; al soggetto narrato un soggetto visibile. Non c'è nessun "modello" cui somigliare o in cui immedesimarsi, ma soltanto un "io" vero, sempre lo stesso, che invecchia sul serio per stacchi successivi. Non vi è nessun *profondo* sotteso, e nessun "io" è trasfigurato dal testo. Dando per scontata l'irriducibilità di ogni forma figurata alla grafia, *linguisticamente* la differenza tra una fotoautobiografia e quella *letteraria* è nella sostanza dei materiali usati (sintagmi o istantanee), il che non è poco; mentre la scelta e il montaggio tecnico dei motivi narrativi, la sintassi della fabula (romanzo di formazione) restano alquanto similari (fatte le ovvie debite distanze di "genere"), e questo sebbene non ci siano "gruppi di parole" (E.M. Forster) al posto di "personaggi", né "mondi inventati", ma personaggi in carne e ossa e cose fatte di cose. Per tanto, il Narratore non è soltanto lo scenografo di se stesso che cura la scelta degli ambienti, delle *mises en scène* riferibili a parti della propria vita, quanto il curatore del susseguirsi del tempo che li distingue. Si va avanti per digressioni e discontinuità; ed è difficile il controllo dello scorrere del tempo ampliando (e abbreviando) la sua durata.

La fotografia rischia di divenire un oggetto transizionale di pratico uso tra i tempi perduti delle foto e i tempi immediati (attuali a chi guarda le immagini) a cui va affidata la funzione (o la performatività) di annullarli, di unirli in un tempo istantaneo ("tutti gli strappi sono contemporanei", Montale). Ed è proprio lì che si ficca tutto il narrativo: nel gesto dell'ordinare, in quel legare la disposizione dei fotogrammi come fossero fondali teatrali (o parziali capitoli) assemblabili in "fogli di montaggio" (S.M. Éjzenštejn) per produrre, lì sulla scrivania, un *continuum* temporale, e perché una qualche *fabula*, alla fine, possa darsi, aiutata dal registro del *trascorrere*, tra l'emozione di chi immagina ricordando e l'asciuttezza dell'analogico. Sì, perché, tutto sommato, la fotografia è un esercizio di *mémoire volontaire* che potrebbe dare atto inconsapevolmente all'epifania improvvisa di una *mémoire involontaire* "al di fuori del suo potere e della sua portata" (Proust).

Si configurerebbe, senza quinte, una drammatizzazione di fondo con comparse e attori (comprimari e ineludibili eroi) come se le foto fossero delle pantomime di commedianti fermi in posa. Soltanto il succedersi dei prosceni, oppure il differente abbigliamento degli attori, consentirebbero loro di recitare l'esperienza temporale vissuta dal Narratore che non resta sempre al centro delle

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immagini, nel disporre figure dietro figure, e periodi dopo periodi. Come ha scritto Robert Musil:

> La semplicità non è se non quella dell'ordine narrativo, quell'ordine normale che consiste nel poter dire: "Dopo che fu successo questo, accadde quest'altro"; e questo sempre per ridurre l'opprimente varietà della vita; infilare un filo, quel famoso filo del racconto di cui è fatto anche il filo della vita, attraverso tutto ciò che è avvenuto nel tempo e nello spazio! Beato colui che può dire: "allorché", "prima che", "dopo che". (Musil 1962, 630).

Così, l'autobiografia fotografica, nel legare questo "filo di congiunzioni", smette di essere un banale archivio di semplici accadimenti, per assumere il ruolo di una vera e propria "narrazione calata nella vita stessa dell'autore" (W. Benjamin), l'emblema figurato di attimi senza una conclusione, e sempre ad una certa distanza (ma estratta) da quella zona d'ombra che ogni autobiografia contiene e precede. Il ruolo che il Narratore stabilisce con il "sé" protagonista, potrebbe paragonarsi, con non poca imprudenza, agli effetti del quadro di *Dorian Gray* ma debitamente rovesciato nelle funzioni.

Ora, come avviene al sempre incompleto ricordare, se il quantitativo delle immagini è limitato (e lo è sempre), il montaggio delle foto disponibili sganghera ogni lineare sintassi e produce una particolare *fabula* fatta di incongruenze, di vuoti, di intermittenze, dove il flusso temporale si lacera in più punti, sebbene si tenti sempre di acciuffarlo e stringerlo in un canto. Il tempo di ogni istantanea comincia a trasformarsi nel molteplice tempo di quanto rappresenta (in contrasto col tempo del Narratore che dispone le immagini). Si crea un'aporia tra la temporalità "ferma" della singola figura e lo svolgersi molteplice delle istantanee che scandiscono un tempo "vivace" rispetto a quello "stantio" del fotogramma. Ed è proprio questo "conflitto" di tempi (e spazi), nel duplice dialogo tra l'istantanea e le successive, a costituire il complesso della "storia" fotoautobiografica.

Si svolge una sorta di *altro* racconto da non da paragonarsi, ad esempio, a quello fluente del cinematografico, visto che nel fotoautobiografico le coordinate di una *dispositio* saltano e si aprono larghi vuoti, assenze, e tra foto e foto i nessi vengono meno. E sono proprio questi vuoti di tempo e spazio tra fotografia e fotografia che il Narratore è chiamato a *riempire*, a riconnettere in un paradossale "incantesimo", l'incantesimo del collezionista creando – per citare ancora Benjamin – un "cerchio magico", ma senza che s'"irrigidisca", restando sempre prensile, mobile (Benjamin 1986, 268).

Prendiamo, ad esempio, il testo di Franco Antonicelli, *Ricordi fotografici* (1988, figg. 4-5), dove l'autore, sempre figurante nelle immagini, assembla una serie di foto tratte dalla sua vita privata e pubblica. L'organizzazione dei materiali iconografici della vita dell'autore (e non solo di se stesso, ma anche di sodali, amici, parenti), vien fuori non da una ordinata sequenza, ma dall'accumulo senza capitoli e paragrafi delle immagini, e senza alcuna tracciabilità di un tempo preciso. Eppure, nonostante l'assenza di una cronologia e di un tema, le foto proiettano una polisemia sostanziale: l'intero viluppo della

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cultura torinese del Novecento si solidifica in quelle immagini. La vita dell'autore, tra impegno antifascista e attività culturale e politica, è tutta concentrata in una sorta di epica visuale e memoriale.
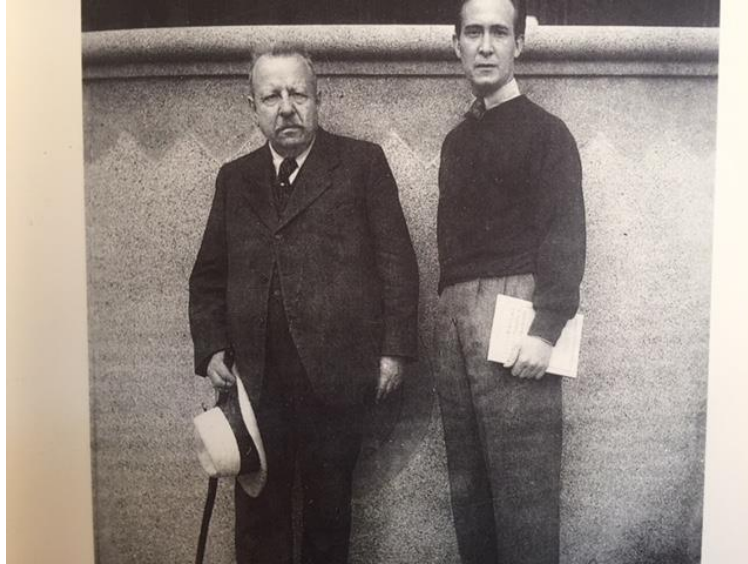
Fig. 4. Benedetto Croce e Franco Antonicelli a Sordevolo.

Fig. 5. Anita Rho, Ada Prospero Gobetti, Anita Coda, Nanda Russo, Benedetto Croce,
Annibale Germano, a Sordevolo.

Lo stesso – in qualche maniera – accade con le foto di Roland Barthes raccolte da lui nella premessa al libro omonimo, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (1975, fig. 6), dove appaiono affiancate dalle parole che s'industriano a metterle al servizio della scrittura con leggero vezzo autoriale. Nasce un *petit cahier figuratif* con molta voglia di scrivere e poco spiegare, dove la notazione

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pensa solo a se stessa, e le fotografie sono lasciate a dire tutto quello che vogliono, ma per conto loro, una per volta, senza bisogno di alcun additivo didascalico.

Il mio corpo non è libero da qualsiasi forma di immaginario se non quando ritrova il suo spazio di lavoro. Tale spazio è dovunque lo stesso, adattato pazientemente alla gioia di dipingere, di scrivere, di classificare.
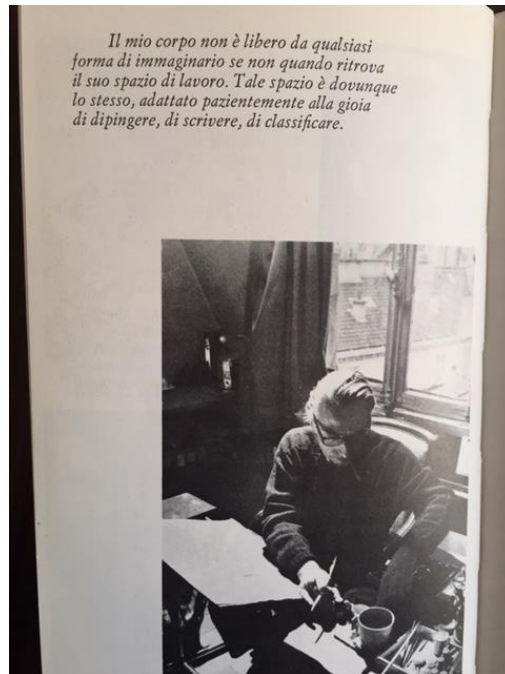
Fig. 6. Roland Barthes, Parigi 1972.

Altro esemplare discontinuo (ma coerente) è il *Nuovo romanzo di figure* (1997) di Lalla Romano, sorta di particolare fotoautobiografia familiare dove l'io narrante si frantuma lungo la disposizione impaginata di fotogrammi che raffigurano un breve tratto di destini accomunati (pur nella loro singolarità) fino a costituire un infinibile romanzo dove "le immagini sono il testo". Ogni fotogramma produce una privata micro-narrazione a sé stante, del tutto indifferente o almeno autonoma rispetto alla successiva;[2] ma la concatenazione profitta del possibile tema della singola scena per unire un discorso o *puzzle* che rincorra una congruità (e questo ricorda il difficile lavoro di Italo Calvino per il suo *Castello dei destini incrociati*).

Ma, proviamo, ora, a immaginare come si possa istruire una autobiografia fotografica. C'è bisogno, innanzi tutto, di un luogo, virtuale o meno (qualunque esso sia). Questo utensile per sua stessa costituzione si offre alla paratassi e ha il ghiribizzo sovente di raccogliere tutto quello che gli viene offerto, "scarti del reale" (Krauss) compresi. L'album (usiamo ancora questa pratica definizione) fotoautobiografico potrebbe paragonarsi ad una raccolta di citazioni (Sontag 1978, 64), ad appunti messi in un ordine fittizio, oppure, in maniera più impertinente, ad un semplice *flip book*.

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[2] Per questo tema, mi si consenta rinviare al mio Ajello 2008. Si veda anche Primo 2016, 181-204.

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Il Narratore si fa egli stesso recettore interno, privato "orizzonte d'attesa", manomette, *destruttura*, questo "ordine" come gli pare, togliendo e spostando "in vitro" i fotogrammi con un semplice taglia e incolla, e così *ristruttura* una nuova sequenza, ma non può aggiungere nulla a quanto dispone (il materiale resta sempre limitato). Mancano in genere le foto che si potrebbero situare tra uno spazio e l'altro, tra un tempo e l'altro, mentre altre si rifiutano di coesistere. Si aprono così lacune di senso e di tempi (l'abbiamo visto) tra le immagini. Per non dire che a complicare il tutto, una foto, spesso, richiama un tempo e un luogo già visto, oppure non riesce a descriversi compiutamente, o rinvia ad un'altra apparentemente diversa in fondo a tutte, complicando la logica (e i tempi) del percorso.

Questo non succede per l'inizio, per la prima foto, la più facile (ma non sempre la più semplice da scegliere), quella che ha dietro di sé il nulla e inaugura il montaggio; è la più lontana e la più avventurosa, quella che assume una valenza quasi fiabesca: "Una volta… C'era una volta" (sebbene l'inevitabile predizione sia già tutta lì).

Un *cominciare* così avventuroso non ha conclusioni, se non banalmente l'ultima foto. L'autobiografia fotografica è per sua natura un'opera senza finale (inesauribile) eppure possiede sempre un'ultima foto. L'ultima foto, come l'ultima sigaretta di Zeno Cosini, non consente il proposito di finire il racconto, ad essa succede il tempo illimitato, la valenza di un momentaneo *exit*, forse di un'ultima morale, di un poter *ricominciare*, ma rischia di chiudersi con una banalità, come accade nel dialogo tra Frédéric Moreau e l'amico Deslauriers nella chiusa dell'*Éducation sentimentale* di Flaubert.

Inoltre, in un'autobiografia fotografica non ci sono soltanto personaggi in posa, ma anche oggetti. Non oggetti orfani, ma oggetti posseduti, consueti o desueti. Anche il più banale in fotografia (come l'insulso barometro di Madame Aubain in *Un cœur simple* di Flaubert) produce l'apparenza (o abbaglio) del reale a dispetto dell'essere il fotografico analogico e senza segno (ma dotato di consistenti connotazioni). La fotografia è un oggetto assai particolare, bidimensionale, ma con una vocazione latente al tridimensionale come accade, ad esempio, ai paesaggi di *Flatland* (E.A. Abbott), quindi capace di farsi "pensosa" (Barthes), di mutarsi di senso ogni volta, ma portando sempre con sé lo strazio dell'unico e dell'irripetibile.

E ci si chiede: possono le cose raccontare una vita come fa disciplinatamente con i corpi un'autobiografia? Cosa *dicono* gli oggetti in fotografia posseduti dal Narratore? Possono essere considerati eroi assoluti (come il "rocchetto Odradek" del racconto di Kafka) o semplici figuranti? In che consiste la loro (eventuale) attendibilità, quando talvolta assumono l'emblema di protagonisti partecipi accanto al proprietario pieni di senso e memoria, narratori in proprio essi stessi?

È quanto accade nello splendido *Autoritratto nello studio* di Giorgio Agamben (fig. 8). Una particolare autobiografia fotografica, dove il testo scritto sgattaiola dalla funzione meramente didascalica, per farsi soltanto coautore assieme alle immagini. "Una autoeterografia, fedelissima e intemporale", la

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definisce Agamben, o forse – aggiungiamo noi imprudenti – anche una "stereometria" (Sebald).

Fig. 8. Agamben 2017. Copertina.

Il libro è una sorta di diario post-datato ma *detto* da una voce che giunge di fronte e mostra le cose, racconta, spiega e riflette. Quel che interessa è l'istituirsi di un autoritratto condotto attraverso il montaggio (non sappiamo quanto causale), nella successione delle pagine, di immagini fotografiche di cose, lettere, frontespizi, altre fotografie, quadri, appunti, accumulandovi accanto in prosa anche il racconto degli incontri avuti con poeti, filosofi, pittori, scrittori, oppure attraverso i loro testi: e così scorrono via via: Heidegger, Elsa Morante, Giorgio Caproni, Walter Benjamin, e altri ancora, assieme agli interni degli studi dove, essenzialmente, tra Roma e Venezia, Agamben ha lavorato e tuttora lavora.

Ed è su queste camere fotografate che vorrei soffermarmi, perché qui ci si avvicina di molto al noema della fotoautobiografia, e a definirlo sono proprio le stanze (le scrivanie) *abitate* da Agamben con tutte le cose che vi compaiono: foto, ninnoli, lettere, carte, libri, senza nessuna vocazione decorativa e tutte *significanti*; intenti a tenere dentro di sé il racconto, la *dispositio* del tempo di una vita celata nei vari traslochi da quello di Via Corsini a quello di Piazza delle Coppelle e poi del Vicolo del Giglio a Roma, e poi agli studi di San Barnaba e di San Polo a Venezia, dove – scrive l'autore – "gli oggetti sono rimasti gli stessi e nelle fotografie che li ritraggono a distanza di anni in luoghi e città diversi sembrano immutati", creando "un unico studio disseminato nello spazio e nel tempo" (Agamben 2017, 14 e 117). Inoltre sovente si dà anche uno straordinario gioco di una particolare *mise en abyme* dove in una fotografia ne esiste un'altra,

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poi descritta in prosa, in un pratico visivo scivolare "folle" ad incastri nel tempo e nello spazio dettato al presente indicativo: "Nella vetrina a destra nello studio di vicolo del Giglio, si intravede una foto di José Bergamin…" (*ibid.* 56); "Sul muro sopra la scrivania di Venezia, si vede una cartolina di Alfred Jarry…" (*ibid.* 85), eccetera.

Queste foto, che non hanno nessun valore di scambio ma d'uso, trattengono l'ossimoro scappato alla penna di Benjamin a proposito dei ritratti: l'"irripetibilità e la durata" che si trasforma nelle pagine fotografiche del libro di Agamben in un isolato gioco di "fugacità e ripetibilità". É ancora in gioco la condizione del tempo e della storia ad attraversare e rendere mobili le figure che sono costrette a consegnare il dramma increscioso e felice di accompagnarsi al disparire, ma le cose che *sono state* ricompaiono, nel contempo (e a loro insaputa) nelle nuove figure come se stessero *per essere* (insistentemente) di nuovo.

Gli studi appaiono deserti come le vie di Parigi fotografate da Atget e ricordate da Benjamin come "luoghi del delitto", vuoti di uomini e ricchi di indizi: "esse inquietano lo spettatore e non lo inducono a divagare" (Benjamin 1966, 29). Difatti una volta entrati nell'*Autoritratto nello studio* non si può divagare, lì «è stato» il Narratore; e quelle camere vuote non più abitabili fanno parte della sua biografia; rassomigliano a prosceni teatrali prima dell'ingresso degli attori (o di un attore), prima che una recita, a breve, possa darsi. Le camere, in effetti, comunicano, per tutto il tempo, il tempo che le ha abitate e le abita ora sulle pagine attraverso il silenzio di cui sono unici inquilini gli oggetti.

Le cose assorbono un solo tempo quello che una volta abbiamo dedicato loro; e quando le incontriamo di nuovo, anche casualmente, quando molto tempo è trascorso, sembrano come "poggiarsi" là dove sono state, ed ecco che allora accade una cosa imprevista (o inopportuna): si mettono subito, a vortice, ad assorbire tutto ciò che era figurabile e stava intorno a loro (tempo compreso) e a restituircelo in un attimo, per bagliori. Basta vederle (o prenderle tra le mani) perché ci conducano in un istante via, in luoghi talvolta dimenticati ma pregni di vita e storie. Nelle foto delle camere di Agamben accade lo stesso, e non ci si entra più se non alle condizioni dettate dalle cose. Per dirla ancora con Benjamin "questi luoghi non sono solitari, bensì privi di animazione", perché è il dettaglio che s'impone: il "rischiaramento del particolare" la fa da padrone. Sono gli oggetti ad assumersi il compito di far luce, di liberare il campo, di narrarsi. Punte di iceberg (come sono punte di iceberg tutte le foto) nascondono sotto di sé enormi quantità di voci, storie, aneddoti, sentimenti. Oggetti consueti che sparpagliati nel libro-album non seguono nessuna coerenza; si ripetono, fanno capolino sulle pagine, qui, là, segnalibri di incontri, letture, amori; imparando con le loro superfici, al pari delle fotografie, la loro stessa consunzione: il "che cosa rimane?" (Chiaromonte).

Alla fine, lo scenografo-narratore Agamben ha raccolto le cose in un'unica immagine su due pagine centrali del libro (2017, 80-81) per mostrarle quasi tutte assieme ben disposte sulla lunga libreria dello studio veneziano di San Polo (fig.

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9). L'autobiografia fotografica di Agamben dopo essersi sparpagliata si riunisce nell'ultima pagina sulle mensole della libreria, come il volo di uccelli che a sera tutti ritornano sui rami dell'albero.

Fig. 9. Giorgio Agamben, *Studio di San Polo*, 2007.

Il Narratore è come se qui volesse avviare col lettore un gioco, una sorta di caccia al tesoro: lo induce a ritrovare sulle scansie della libreria le cose riprodotte nelle pagine (nelle camere) precedenti: una lettera, una vecchia foto, una copertina di libro, aiutandolo con alcune indicazioni: "nello studio di Venezia, nell'angolo di uno scaffale della libreria, una fotografia ricorda…"; "nello scaffale in basso a sinistra è poggiata una fotografia di Giorgio Colli"; "nella casa di via Corsini, due vetrine conservano la collezione di vecchi libri illustrati per bambini".

La libreria diventa una lista, o meglio un "bazar", uno "spaesamento" per organizzarsi di nuovo "secondo una tassonomia fluttuante, non consegnata alla logica di una classificazione che funga da autorità impersonale" (Celati 1975, 198); questo *bric-à-brac* di foto nella loro impaginazione (la libreria) sembra costituire una sorta di "messa in visione" (eteroclita) del tempo, di un tempo "tattile" e qui amorevolmente raccolto.

Le figure sono libere di dirsi, sono affidate alla loro bisogna; sono esse da sole a decidere cosa dire. Agamben attracca ad esse la scrittura narrante, e se ne lascia condurre immagine per immagine (ma non sapremo mai chi è alla cappa: la scrittura che nasce dall'immagine, o la grafia che cerca la sua figura). Il Narratore forse ci mette sotto gli occhi i suoi studi come delle rovine, luoghi abbandonati e ora inesistenti o rivissuti da altri. Lo sguardo dell'autofotobiografo esercita così un'esplorazione dal vago sapore archeologico e cerca residui, pezzi dispersi, tracce, apparenze, non per connetterli, ma per lasciarli vagare indipendenti, senza nessuna giustificazione che le loro stesse apparenze. Lavora

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soltanto calvinianamente sulla superficie delle cose che, come il Signor Palomar ci ha insegnato, è "inesauribile".

Daniele Del Giudice ha osservato, con acume, sulla "inestinguibilità degli oggetti", sulla loro resistenza, sul non smettere mai di essere tali; della connaturata loro impassibilità nel sopravvivere (2012, 48). Con essi vediamo il nostro tempo trascorso, e come il tempo è trascorso in essi. Il loro segreto è la sicumera dell'inamovibilità, gli oggetti pensano di restare sempre nello stesso posto; per cui è bello sospettare che cosa stiano pensando, lì ora, su quelle mensole.

Il Narratore ha fatto come il Kafka autobiografo quando appuntava: "voglio poi costruire me stesso, come uno la cui casa sia pericolante decide di costruirsene un'altra più sicura, lì vicino, magari col materiale di quella preesistente" (1972, 972). Questa libreria è fatta così: Agamben vi costruisce una sua parziale autobiografia edificandola con i materiali fotografici "preesistenti", ovvero con quanto del vissuto si è impregnato nelle cose di quelle camere *in figura*, col loro "mutismo esistenziale" (Sartre); e con quanto esse indicano ancora lì in posa tutte assieme, facendo sfoggio, ora, di quanto nella vita ci sia di irripetibile.

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MARGARET OWENS

PHOTOGRAPHY AS AUTOMATON
Roland Barthes and Fellini's Mechanical Doll

ABSTRACT: The stated purpose of *Camera Lucida* was to champion photography over cinema; however, at a critical moment in the text Roland Barthes turns to an episode from a film, a scene involving an automaton in *Fellini's Casanova*, to expound the notion of the photograph as a type of madness, a "shared hallucination." This essay explores the automaton as a nodal point linking the rival media of cinema and photography. Although Barthes disavows any interest in Fellini's film beyond the scene in which Casanova dances with an automaton, the film in fact shares many thematic concerns with *Camera Lucida*. When read in light of the film's metacinematic preoccupation with mechanical dolls and mannequins, the automaton passage in *Camera Lucida* may be linked to a longstanding *topos* in Western culture: a Pygmalionesque fantasy in which the artificial woman (robot, automaton, replicant) metaphorically embodies the allure of visual media.

KEYWORDS: Barthes, Fellini, Automaton, Photography, Cinema.

Although *La Chambre claire: Note sur la photographie* (Barthes 1980) (hereafter referred to by its English title *Camera Lucida*) was published under the imprint of *Cahiers du cinéma*, the book had anti-cinematic origins, as Barthes reveals in the opening paragraph: "I decided I liked Photography *in opposition* to the Cinema, from which I nonetheless failed to separate it" (Barthes 1981, 3).[1] In interviews conducted prior to the book's publication, Barthes (1985, 357) explained its genesis as an expression of his preference for photography over cinema: "It's a modest book, done at the request of *Cahiers du cinéma*, which is publishing a series of books on film; they left me free to choose my own subject, however, and I chose photography." In Barthes's quest to discover "the essential feature" whereby photography might be "distinguished from the community of images" (1981, 3),[2] a quest pursued through the 48 chapters that make up *Camera Lucida*, cinema figures as an inferior rival, incapable of evoking a response equivalent to the complexity and intensity provided by "certain photographs" (1981, 7). Yet if the task of the project was "to separate" photography from cinema, it seems ironic that an extended reference to a film, namely, *Fellini's Casanova* (1976), should dominate the penultimate chapter of *Camera Lucida*, a location that

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[1] "Je décrétai que j'aimais la Photo *contre* le cinéma, dont je n'arrivais pas cependant à la séparer" (Barthes 1980, 13).
[2] "Par quel trait essentiel elle se distinguait de la communauté des images" (Barthes 1980, 14).

inherently marks the episode as a key moment in the book.[3] It would appear that, in more ways than one, Barthes *needed* cinema in order to write this book.[4]

This essay attempts to make sense of Barthes's discussion of the automaton episode in *Fellini's Casanova* at a crucial moment in *Camera Lucida*. The automaton, I argue, serves as a nodal point linking the rival media of cinema and photography. Although Barthes disavows any interest in Fellini's film beyond the scene in which Casanova dances with an automaton, the film in fact shares many thematic concerns with *Camera Lucida*. When read in light of the film's metacinematic preoccupation with mechanical dolls and mannequins, the automaton passage in *Camera Lucida* may be linked to a longstanding *topos* in Western culture, a Pygmalionesque fantasy in which the artificial woman (robot, automaton, replicant) metaphorically embodies the allure of visual media.

Throughout his career, Barthes's tendency was to approach film by fragmenting it, either by extracting a detail (Garbo's face, Roman hairstyles) or by analyzing film stills. As critics have noted, *Camera Lucida*'s concept of the photographic *punctum* (a detail in the image that that pricks or wounds the viewer) closely resembles the concept of the "obtuse meaning" which Barthes developed through an analysis of stills from Eisenstein's films in "The Third Meaning."[5] The obtuse meaning is an apparently trivial detail, such as an item of clothing or a fake beard, that resonates beyond its diegetic role, "a signifier without a signified," which has "a distancing effect with regard to the referent" (Barthes 1977b, 61). In Barthes's texts, films and photographs alike are reduced to isolated details, frequently body parts, clothing, or jewelry, in other words, the classic inventory of psychoanalytic fetishes. Indeed, Barthes himself referred to the details that attracted him as fetishes in "The Third Meaning" (1977b, 58). In "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein," Barthes praised Eisenstein's films precisely for their appeal to a fetishizing gaze: "the film is a contiguity of episodes [...] holding out to the fetishist, with dotted lines, the piece for him to cut out and take away to enjoy" (1977a, 72).

Barthes's fetishistic treatment of visual media, his delight in cutting out a piece to take away and enjoy, is especially conspicuous in *Camera Lucida*'s discussion of the automaton episode from *Fellini's Casanova*. Expounding the notion of the photograph as a type of madness, a "shared hallucination," in the sense that the image is both false (what it depicts is not there) but also true (it was in front of the camera in the past), Barthes (1981, 115) proceeds to recall a trip to the cinema, "the same evening of a day I had again been looking at photographs of my

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[3] Pointing to evidence in *Mourning Diary* (Barthes 2009) that Barthes experienced some deeply moving responses to films during the months of *Camera Lucida*'s gestation, Neil Badmington 2012 argues that Barthes suppressed the book's filmic origins.

[4] On Barthes's ambivalent relationship with film over the course of his career, see Watts 2016, Ungar 2000, Gardner 2009, among others.

[5] For a sustained discussion of the relationship between the obtuse meaning and the *punctum*, see Attridge 1997.

mother."[6] He was feeling sad, and the film bored him, up until the moment when a mechanical doll appeared on the screen:

> when Casanova began dancing with the young automaton, my eyes were touched with a kind of painful and delicious intensity, as if I were suddenly experiencing the effects of a strange drug; each detail, which I was seeing so exactly, savoring it, so to speak, down to its last evidence, overwhelmed me: the figure's slenderness, its tenuity—as if there were only a trifling body under the flattened gown; the frayed gloves of white floss silk; the faint (though touching) absurdity of ostrich feathers in the hair, that painted yet individual, innocent face: something desperately inert and yet available, offered, affectionate, according to an angelic impulse of "good will"...[7] At which moment I could not help thinking about Photography: for I could say all this about the photographs which touched me (out of which I had methodically constituted Photography itself).[8] (1981, 116).

What fascinates Barthes about the automaton and remains lodged in his memory are items of clothing and facial and physical features, precisely the sorts of elements that he tends to designate as *puncta* in photographs.[9]

As the passage continues, Barthes recalls how he tried to make sense of his intense response to the automaton:

> I then realized there was a sort of link (or knot) between Photography, madness, and something whose name I did not know. I began by calling it: the pangs of love. Was I not, in fact, in love with the Fellini automaton? Is one not in love with certain photographs? [...] Yet it was not quite that. It was a broader current than a lover's sentiment. In the love stirred by Photography (by certain photographs), another music is heard, its name oddly old-fashioned: Pity.[10] (1981, 116).

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[6] "Le soir même d'un jour où j'avais encore regardé des photos de ma mère" (Barthes 1980, 177).

[7] This is the translator's ellipsis, possibly inserted to emphasize the peculiarity of the transition from film to photography. No ellipsis appears in this paragraph in *La Chambre claire* (1980, 178).

[8] "Mais lorsque Casanova s'est mis à danser avec la jeune automate, mes yeux ont été touchés d'une sorte d'acuité atroce et délicieuse, comme si je ressentais tout d'un coup les effets d'une drogue étrange; chaque détail, que je voyais avec précision, le savourant, si je puis dire, jusqu'au bout de lui-même, me bouleversait : la minceur, la ténuité de la silhouette, comme s'il n'y avait qu'*un peu* de corps sous la robe aplatie; les gants fripés de filoselle blanche; le léger ridicule (mais qui me touchait) du plumet de la coiffure, ce visage peint et cependant individuel, innocent : quelque chose de désespérément inerte et cependant de disponible, d'offert, d'aimant, selon un mouvement angélique de «bonne volonté». Je pensai alors irrésistiblement à la Photographie : car tout cela, je pouvais le dire des photos qui me touchaient (dont j'avais fait, par méthode, la Photographie même)" (Barthes 1980, 178).

[9] Also typical of Barthes's commentary on photographs is his tendency to get details wrong: the ostrich feathers that he recalls in the automaton's hair are in fact white roses.

[10] "Je crus comprendre qu'il y avait une sorte de lien (de nœud) entre la Photographie, la Folie et quelque chose dont je ne savais pas bien le nom. Je commençais par l'appeler : la souffrance d'amour. N'étais-je pas, en somme, amoureux de l'automate fellinien ? N'est-on pas amoureux de certaines photographies ? [...] Pourtant, ce n'étais pas tout à fait ça. C'était une vague plus ample que le sentiment amoureux. Dans l'amour soulevé par la Photographie (par certaines photos), une autre musique se faisait entendre, au nom bizarrement démodé : la Pitié" (Barthes 1980, 178-179).

Recalling some of the photographs which moved him, which featured the effect he named the *punctum,* "like that of the black woman with the gold necklace and the strapped pumps," Barthes writes that he now recognized that the intensity of his engagement with those images constituted a type of madness infused with pity: "I passed beyond the unreality of the thing represented, I entered crazily into the spectacle, into the image, taking into my arms what is dead, what is going to die, as Nietzsche did when, as Podach tells us, on January 3, 1889, he threw himself in tears on the neck of a beaten horse: gone mad for Pity's sake"[11] (1981, 116-117).

The connection that Barthes draws between viewing photographs of his mother earlier that day and his intense response to the dancing automaton verges on an acknowledgement that the doll poses as a surrogate for his lost mother. The attitude of angelic good will that he attributes to the automaton closely echoes the quality of kindness, "la bonté" (1980, 107), that for Barthes represents his mother's essential character, a quality which, he feels, is best captured in the Winter Garden photograph of her at age five (1981, 69). In terms of the narrative structure of the book, the experience of viewing the cinematic automaton recalls and rehearses the pivotal moment (Chapter 28) when Barthes discovers the Winter Garden photograph, thereby fulfilling the more intimate level of the book's quest, namely, to locate not only the essential nature of photography but also the essential photograph of his mother.

If the automaton stands in for his mother, then does Barthes identify with Casanova, the dancing partner and lover of the mechanical doll? Setting aside the incestuous aspect of such an identification, I would like to pause over Barthes's ruminations on being in love with photographs as the equivalent of Casanova's courtship of a mechanical doll. In Casanova's self-abandonment to the simulacrum, Barthes discovers a model for his own intense engagement with the illusions of photography, what he terms photography's alchemy or magic, and its madness. The trajectory of chapter 47, entitled "Madness, Pity," is to explore the madness of photography, but ultimately to pair that madness with pity, rather than with love. Thus the libidinal element is raised only to be qualified and renamed as pity.

In a radio interview conducted several years prior to the composition of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes suggested that there was a necrophiliac quality to his interest in photography: "what I really find fascinating about photographs, and they do fascinate me, is something that probably has to do with death. Perhaps it's an interest that is tinged with necrophilia, to be honest, a fascination with what has died but is represented as wanting to be alive" (Calvet 1995, 220). In Chapter 47 of *Camera Lucida*, necrophilia has been replaced by another type of forbidden desire, "Pygmalionism," or "falling in love with statues […] a rare form of

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[11] "Comme celle de la négresse au mince collier, aux souliers à brides. A travers chacune d'elles, infailliblement, je passais outre l'irréalité de la chose représentée, j'entrais follement dans le spectacle, dans l'image, entourant de me bras ce qui est mort, ce qui va mourir, comme le fit Nietzsche, lorsque le 3 janvier 1889, il se jeta en pleurant au cou d'un cheval martyrisé : devenu fou pour cause de Pitié" (Barthes 1980, 179).

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erotomania founded on the sense of vision," according to Havelock Ellis, the British sexologist who is credited with naming the condition in 1905.[12] While Barthes does not specifically refer to Pygmalionism in *Camera Lucida*, the automaton passage nonetheless serves to signal the relevance of the Pygmalion myth to the story he has to tell about the affective power of photographs.

In what follows, I wish to move beyond the more intimate, personal dimensions of Barthes's peculiar turn to a cinematic automaton in his reflections on photography. Taking seriously the notion of "shared hallucination," I attempt to make sense of the book's automaton passage by exploring the automaton as a more broadly shared cultural fantasy. This move involves returning *Camera Lucida*'s dancing mannequin to the context from which it was extracted, namely, *Fellini's Casanova*. The film, I argue, draws upon and interrogates Pygmalionesque fantasies, that is, a longstanding cultural *topos* whereby visual media and creative agency are emblematized in the figure of an automaton, mannequin, or replicant.[13] I argue that this *topos* lies behind Barthes's automaton passage, in ways that are elided through his exclusive focus on his personal affective response to the figure. Admittedly, this task amounts to shifting the automaton from Barthes's *punctum* into the scholar's *stadium*.

Barthes claims to have been bored by Fellini's film, up until the moment when Casanova begins dancing with the automaton. He implicitly dismisses the rest of the film as banal, the equivalent of the vast majority of photographs, which evoke a largely intellectual response that he names the *studium*.[14] The dancing automaton, by contrast, provokes in Barthes the rare effect of pricking or wounding that he designates as the *punctum*. I would argue, however, that the automaton scenes are not as anomalous within Fellini's film as Barthes implies; indeed, the automaton represents the culmination of the film's thematic interests, some of which overlap with those of *Camera Lucida*.

Fellini's Casanova is typical of much of the director's work, most notably, *La Dolce Vita* and *8½*, in its focus on the failed artist and in its somewhat self-critical examination of the role of libidinal energies in artistic creation. Though not as overtly metacinematic as *8½*, indeed set in a period over a century prior to the invention of cinema, *Casanova* alludes to the technology and psychodynamics of cinema through the figure of the life-size automaton, the dancing mannequin which appears in two episodes. In the first episode, set at the Duke of Württemberg's court, Casanova engages in a charming dance of courtship with the automaton, and then takes her to bed. The ensuing sex scene between the legendary lover and the

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[12] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "Pygmalionism," accessed 5 January 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/155341.

[13] For extensive surveys of the history of this *topos*, see Stoichita 2008, Hersey 2009, and Gross 1992.

[14] In the notes for his lecture and seminar course, *The Preparation of the Novel*, Barthes (2011, 108) writes: "the whole of Fellini's *Casanova* (which I don't particularly like) redeems itself because the automaton sets a bell ringing—in me, of course, so taking no account of the cultural consensus."

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doll is no more absurd and mechanistic than any of the other sex scenes in this seemingly anti-erotic film. Casanova's sincere fascination with the automaton, his ability to suspend disbelief and carry on the performance of courtship and copulation with the wooden lady, recalls the spell cast by the automaton in E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story "The Sandman."[15] But unlike the tragic protagonist of Hoffmann's tale, Casanova is not deceived by cunning artifice. He recognizes from the outset that the beauty is a mannequin, remarking: "Enchanting! I heard tell of something like this in Nuremberg where a general had a mechanical chess player made for himself. This exceeds the bounds of the imagination. By heaven, you'd swear that was living flesh; that skin colouring would deceive anyone" (Fellini 1976, chapter 13). The automaton's power to simulate living flesh might "deceive anyone," but it manifestly does *not* deceive Casanova.

The automaton reappears in the dream sequence at the close of the film, in which the dying Casanova imagines himself in the arms of the doll, the two of them revolving in a circular dance as though they were porcelain figurines perched atop a music box. Figuring both apotheosis and stasis, the final image of Casanova as a music box figurine offers a scathing summing up of the man whom Fellini, in interviews, dismissed as a nonentity. Reading Casanova's *History of My Life* evoked in Fellini

> a profound sense of irritation, estrangement and disgust. It was this complete refusal, this total lack of the minimum of sympathy for the undertaking, it was this nausea, this aversion, that suggested to us the method of making the film, its only possible point of view. [...] A film on nothingness. (Fellini 1978, 28).

In this 1976 interview coinciding with the release of the film, Fellini claimed that his goal was to make an "anticinematic" film, "an abstract and formless film on a nonlife [...] there is no narrative either in the romantic or the psychological sense. There are no characters, there are no situations, there are neither premises nor developments nor catharses—it is a mechanical, frenetic ballet like an electrified wax museum" (Fellini 1978, 31).

As the expression "electrified wax museum" emphasizes, the figure of the automaton constitutes the aesthetics of this film. Mannequins of various kinds (dressmaker's dummies, dolls, a stuffed ape, a monumental bust of Venus) appear in frame and after frame, and Casanova himself is represented as a mannequin, dressed in ruffs and ribbons, often shot in profile, his face plastered in cosmetics. His resemblance to a sculpted portrait, a porcelain figure, an automaton, or waxwork is underlined repeatedly, sometimes through posing him alongside other mannequins. Long before Casanova encounters the dancing automaton, the mechanical nature of his eroticism is emblematized in a mechanical golden bird, which he carries in a coffin-like case and uses as a musical accompaniment to his romantic escapades. Fellini claimed that his "vision of Casanova was as a puppet":

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[15] Hughes 2009, 193, argues that the automaton passage in *Camera Lucida* includes a "veiled but unmistakable reference" to Freud's reading of Hoffmann's tale in his essay "The Uncanny."

"A real man would have had to have some concern for how the woman felt. He is so engrossed in his own sex act that, really, he is a mechanical man, like the mechanical bird he carries about" (Chandler 190). Making a film featuring a puppet-protagonist allowed Fellini to draw upon his childhood hobby of puppetry: "My early influence and experience as a puppetmaster in boyhood is, I think, more apparent in *Casanova* than in any of my other films" (Chandler 190).

To interpret the motif of the mannequin as nothing more than a critique of the hollow, mechanistic quality of Casanova's character and his eroticism is to offer a merely banal reading of the film; it would be to take at face value Fellini's claim that the film is "anticinematic," a "vertigo of nothingness" (Fellini 1978, 28). That is not the route that I want to pursue. Instead, taking a cue from Barthes's reading of the Fellini mannequin as emblematic of photography, I suggest a metacinematic reading of the film's preoccupation with mannequins.

The metacinematic linkage between doll and film long predates Fellini's *Casanova*. As film historians and theorists, including Annette Michelson (1984) and Andreas Huyssen (1982) among others, have observed, narratives about androids, especially female androids, and allusions to the Pygmalion myth are closely associated with the emergence of cinema at the end of the nineteenth century. One of the most peculiar instances is Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's 1886 novel *L'Ève future* (*The Future Eve*), in which a character named Thomas Edison invents a female android, using a technology that anticipates film projection. Villiers de l'Isle-Adam did not live to see the real Thomas Edison put a talking doll into production in 1889, nor to see Edison bring his early version of film, the kinetoscope, to Paris in 1894. *L'Ève future* was one of the inspirations for Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), the film which features the most notorious of female androids. In between Villiers de l'Isle-Adam and Fritz Lang, it is possible to cite a host of early films featuring the Pygmalion myth and other scenarios in which mannequins and dolls come to life.[16] Among the earliest were *Le Magicien* (1898) and the now lost *Pygmalion et Galathée* (1898), by Georges Méliès, incorporating his characteristic trick photography to create the effect of the statue transforming into a real woman. Dominique Païni (2010, 335) observes:

> Thanks to Georges Méliès, the movies exploited the legend of Pygmalion and Galatea right from the start, unwittingly offering a hermeneutic perspective on the medium's own birth, namely the passage from inanimate to animated. [...] It might be suggested that the invention of the movies involved a "Pygmalion complex."

The Pygmalion myth set the parameters for this equation between cinema and android, with the filmic imagined as feminine and the filmmaker as masculine. An explicit allusion to Pygmalion occurs early in *Fellini's Casanova*, in an episode involving Casanova's attraction to an anemic seamstress named Anna Maria who

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[16] For a list of such films, see Adriaensens and Jacobs 2015, 49. For an extended exploration of the prominence of the Pygmalion myth in nineteenth-century literature, art, popular culture, and early cinema, see Nead 2007, 45-104.

suffers from fainting spells. Her passivity only heightens his desire, and he takes her to bed during one of her fainting spells, first confessing: "That unearthly beauty of yours appeals to the artist in me. I would like to mould you like clay in my hands, like the statue I first took you to be. I would be your Pygmalion, giving life to my own creation" (Fellini 1976, chapter 3).

The Pygmalion myth is evoked again with the mechanical doll. In this instance, rather than claiming the role of artist for himself, Casanova speculates about an erotic scenario involving the automaton and its maker: "What a genius of an inventor your father must have been! Quite mad of course, but a poet, to have made you so beautiful! Did you lie with him incestuously?" (Fellini 1976, chapter 14). One of the effects of the Pygmalion narrative is to displace the autoerotic (the artist desires an inanimate object of his own creation) with incest (the artist copulates with his own creation). The automaton sequence highlights this displacement.

Many literary and cinematic treatments of the *topos* of the female automaton or android involve a *femme fatale* scenario, in which a man falls victim to the lure of a beautiful exterior, the most notorious instance being Lang's *Metropolis* in which the angelic Maria's likeness is stolen to create a robot-double. Underground labourers and elite playboys alike fall victim to the robot-Maria's seductive spell; only when she is burnt at the stake as a witch do they discover her mechanical nature. The alluring woman, it turns out, has no soul; she is hollow, machinelike. Fellini's Casanova, by contrast, does not mistake the automaton for a real woman. Copulating with a wooden doll poses no difficulty for the man who is himself so much a creature of artifice.

Supporting the notion that the automaton, in Fellini's conception, was designed as a metacinematic allegory for the ambiguous power of film to simulate human life, are Fellini's own remarks equating cinema with the feminine. For instance, in an interview coinciding with the release of *City of Women* in 1980, Fellini endorsed precisely this equation:

> I think the cinema is a woman by virtue of its ritualistic nature. This uterus which is the theater, the fetal darkness, the apparitions-all create a projected relationship, we project ourselves onto it, we become involved in a series of vicarious transpositions, and we make the screen assume the character of what we expect of it, just as we do with women, upon whom we impose ourselves. Woman being a series of projections invented by man. (Fellini 1981, 8).

Fellini's notion of the movie theater as womb-like space filled by masculine projections is literalized in his Casanova film in an episode set at a carnival, which features a magic lantern show, a technological precursor to cinema. The show is billed as an encounter with the eternal feminine, a maternal goddess in the shape of a whale named the Great Mouna. Audience members (exclusively male) enter the theatre through the mouth of the whale, where they are treated to a series of projected images of vagina dentata, the demonized obverse of the idealized woman. Casanova's later romance with the automaton may be read as yet another encounter with a pre-cinematic technology, but one in which the feminine,

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overwhelming and frightening in the gigantic Mouna, has been subdued into a compliant mechanism.

If the mechanical doll is cinema, then does the film offer a self-deprecating portrait of the filmmaker? In interviews conducted during the film's production and shortly after its completion, Fellini vehemently disassociated himself from the protagonist, claiming that he was repulsed by the impression of the man that he gained from the memoirs and that his goal was "to destroy the myth of Casanova" (Fellini 1994, 90). The director's vision of Casanova as a puppet seems to have had the effect of distancing himself from the character, and was carried over into a treatment of the actor Donald Sutherland as a type of puppet. In his biography of Fellini, Tullio Kezich (2006, 322) writes:

> Fellini wants Sutherland's forehead to be seven centimeters higher; his real eyebrows are plucked and fake ones drawn at the last minute. He tries on as many as 300 noses and chins, glued on and then removed. [...] At times, the director's determination to impose physical deformities and humiliating behavior on the character verges on sadism.

Recalling the experience of being directed by Fellini, Sutherland claimed that the director "excised" his ego: "he literally surgically pulled it out and threw it off […] I literally was there to do his bidding" (Sutherland 2005). By reducing the character and the actor playing him to a puppet, and relishing his own role as puppetmaster, Fellini apparently held at bay the discovery that he was making a film about himself. According to Kezich (2006, 321), "the recognition that the protagonist is a kind of expressionistic self-parody will come to the director" only once the filming is completed.

Sutherland (2005) claims that filming the scene in which Casanova dances with the mechanical doll had a transformative effective on Fellini "such that he found a totally new line for the film, he developed sympathy for the character Casanova." Having discovered "a very specific humanity" in the lover's wooing of the mannequin, Fellini developed a new approach to the film's ending (Sutherland 2005). Evidently, Sutherland is referring to the pathos and lyrical beauty of the final scene, in which the dying man dreams of a reunion with the automaton on Venice's frozen Grand Canal and ends up locked in an embrace with the mechanical doll. Bernardino Zapponi (1995, 101), Fellini's collaborator on the script, recalls that "even Federico had tears in his eyes" when they shot the closing ballet between Casanova and the automaton.[17]

It seems ironic that a scene featuring a mechanical doll should prove pivotal in eliciting sympathy for a character that the director had heretofore reviled. Rather than serving to emphasize the mechanical nature of the legendary lover, which was Fellini's stated intention, the doll instead somehow endowed Casanova with more humanity. In other words, the automaton might be identified as a *generator*, not just a *simulator*, of humanity. Of course, the mechanical nature of the doll was

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[17] My translation of Zapponi's text: "Al balletto finale di Casanova con l'automa, sulla laguna ghiacciata, lo stesso Federico ha le lacrime agli occhi."

itself largely an illusion, created through the ingenious performance of Angela Adele Lojodice, a trained dancer. According to Zapponi (1995, 100), Lojodice was replaced for certain shots with an actual doll, the substitution so skillfully done that it is difficult to distinguish between the woman and her replica in the finished film.

Barthes's experience on viewing the first dancing scene with the automaton oddly echoes the trajectory that Sutherland describes for Fellini: in both cases, the introduction of the mechanical doll prompts a radical shift in affective response on the viewer's part. For Barthes, the doll itself is the locus of sympathy: "that painted yet individual, innocent face: something desperately inert and yet available, offered, affectionate, according to an angelic impulse of 'good will'" (Barthes 1981, 116). In Barthes's account of his own overwhelming response to the automaton, Casanova is literally effaced. Casanova's name falls away, and we hear only about Barthes's fascination with the doll. Arguably, Casanova disappears from the account because Barthes has imaginatively occupied the protagonist's place as the automaton's lover: "Was I not, in fact, in love with the Fellini automaton?" (Barthes 1981, 116).

The notion of photography as a Pygmalionesque medium, its technology that of mannequin-production and its reception analogous to seduction by a simulacrum, is not confined to Chapter 47 of *Camera Lucida*. The *topos* of the mannequin recurs through the text. Just as the automaton sequence in *Fellini's Casanova* figures as the culmination of the film's mannequin aesthetics, so does Barthes's passage on the automaton serve as the culmination of his text's preoccupation with photography's uncanny power to transform people into reified replicas. For instance, referring to the early years of portrait photography, Barthes (1981, 13) observes that the medium "transformed subject into object, and even, one might say, into a museum object."[18] The effect of reification was redoubled through the use of devices to help the sitter remain still, which Barthes describes as "a kind of prosthesis invisible to the lens, which supported and maintained the body in its passage to immobility: this headrest was the pedestal of the statue I would become" (13).[19] For Barthes, the experience of sitting for a photograph evokes a sense of self-alienation, as he finds himself deliberately posing, fashioning another self for the camera: "I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image. [...] I feel that the Photograph creates my body or mortifies it, according to its caprice" (10-11).[20] As he tries to project a certain version of himself for the camera, he experiences feelings of

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[18] "La Photographie transformait le sujet en objet, et même, si l'on peut dire, en objet de musée" (Barthes 1980, 29).

[19] "Un appareil, nommé l'appuie-tête, sorte de prothèse, invisible à l'objectif, qui soutenait et maintenait le corps dans son passage à l'immobilité : cet appuie-tête était le socle de la statue qui j'allais devenir" (Barthes 1980, 29).

[20] "Je me fabrique instantanément un autre corps, je me métamorphose à l'avance en image. [...] je sens que la Photographie crée mon corps ou le mortifie, selon son bon plaisir" (Barthes 1980, 25).

inauthenticity, a loss not just of selfhood but of life itself: "I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter. The Photographer knows this very well, and himself fears [...] this death in which his gesture will embalm me" (14).[21]

If photography is to escape this mortifying, embalming, or reifying effect, it needs to be animated through the mystery of the *punctum*. Barthes (1981, 20) writes: "suddenly a specific photograph reaches me; it animates me, and I animate it."[22] As he goes on to explain, "the photograph itself is in no way animated (I do not believe in 'lifelike' photographs), but it animates me" (20).[23] This passage, early in *Camera Lucida*, anticipates the automaton image near the close of the text. What Barthes has in mind, it seems, is a deliberate and conscious submission to the illusion of the image, and an effect of reciprocal animation. Not only is the dead figure in the photograph animated, but so is the viewer of the image.

Barthes insists that the animation effect that he attributes to certain photographs is not to be confused with the medium of cinema. In the final chapter of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes maintains the polemical line introduced at the opening, whereby photography is preferred to cinema. In his final dig at cinema in the course of a paean to the madness of photography, Barthes asserts that "cinema participates in this domestication of Photography—at least the fictional cinema," and that film "is always the very opposite of an hallucination; it is simply an illusion" (117).[24] What Casanova's automaton seems to provide for Barthes is a rare third term where the dialectic pitting photography against cinema can be momentarily resolved. With its mechanical, rather than organic, animation, the automaton offers an allegory for the power of cinematic technology to lend motion to still images. The automaton is the uncanny nodal point where cinema and photography meet, not only for Barthes in *Camera Lucida* but also for filmmakers, from Méliès to Fellini and beyond.

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[21] "Je ne suis ni un sujet ni un objet, mais plutôt un sujet qui se sent devenir objet : je vis alors une micro-expérience de la mort (de la parenthèse) : je deviens vraiment spectre. Le Photographe le sait bien, et lui-même a peur [...] de cette mort dans laquelle son geste va m'embaumer" (Barthes 1980, 30).

[22] "Telle photo, tout d'un coup, m'arrive ; elle m'anime et je l'anime" (Barthes 1980, 39).

[23] "La photo elle-même n'est en rien animée (je ne crois pas aux photos « vivantes ») mais elle m'anime" (Barthes 1980, 39).

[24] "Le cinéma participe à cette domestication de la Photographie – du moins le cinéma fictionnel [...] il est toujours le contraire même d'une hallucination; il est simplement une illusion" (Barthes 1980, 180-81).

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JULIE GAILLARD

IN SEARCH OF "THE ALEPH OF THE OTHER"

Photographic Archive and Narrative Structuring
in the Biographic Prose of Édouard Levé

ABSTRACT: This paper analyses how, through a transposition of photographic methods to literary composition, Edouard Levé (1965-2007) reconfigures the literary genre of the portrait, and situates his work at an unstable threshold from which he explores the border between the visible and the invisible, the knowable and the unknowable, existence and essence. The photographic archive that lends its shape to the text implies an externalization of the definition of identity, which thwarts any ontological discourse that would explain subjective essence as the source of identity and reality. Identity becomes a panoptic collection of the self, which points to the invisible mystery of identity and meaning beneath the surface of the visible.

KEYWORDS: Édouard Levé, Photographic Archive, Photoliterature, Autobiography.

> En ese instante gigantesco, he visto millones des actos deleitables o atroces ; ninguno me asombró como el hecho de que todos ocuparan el mismo punto, sin superposición y sin transparencia. Lo que vieron mis ojos fue simultáneo: lo que transcribiré, sucesivo, porque el lenguaje lo es.
>
> Jorge Luis Borges

Edouard Levé started his artistic career as a visual artist and photographer before becoming a writer. Oscillating between a literary and a photographic practice, he blurs the boundaries between the arts. Not in the sense that he would insert images within his texts, or write captions that would serve as literary accompaniment to his pictures:[1] he rather transposes the features of a literary aesthetics to his photographic approach, and vice versa. The literary category of "fiction" becomes a matrix for his photographic series, just as the photographic method shapes a poetics based on reference, instantaneity and the montage of discontinuous elements. Indeed, most of Édouard Levé's writings are structured as collections of fragments whose articulation does not obey any narrative or even discursive logic, whether temporal or spatial. On the contrary, everything

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[1] With the notable exception of *Fictions* (2006), a photoliterary collection, where photographs in black and white are set against short poetic fragments on the opposite page.

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happens in these texts as if the sentences were collaged just as photographs would be stored in an album or a photo-montage frame, indiscriminately according to their order of arrival. His *Autoportrait*, published in 2005, is an accumulation of juxtaposed, often extremely brief sentences describing facts relating to the author in the present tense. In his last text, *Suicide*, published posthumously in 2008, Levé compiles without chronology a series of paragraphs describing facts relating to the life of a childhood friend who committed suicide at the age of 25, whom the text addresses directly in the second-person singular.

Focusing on this (auto)biographic prose,[2] I propose to show how Édouard Levé transposes modalities of the photographic archive to literary narration, and how such a transposition leads to a reconfiguration of the literary genre of the portrait. I will start by analysing the modalities of such reconfiguration and its effects on the narrative organization of space and time, before exploring its consequences for the definition of identity.

Towards an Archival Structuring of the Portrait

Whether they retrace the story of a vocation, highlight the development over time of various aspects of a personality, or offer an external description of physical or moral features, biographical genres usually obey a narrative structure that progresses chronologically and linearly. Admittedly, Michel Beaujour, in his book *Miroirs d'encre* (Mirrors of Ink, 1980), contended that the "rhetoric of the self-portrait" differs from the canonical definition of autobiography (that of a "retrospective record in prose" that a real person makes of their own life, with special emphasis on the history of their personality; Lejeune 1975, 14). The literary self-portrait would be organised thematically rather than chronologically (Beaujour 1980, 8). However, such a thematic organization still requires a minimal amount of narrative organization, which Édouard Levé abandons altogether. His texts do not follow a narrative sequence, their fragments are not arranged according to thematic groupings. Rather, they present an uninterrupted flow of sentences or paragraphs.[3] In particular, *Autoportrait* consists in a juxtaposition of assertions relating to the *I* who utters them, without any hierarchy between heterogeneous elements simply laid end to end, as we can see in the following passage, arbitrarily selected:

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[2] Determining whether the status of *Suicide* is biographical or autobiographical (which would deserve a full article of its own) is not the focus of this essay. I will rather focus on the numerous indications that shed light on its author's aesthetics.

[3] Levé writes in *Autoportrait*: "I do not write memoirs. I do not write novels. I do not write short stories. […] I do not write science fiction. I write fragments" (2016; 2013, 75). Among his texts, *Suicide* is the most "narrative": some paragraphs unfold anecdotes or descriptions over the course of several sentences. However, the book presents no linear chronology.

I drink red wine when I eat, and sweet wines by themselves. I often remember that there is something I'm forgetting, but what? I prefer beginning to ends. I do not scorn the teachings of my mother. I have not managed to describe the pain of a powerful electric shock. […] When I lived rue Legendre I often saw a woman in her sixties who was a mass of nervous tics, I wondered how she managed to smoke without burning herself. Three things make pools unpleasant: the locker rooms, the fluorescent lights, the smell of chlorine. I have no financial woes. I wait to sort my mail. My life is nothing like a hammer. I wish there were one-liter bottles of wine. In an abandoned factory, I smelled a mixture of dust, grease, old floorboards, and fossilised sweat. I think the rich are wickeder than the poor. "I love you" can be a form of blackmail. I do not force myself to be enthusiastic, even with people who are. I have spoken with several American Indians. I have spoken with several Indian Indians. I have spoken with at least a thousand Americans. I have no obese friends. I have no anorexic friends. I cannot integrate myself into a group of friends who already know each other, I will always be the latecomer, I like groups of friends formed all together at the same moment. I do not know what I expect from love. (2016 [2013, 77-78]).

Sentences are juxtaposed without head or tail. As soon as a thematic coherence seems to emerge out of a sequence of a few sentences, the train of thoughts shifts again in a completely different direction, with no apparent motive. In an interview, Levé confided that he wrote this text beset by a feeling of urgency, with the aim of leaving a trace behind, and defined this accumulation of "sentences fired like arrows" as "an imprint of [his] brain, obsessional and spontaneous" [*obsessionnel et primesautier*] (Morice 2007). Such writing could of course be compared to a stream of consciousness obeying a technique of free-floating attention akin to that of psychoanalysis. In the passage quoted above, several modalities of textual progression can be observed. The succession of two sentences can, for example, be triggered by the naming of opposites (obese/anorexic), by the exhaustion of a list (American Indians/Indian Indians), or the association of an object with one of its stereotypes (American/obese). But the overarching goal of such associations is not to achieve a higher truth or identify a neurotic source that would provide a key to explain or interpret the subject's life. The sum of these enumerated assertions, sometimes trivial, sometimes intimate, constitutes a strictly superficial and non-hierarchical collection, whose aim is neither to trace a path that would allow to establish a causality of past events, nor to reveal an ontological depth. In short, *Autoportrait* does not create a discourse, fragmented as it may be, that would combine linear and associative means of articulation to retrace the history of a subject. Its goal is not anamnesis, but archiving.

Indeed, from the very first lines of *Autoportrait,* the author states laconically: "I archive" (2016 [2013, 7]). In lieu of documents, the book collects statements. *Autoportrait* is therefore not a *bio-graphy* in the strict sense of a linear or thematic tale of a life allowing for a retrospective coherence to emerge, but rather a portrait of words, erratically established. The text juxtaposes fragments of reality that have been captured and recorded at a given moment.[4] Just as

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[4] Shedding light on the photographic "aesthetics of the instant" in Barthes' works, Magali Nachtergael argues that "the biographeme [*biographème*] constitutes a type of fragment that is

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photography (at least unretouched analog photography) can serve as a proof of the real existence of an object (a function that Barthes famously described as the "it has been" of photography, which Levé adopts and transforms for his own practice), each sentence in *Autoportrait* documents the truthfulness of a series of physical or moral qualities of its author, who states: "Everything I write is true, but so what?" [*Tout ce que j'écris est vrai, mais qu'importe?*] (2016 [2013, 82]). *Autoportrait* does not organise its author's life discursively: the book's essential aim is rather to attest to its reality, by forming the archive where the integrality of the traces of his existence will be conserved. But what are the stakes and the scope of this archival structuring of narration? Why this superficial, non-hierarchical collection of sentences?

Many figures of collectors and archivists are disseminated in Levé's texts. In *Suicide*, he reports the following anecdote:

> You marvelled at the story of this Parisian entrepreneur whose obsessive hobby consisted in documenting his daily existence. He saved letters, invitation cards, train tickets, bus tickets, metro tickets, tickets for trips by planes or by boat, his contracts, hotel stationary, restaurant menus, tourist guides from countries visited, programs from plays, day planers, notebooks, photographs… A room in his house, lined with file cabinets, served as the receptacle for his archives, always being expanded. At the centre, organised in a spiral, a chronologically oriented plan indicated Paris, France, or abroad, continents, seas, months, days, in different colours. With a glance, the man could visualise his entire existence. He had made a collection of himself [*il s'était collectionné lui-même*] (2011 [2009, 59-60]).

Each document in this man's collection refers to a specific experience of his existence, precisely located through indications of places and/or dates. Not each of these documents is nominative (such as, for example, restaurant menus or tourist brochures), but their inclusion in chronological order in the personal collection of a singular individual links them to his personal experience, by an effect of this collection's seriality. Each article constitutes a trace, a proof of his passage, each article says: *it has been*, and, by extension, *"I" have been*. In gathering around himself the evidence of his life, it is as if the entrepreneur would attempt to secure his own existential cohesion and continuity across time and space, by archiving a series of items whose material and referential nature

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somewhat equivalent with photography, just like the haiku" (2012, 167, translation mine). Barthes, like Levé after him, would thus have composed his self-portrait (or his "individual mythology") by conferring to a sentence/fragment the same value than a photograph. Biographemes would be like a series of snapshots (what is not captured in the frame falls into oblivion). Comparatively, in Levé, such "snapshots" have an exacerbated referential and cognitive function. Additionally, unlike Barthes' fragments, Levé's fragments are not separated by thematic demarcations, but are carried by the flow of sentences described above with no distinction. Barthes imagined that his "biographemes" could, after his death, escape any sense of destiny to present his life in a fragmentary fashion thus escaping any articulated totalization (see Barthes, 2002, 706). On the contrary, Levé, through his accumulative compulsion, seems to collect fragments in the hope of a concretion (however with no hope or even mention of fate, articulation or totalisation).

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would make their truth impossible to deny. This archive forestalls any falsification *a posteriori*—no matter whether this falsification might be caused by oblivion, nostalgia, or bad faith. Indeed, as Derrida has shown, while its recording power endows the archive with a function of unification, identification and classification, any impulse to archive, to conserve, is however inevitably inseparable from an opposite impulse to destruct (1998, 3-4). According to Derrida, "there would indeed be no archive desire without the radical finitude, without the possibility of a forgetfulness which does not limit itself to repression" (1998, 19). There would be no inscription without a fear of disappearance, no collection without a fear of fragmentation. The anecdote of the Parisian entrepreneur shows that the role of a collection is to unify into a coherent whole items that would otherwise remain scattered. "Collecting" amounts to establishing a link of belonging between each item in the collection and its overarching category, whose cohesion, in turn, is thereby reinforced. *Collecting* the traces of an individual's existence must then be understood in this strong sense where the work of gathering scattered pieces is a preliminary and necessary process toward the unification of this individual. (According to the same logic, the archival structuring of *Autoportrait* would then assume, for its author, an existential function.)[5] However, such a unification remains mysterious: how can such a formless accumulation, bringing together traces of disseminated events, distant in space and time, be endowed with such a unifying power?

Archive and Aleph[6]

The originality of the entrepreneur's collection lies the mode of its presentation. The existence of this man is represented as a panoramic chronological frieze combined with a system of geographic indications. The device of the orientation table situated at the centre of the room also allows for a synchronic perspective on his existence. Traversing chronology, it allows navigating it in all directions. Placed at the centre of the device, the entrepreneur overlooks the collected evidence of his existence, which is also, in a way, its duplicate, its re-presentation. It provides him with a visualisation of his referential cohesion and existential continuity across time, but also perhaps with a certain ontological confidence. For the panoptic device also compresses duration as it unwinds it spatially in a spiral, and condenses it into the single point at the centre of the room. The entrepreneur, posted at his orientation table,

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[5] As such, the text would be a literary counterpart to an artistic engagement with the archive as medium, which Cristina Baldacci identifies as "an obsession of contemporary art". Concerning these *Impossible Archives*, she shows in particular that, among multiple functions, the archive compulsion can correspond to a need to "recompose the self" (2016, 117-124).

[6] A preliminary version of this reflection on the aleph and the impossible totalization of identity was published in French in the context of a larger reflection on fiction and virtuality in the works of Edouard Levé (Gaillard 2014, §§19-23).

can say: "it is true to say that I have been to all these places." He can thus fold the plural fragmentation of spaces and times back onto one basic reference frame, i.e. this centre of the spiral, at the exact moment when he stands there.

However delirious and illusory this device may seem, it nevertheless opens onto a seminal aspect of Levé's writing. It provides a key to think how the author organises the impossible encounter of instant and duration in an aesthetics influenced as much by the visual arts as by the arts of time. This anecdote indeed describes the architecture of a panoptic observation centre of an individual, which Levé elsewhere compares, borrowing the title of one of Borges' short stories, to an "aleph." Borges defines this device as a unique and fixed point in space where all the places of the universe can be seen simultaneously.[7] An aleph resembles a portal of science fiction that would provide a view of all the other points of the universe, not by an effect of transparent succession or superimposition, but seen *at the same time from all angles*. Such an object is of course impossible, except as a thought experiment, after an immense effort of abstraction.

The centre of the entrepreneur's archive is but one instanciation of this ideal, impossible point of observation and convergence, which is a recurring motif in Levé's artistic and literary research, and contributes to give their shape to his texts. For instance, in the following passage of *Suicide*, the aleph orients a certain attitude towards narratives, involving a reconfiguration of traditional narratives and their chronological structure:

> As you did not believe in narratives, you would listen to stories with a floating ear, in order to lay bare their bone. […] You would reconstitute accounts in an order different from that which they'd been given. You would perceive duration like others would look an object in three dimensions, moving yourself around it so as to be able to represent it in all its aspects at once. You looked for the instantaneous halo of other people, the photograph that would, in a second, capture the unfolding of their years. Your reconstituted their lives as optical panoramas. You brought together distant events by compressing time so that each instant stood side by side with the others. You translated duration into space. You searched for the aleph of the other. (2011; 2009, 38, translation slightly modified).

Inspired by photography, this attitude disarticulates biographical accounts in order to create a synthetic approach to narrative data. Narrative chronology is torn apart, reconfigured and condensed *a posteriori*. Similar to the way cubist painters unfold the multiple perspectives from which a three-dimensional object can be observed and present them all together onto one single flat surface, the character ("you"), listening to the linear sequence of stories, seeks to collect, into

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[7] In this short story, a fictional double of the author, also named Borges, has the opportunity to contemplate an aleph in the cellar of Carlos Argentino Daneri, who uses this observation point to write an epic poem exhaustively describing the planet (we recognise a mocking evocation of Pablo Neruda's *Canto General*). But the entire story consists in a network of considerations on grief, portraiture and forgetfulness. We may contemplate the vast universe and want to capture it in representation, nothing—not even their many portraits—will prevent the memory of loved ones from fading away.

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a unique point of space, elements that belong to heterogeneous temporal perspectives, in order to extract their "instantaneous halo." This point of identity is not an abstract entity. The object of the search is not a "substantific marrow," but a "bone"; not a "being," but a "halo." Identity does not derive from a unifying interiority, from an ontological source with a constant flow, but from a structure, a very concrete framework that can only be apprehended from the outside, as a condensation of several properties belonging to the same individual at various times and places in their life. The aleph of the other is not their essence, but the snapshot that contains literally all aspects of their existence.

Like these biographies are disarticulated and re-condensed by the character of *Suicide*, the narrative can spatialise duration and tie it to a panoptic point of reference, absorbing the unfolding of time within a single instant that compresses it. Édouard Levé creates most of his literary works according to a strictly symmetrical approach. In the sequence of erratic entries of *Autoportrait*, "time doesn't exist" (2011; 2009, 38). In order to be able to observe all the sides of an object simultaneously, time must be abolished, the instant frozen, the infinite multiplicity of perspectives bound to the uniqueness of a point of view. What is this point of view, this aleph that allows to embrace panoptically the totality of the assertions collected in *Autoportrait*? What, if not the only fixed point of reference: the proper name of the author placed on the cover to which each "I" refers? *Autoportrait* would thus function as a display of the myriad descriptions that can be attached to the proper name to which the pronoun "I" refers, descriptions whose multiplication would allow a panoramic grasp of the referent, i.e. the person of the author. Accordingly, the text would correspond to Philippe Lejeune's canonical definition of the autobiographical pact, as that which attests that character, narrator and author are one and the same person corresponding to the enunciating "I" and to the proper name appearing on the book jacket (Lejeune 1975, 22). The proper name, because it is the hinge that attracts and gathers all possible utterances about its referent, would be the aleph of an individual, containing all possible points of view about that individual not only in synchrony, but also in diachrony.

The Aleph, Postmortem

However, nothing is more mysterious than this correspondence of a given individual to their own name. As Descartes already suggested: between two moments when I am certain to think, it is not certain that I am, that I exist (Descartes 1996, 17). What about the moments that escape my mind? My conscious perception? My memory? What about the existence of the entrepreneur, in the chronological series of his collection, between two documents? Even if the archive assembles proofs of their existence, characters, in the works of Edouard Levé, can always doubt that they exist. *Suicide*, for example, states: "You kept your day planners from previous years. You reread

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them when you doubted your existence. […y]ou worried about not remembering what happened in between the things you wrote down. You had lived those moments too. Where had they gone?" (Levé 2011 [2009, 29]) The proper name "Édouard Levé," printed on the book cover, seems to function *in theory* like an aleph, gathering virtually, synchronically in one single point, all the assertions that can be attached to an individual; however, this aleph can *in fact* only be imperfect.

Indeed, because the enumeration of sentences in *Autoportrait* no longer obeys the logical causality of a narrative, it is potentially infinite. The series of "I"s referring to the proper name of the author is federated through the unicity of an enunciative voice. This convention guarantees a minimal and necessary fixity of the bind between the name and its referent, yet identity is always missed, because it is not the sum of conscious, describable moments. It is also the sum, impossible because virtually infinite, of all that is not said, not done, not accomplished, not perceived, not preserved by memory, not yet happened. As Nicolas Bouyssi states, "Édouard Levé suggests that the proper name is not the unifying factor of a being, and even less of an existence" (2011, 16; translation mine). A unified identity is a mirage. And, if an individual's identity can be given as an "instantaneous halo," as a "photograph that [summarises] in a second the unfolding of their years," as Levé imagines in *Suicide*, this can only be in the sense in which Barthes said of the famous photograph of the Winter Garden, inaccessible except to himself, representing his mother at the age of five, that "it achieved for [him], utopically, *the impossible science of the unique being*" (Barthes 1981 [1980], 71). If the aleph of an individual is accessible only from the outside, in a utopian and highly singular way, it is also related to death. Only death would stop the proliferation of the archive of the traces of existence of the self, the infinite multiplication of the descriptions accumulated in *Autoportrait*.[8] Then, and only then, does this proliferation of possibilities come to a standstill, and can be subsumed in an attempt to reconstruct a coherent trajectory after the event. As Levé writes in *Suicide*:

> Only the living seem incoherent. Death closes the series of events that constituted their lives. So we resign to finding a meaning for them. To refuse them this would amount to accepting that a life, and thus life itself, is absurd. Yours had not yet attained the coherence of things done. Your death gave it this coherence. (2011 [2009, 23]).

A life can be summarised, *a posteriori*, and be ascribed a meaning as a coherent trajectory. But its character of "instantaneous halo" can only be approached through the affective, oblique and spectral force of the *punctum*, which befalls the viewer and illusorily restores the presence of the lost being,

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[8] Similarly, Philippe Lançon notes that the inventory of the self-presented in *Autoportrait* "could be endless: one is never done dealing with oneself; but it soon stops: one perhaps ends with the desire for oneself". In "Le Moi se meurt : par Edouard Levé, un 'Autoportrait' sans égotisme", *Libération*, 19 Mai 2005, translation mine.

whose *air* they believe to recognise. Levé's fantasy, as it appears in *Autoportrait*, seems to be that of a totalizing and unifying collection, which would not summarise his life, but which would re-present each facet of its identity in one single glance. Yet, logically, such unity can only be achieved *post mortem*. With *Autoportrait*, Levé thus brings together, under his own name, the archive of his existence, however incomplete it necessarily has to remain. In 2001, when asked by the magazine *Les Inrocktuptibles* under which form he would like to come back after his death, Levé answered: "Borges' aleph." Writing *Autoportrait*, Levé constructed an archive of himself that would turn his name into an aleph.[9]

Conclusion

Thus, through this break with the conventional narrative structures of biographical genres and this turn to an eminently photographic and documentary aesthetics, Levé situates his work at an unstable border at the threshold of the visible and the invisible, the knowable and the unknowable, but also of existence and essence. By renouncing chronology in favour of referentiality, by substituting an archival matrix to discursive structuring, i.e. by situating his writing strictly at the level of a superficial description of the visible, Levé ultimately opens onto an impossible, invisible dimension: that of a phantasmatic totalisation of existence compressed into a single point of view. Like Barthes' *punctum*, this dimension is eminently singular. Like the Winter Garden photograph, it must—not by a choice of the author, but by an intrinsic necessity—remain invisible. Like Barthes' mother, this superficial yet singular essence, this air, or this halo, can only be given definitively after the death of the person who left this imprint: returning from the depths of the archive to haunt the present of the living.

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[9] In the context of a questionnaire initiated in 2001 by French magazine *Les Inrockuptibles* (November 2001).

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AYŞE EREK, ESRA ALMAS

PHOTOGRAPHS, MEMORIES, MONUMENTS AND MOVEMENTS
Black and White Istanbul in the Work of Orhan Pamuk and Ara Güler

ABSTRACT: Combining images and words when relating to a city has a long history; in Istanbul's case, it has its roots in the Orientalist tradition and in the great journeys to the "East." For the Istanbul of the twenty-first century, the most renowned combination of photography and literature is Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul: Memories and the City* (2003), a portrait of the writer as a young artist accompanied with black-and-white photographs of Istanbul. Pamuk's use of the photographs of Ara Güler draws from the tradition of travel writing and autobiography, documenting both the lost city and, conversely, endowing the melancholy of the narrative with a reality effect that is difficult to trace in writing. This paper discusses Pamuk's use of photography in the memoir to address how his work supplies a heterogeneous archive of memories which both preserves and transforms the entangled pasts and presents of the city.

KEYWORDS: Memory, Nostalgia, Urban Space, Orhan Pamuk, Ara Güler.

In recent years, Istanbul has undergone a massive process of renovation, restoration and restructuring. An expanding population, the construction of new neighborhoods, the increase in building and rebuilding of various sites, the city's threatened history and its changing silhouette all create a struggle for identity and identification. In terms of the decline in the preservation of material urban spaces as well as the narratives attached to existing structures and location, artistic and literary works act as a means to trace the presence of what has been forgotten or lost in contemporary landscapes. These works critically and creatively produce new relations to the past.

Literary representations of Istanbul dating from the early twentieth century are characterized by the retrospective gaze, as if to echo the black-and-white images of the city, which, ironically, have been gaining popularity as the city center undergoes drastic changes. The most renowned example of this trend in twenty-first-century Turkish literature is by Turkey's foremost writer, Orhan Pamuk. In *Istanbul: Memories and the City* (2003, 2005), his memoir with visual, mostly photographic, and verbal representations of the city and of himself, Pamuk identifies with the city and offers it as his autobiography. Most of the photographs of the city, which are all in black and white, reveal the city's collective memory. The photographs were taken by renowned journalist-photographer Ara Güler,

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whose photographs of Istanbul in the '50s and '60s have been praised for their aesthetics as well as for their documentary value. [1]

Pamuk's representation of Istanbul became a trademark of his work and contributed to his renown, especially following the Nobel Prize he was awarded in 2006. In later years, Pamuk took his interest in visual images of the city further. In 2018, he published *Balkon*, a selection from the thousands of photographs he took from his balcony during the winter of 2013, a collection which is as much about the writer's emotional landscape as it is about the views of the city. The visual, even photographic turn in Pamuk's work was already manifest in 2015: the writer published an extended version of the memoir, enriched with an additional 230 black-and-white images of the city and a short introduction that elaborates on the function of the photographs in the text. This essay takes its cue from the increasing role of the visual in the verbal imagery of the memoir. It focuses on the dynamics between the verbal and the visual, the individual and the collective, the past and the present to discuss how black-and-white images shape our thoughts on everyday urban life, memory, monuments and movement, and how photographs and words complement each other in the search for the soul of the city.

Photographs and Memories

The immediate impression that Pamuk's memoir leaves on the reader is the preeminence of Istanbul. Indeed, in the first chapter of the memoir, we are told the writer's identity is inscribed with the history and identity of his immediate family and of the city into which he was born. Pamuk declares that his destiny was determined as much by Istanbul as by the family, body and gender he was born into. Indeed, the text combines images of the city in black and white with the story of how he decided to become a writer: by speaking of Istanbul, he speaks of himself and vice versa. This portrait of the artist as a young man is interwoven with the literary and artistic representations of Istanbul, notably by the nineteenth century French writers who travelled to the city, early twentieth-century Turkish writers who adopted the city as a bridge between the remains of the Ottoman Empire and the emerging culture of the Turkish Republic, and most notably with two hundred black-and-white photographs of the city.

In a *Paris Review* interview, Pamuk contends that the book's originality is the result of "put[ting] together two things that were not together before: [...] combined with [an] essay on the invention of Istanbul's romantic landscape is an autobiography" (Gurria-Quintana 2010, 377). Istanbul is not only the space in which he has lived all his life; it is also a space of imagination and representation,

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[1] A renowned artist and, in his own words, a journalist-photographer, Ara Güler (1928-2018) compiled a portfolio of work that ranges from portraits of the internationally acclaimed figures in the 60s, to war journalism. The photographs included in this essay are published with the kind permission of Ara Güler Archival Centre (AGAVEM).

the sole constant in a world of fleeting experiences and sensations—a multi-faceted entity which shapes the individual. Istanbul in the memoir is, therefore, more than an entity that the writer himself comes to terms with or sets himself against; it is an unparalleled companion, central to the self and to the human condition. The city writes the self, and Pamuk's memoir is a peculiar combination of verbal and visual images.

Pamuk's use of photographs scattered in the text is not unlike W.G. Sebald's use of captionless photographs in *Austerlitz* (2001) and the desperate search for a lost past that characterizes the novel. The link between photographs and the unattainability of the past has been much discussed, particularly in relation to the work of Sebald, where it turned into a literary feature.[2] Sebald reveals that what he particularly likes about the insertion of photographs in the narrative is "when this lack of clarity enters the photos" (Jacobs 2015, 166). Images conceal rather than disclose the objects they represent; the distance between the object and its representation multiplies. Pamuk's choice of black-and-white photos to accompany the text reinforces the dual position of self-invention through the city while the self is a participant in making the city. The writer's reliance on visual memory recalls what Marianne Hirsch calls, after Aby Warburg, "pre-established forms," which shape how we consider the past as well as the present. The much-cited passage in the novel on the link between memory and image, or "the pictures that make up the stock-in-trade of the spectacle of history forcing themselves upon us," encapsulates the role of visual images on how we remember (Hirsch 2001, 71). The melancholy protagonist quotes his history teacher's rendition of "our concern with history (as) a concern with preformed images already imprinted on our brains, images at which we keep staring while the truth lies elsewhere, away from it all, somewhere as yet undiscovered" (Hirsch 2001, 72).

Unlike *Austerlitz,* however, Pamuk's memoir is not preoccupied with the "truth" of the photographs or of the account included in the text. Instead, it accentuates the palimpsestic, imprecise, and shifting nature of the object and subject of writing. In the memoir, an alternative is proposed: symmetry, not truth, is the *modus operandi* (guiding principle), and presides over truthfulness:

> Bir ressam için şeylerin gerçekliği değil biçimi, romancı için olayların sırası değil düzeni ve hatıra yazarı için de geçmişin doğruluğu değil, simetrisi önemlidir (Pamuk 2003, 275).

> What is important for a painter is not objects' reality but their shape; and what is important for a novelist is not the sequence of events but their order; and what is important for a memoir writer is not the factual accuracy of the past but the symmetry of its account (Pamuk 2005, 265).

Symmetry, here, is a peculiar aesthetic sensibility; it concerns the arrangement and the relation between black and white, words and photographs, past and present,

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[2] See Barthes 2010, Hirsch 2012, Sontag 2001.The most notable of these are *The Emigrants, The Rings of Saturn,* and *Austerlitz.*

form and content. The relation between seeing and understanding, or perception, is a theme that runs throughout the memoir. The limits of perception, and by extension confusion, is a major component of its aesthetics. The same principle is also at work with the use of photographs as part of the text, troubling cognition on both textual and conceptual levels.

Black-and-White Photographs

In the first edition of *Istanbul*, there are around two hundred photographs and illustrations, ranging from images of the city by foreign visitors to photographs by Turkish photographers and a collection of family photographs. Most of the photographs Pamuk chose to include in the memoir are depictions of the city in the 1950s and 1960s, by Ara Güler, and they are black and white. These are scattered, without captions, throughout the text. The choice of black and white here relates not only to Güler's choice, it also helps portray a feeling that Pamuk associates with the city. Indeed, the memoir contains an eponymous chapter where the writer contends that black and white convey the childhood memories of the city.[3] Pamuk comments:

> Bu siyah beyaz duygusunun bir yanı elbette şehrin yoksulluğu, tarihi ve güzel olanın ortaya çıkarılamayıp, eskimiş, solmuş, gözden düşmüş ve bir kenara itilmiş olmasıyla ilgilidir. Bir başka yanı ise, en gösterişli, debdebeli zamanlarında bile Osmanlı mimarisinin alçakgönüllü yalınlığıyla ilgilidir (Pamuk 2003, 48).

> To see the city in black and white is to see it through the tarnish of history: the patina of what is old and faded and no longer matters to the rest of the world. Even the greatest Ottoman architecture has a humble simplicity that suggests an end-of-empire melancholy (Pamuk 2005, 38).

The city's Ottoman past peeks through black-and-white photographs. The decrepitude of the city, made more somber by the remnants of the Ottomans, also fed the nostalgia for past grandeur, which, ironically, even at the height of the Empire, retained modesty. This nostalgic feeling that borders on melancholy pervades the city and the memoir.

At the end of the memoir, Pamuk adds a note about the photographs, registering some astonishment at his selection, and in his words, "a feeling in between nostalgia and amazement at the strangeness of the past" (Pamuk 2003, 347; trans. ours). Just like the relation between the words and images, the feelings that the photographs convey are also not easy to identify. It is accurate to say that Pamuk's sense of identity haunts the images presented. The images are immediately recognizable, these contradictory yet complementary feelings concerning the

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[3] "Çocukluğumun İstanbul'unu siyah-beyaz fotoğraflar gibi, iki renkli, yarı karanlık, kurşuni bir yer olarak yaşadım ve öyle de hatırlıyorum" (Pamuk 2003, 22). This is altogether omitted in the English translation, and the English in the text above is our own translation.

black-and-white past relate to the interplay between the old and the new. As urban regeneration increasingly affects the city's silhouette and topography, and as images and non-verbal elements have become increasingly significant in Pamuk's work, so has the writer's interest in photographs and memory objects. A recent collection of essays, *Manzaradan Parçalar: Hayat, Sokaklar, Edebiyat* (*Excerpts from the View: Life, Streets, Literature*), includes "Güler's Istanbul," ("Ara Güler'in Istanbul'u"). In the essay Pamuk elaborates on his decision to include Güler's photographs in greater detail. Pamuk's discovery of Güler's archive after completing most of the text generated both despair and joy. These contrasting feelings, in a manner not unlike that of black and white, inform the general feeling Pamuk identifies with the city and with Güler's photographs. Pamuk's analysis of the uniqueness of Güler's photographs is worth quoting at length:

> İstanbul'u bir Batılılaşma gayreti içinde olsa da, geleneksel hayatın sürdüğü, eski ile yeninin, bir yıpranma, yoksulluk ve alçakgönüllülük müziğiyle birleştiği ve manzaraları gibi insanlarının da yüzü aşırı hüzünlü bir yer olarak gösteren Ara Güler'in siyah-beyaz fotoğrafları; özellikle 1950'ler ve 60'larda, geçmişin şaşaası artık iyice yıpranıp kabuk kabuk dökülürken ortaya çıkan özel dokuyu çok şiirsel bir duyarlılıkla saklamıştır (Pamuk 2003, 245).

> Ara Güler's photographs show Istanbul to be a place where traditional life carries on regardless, where the old combines with the new to create a humble music that speaks of ruin and poverty, and where there is as much melancholy in the faces of the city's people as in its views, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, when the last brilliant remnants of the imperial city… were collapsing all around him, he caught the poetry of the ruins (Pamuk 2005, 234).

In a city that alienates its residents as much as it draws them to itself, aesthetic sensibility—here referred to as "humble music"—is not a luxury but a necessity for the city dwellers who take part in the city and its everyday reality. Güler's photographs provide visual representations of the memoir, revealing the city's contradictory yet complementary pasts, presents and its melancholy refrain. In a similar vein, coming across a scene on television from an old black-and-white film set in Istanbul makes him realize that the Bosphorus "glittering in the distance" (Pamuk 2005, 77) constituted the subject.

In 2017 Pamuk published a deluxe edition of the same memoir, with an additional 233 photographs, and a detailed note on the use of photographs in the memoir. The note provides an overview of Pamuk's experience with photography, tracing it back to the ritual of the family portrait. More importantly, it explains how photographs change the reading practice. The extended edition is thus "a book that lives by visual cues" (xvi), where photographs and words not only complement but also reiterate each other. For Pamuk this repetition means that the book could be leafed through for photographs only, and the feeling that the words convey would still be experienced. His introduction to the 2017 edition ends with the following comment:

> The subtler pleasure that drew me to old photographs was the possibility of returning to certain

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emotions, of feeling, if only for a moment, that I was still living in those times… It is … full of the heartfelt conviction that these photographs and images will leave the reader with emotions not so far from those that I experienced, from 1950-75, when I wandered the streets of Istanbul (xxiii).

Beni eski fotoğrafiara bağlayan daha ince zevk ise, bazı duyguları yeniden yaşamak, kendimi bir an hala o zamanlarda yaşıyormuş gibi hissetme ihtiyacı idi… Çünkü bu fotoğraf ve resimlerden okura geçecek duygunun, 1950-75 arası İstanbul sokaklarından bana geçen duygulara yakın olacağına saflıkla inanıyorum (Pamuk 2015, 515).

Photographs do not simply document the past, nor do they only repeat the verbal story; they elaborate and transmit the feeling that Pamuk associates with the city, amplifying the visual dimension of the narrative. In the case of Güler's photography, the visual narrative in relation to the text produces disorientation, manifesting itself in movement. While the background image of the historical city is frozen, the foreground is in ongoing urban movement. The eye of the reader moves between the objects at the frame, and also in between the text and the image. In this sense, the image does not secure the text in generating the meaning; rather, the image and the text complement each other in generating unstable viewing positions, as the experience of walking in a city.

Photographs transcend time as they unite multiple layers of Istanbul's history in single frames, recalling Christine Boyer's contention that "our desire for authentic memories and city experiences reveals an empathy for lost totalities, even though no one actually speaks out in favour of a unified city" (Boyer 1996, 4). Pamuk and Güler's representations of Istanbul are both retrospective and future-oriented. Both emphasize, albeit in very different degrees, the spectacular aspects of the demoted metropolis. Yet in both the present also features as part of the narrative. In both, at times, the emphasis is on the current moment, where it is expressed through depictions of movements in the streets of Istanbul. Pedestrian experience, especially in Pamuk's work, represents actual encounters with the city, in the form of long walks in crowded streets, it weaving together the present moment with the past.

Everyday life experience in the metropolis has been rendered as a collection of snapshots or images, which lies on a narrative of the past intermingled with the present. These snapshots reawaken the memory, such as the memories awakened in Güler's photos; "the old" gaining presence in the form of an Ottoman mosque, a dilapidated streetscape or a monumental building that lost its previous life. Boyer contends that "Every discourse sets up a spatial order, a frozen image that captures the manner in which the transitory present is perceived" (Boyer 1996, 32). The urban experience for a spectator is described as travelling "through the city observing its architecture and constructed spaces, shifting contemporary scenes and reflections from the past until they thicken into a personalized vision" (Boyer 1996, 32). Güler and Pamuk's depictions of the city reveal a similar dynamic: framing Güler's photos, Pamuk's text implies the personalized in the frozen image.

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In Güler's depiction of the urban landscape (Figure 1), it is possible to discern the ephemeral practice against a fixed form: the streets' affective intensity is a constant in a rapidly changing city, and the self is reinvented with an embodied reflection on the urban. At first glance the self is a passerby engaging with the city as a flaneur. The photos of Güler highlight precisely this relation between the monumental structures, in particular the mosques in the old city, along with the city itself as a monument forming the background, and the participants in the everyday hustle and bustle of the city in the foreground. Photographs, therefore, reveal the urban texture as a memoryscape, as the past in the present, and a constant interplay between past and present, monuments and movements. To cite an example, in his essay titled "Photos of the Bosphorus" in *Manzaradan Parçalar* (*Pieces from the View*), Pamuk comments on the layers of sentiments the photographs evoke. The fishing boats on the Bosphorus, in particular, make the viewer feel "the excitement of seeing the innocence of nature amidst the monuments and ruins of history and modernity"—"tarihin ve modernliğin anıtları ve yıkıntıları arasında, doğanın çocuksuluğunu görmenin heyecanını da hissederiz" (Pamuk 2010, 195). The fishing boats not only remind us of the innocence, but also of the surprising dynamism of the life that's included within. The city cycles between the monument (in ruin or poverty) and the exuberance of the people's acts within it.

Güler's Istanbul is a city of both splendor and poverty, with the ostentatious remnants of the Ottoman Empire providing a backdrop to the everyday activity of its inhabitants on land and water. His photographs document the daily life in its chaos and flux. Hence, the onlooker is not only the passerby but also an active observer of the constant movement with the activities of the people. In this way, despite a nostalgic feeling for the past, the photos give a sense of the city *with* the people moving through it. Hence, Güler's photographs capture not only the monuments or natural beauties of the city, but most particularly, the people who work with or against it. The photographer comments: "When I photograph Saint Sophia, what matters is the passerby; in other words, life" (Güler 2014, 2006). As Güler points out, a photograph is about life, about what lies beyond the object of the photograph, what invokes narratives feeding possible storylines:

> Fotoğraf, herşeyden önce, mutlaka bir şey anlatmalıdır. Etrafında dönen bir dünya vardır, bu dünyanın içinde bana en duygu verecek, beni en zevklendirecek şey olunca deklanşöre basıyorum. Benim açımdan olay, 'an' çok önemlidir. Olay kaçmamalıdır. İnsanların fotoğrafçısı olarak insanların sevinçlerini dramlarını yaşama tarzlarını korkularını insana ait herşeyi kaydetmek istiyorum. Yani benim için daha önemli olan insanların dramlarının gelecek asırlara kalmasıdır. Çünkü fotoğraf bir kayıt aracıdır ve bir dram, bir şey anlatmalıdır ki, bir netice çıkabilsin, işte o zaman fotoğraf çekici olur (Güler 2014, 2006).

> More than anything else, photographs must absolutely have something to say. There is a world that turns around me. And when something happens within this world that utterly moves or uplifts me, I press my shutter release. As I see it, the "event," the "moment" is all-important. The "event" should not be missed. As a photographer of people, I want to record people's joy, dramas, their attitudes toward life, their fears. Anything and everything that is human. In other

words, what matters to me more is that people's dramas live on in the centuries to come. After all, a photograph is a recording medium, and it should recount something, a drama, if it is to be of consequence. Only then will a photograph have appeal.

Similarly, the monumental structures of the city are brought to life by the everyday lives of the inhabitants who struggle to make ends meet. In this teeming—if decrepit—metropolis, the remnants of an imperial past acquire a looming presence, towering over the figures in the photographs, adding an air of Oriental allure as well as decay.

Fig. 1. Güler photograph (Pamuk 2015, 86).

In this black-and-white photograph of a nocturnal thoroughfare in the city center, the past and the present of the city coexist. It is probably the evening rush hour, with cars and trams cutting across the silhouette of the city: the signature minarets of the Blue Mosque, seen from a distance. The lights of the minarets blend in with the car lights—the old and the new, the monumental and everyday coexist in this shadowy metropolis.

Istanbul's old city remained mostly unchanged until the 1980s, and the historical peninsula kept its charms despite partial modernization. While the old communities were deterritorialized in line with political conflicts and urban policies, the city's population tripled due to the acceleration of immigration, after the 1980s in particular, leading to sudden expansion accompanied by new financial centers, gated communities and shanty towns. The physical spaces had to

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transform rapidly, generating loss of memory both in regard to the physical environment and the stories of everyday life in the city. The retrospective imagery of the city has become part of the everyday since the ongoing large-scale construction projects in the city center are screened by these black-and-white photographic images of the area dating from a century ago. They confirm Svetlana Boym's contention that "the urban renewal taking place in the present is no longer futuristic but nostalgic; the city imagines its future by improvising on its past" (2011, 75). Since the rapid urban transformations cannot fulfill the promises for a better life (Huyssen 1995), people look back at the past fondly. In regard to the rapid change in the city, Pamuk says in an interview that his objective in *Istanbul* is not to mourn the loss of empire and Ottoman Istanbul, but instead to critique the top-down nature of the republican project of modernization. In Pamuk's work, Istanbul is in flux, combining past glory and present decrepitude, extending over the many stories, lives, pasts and presents of its inhabitants and visitors. "Yet, Pamuk's critique, if and when situated within contemporary local debates, can also be interpreted as participating in a displaced critique of the state of urbanism in contemporary Istanbul that manifests itself as nostalgia" (Türeli 2010, 303).

The layers of the image are the clue to Pamuk's text. While the immediate feeling when reading the text is a nostalgia for the past, the book reveals much more. The character's walking throughout the memoir is a creative act inherent in exploring and formulating the urban. Despite the visual dominance of monumental history, Güler's photos embrace life in the city. The distant past of old Istanbul is materialized in the sublime Nuruosmaniye Mosque, showcasing Ottoman architecture in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, in the foreground the constant movement of cars, pedestrians and their ephemeral practices, ruled by the demands of the everyday, stand in sharp contrast.

Conclusion

The Istanbul of today no longer peeks through Güler's black-and-white photographs. Yet many of the themes conveyed in the accompanying photographs of Ara Güler still mark the city. If not black-and-white, it is, nevertheless, a city of contrasts and change with a resulting indistinctness of cultural space. Black-and-white photographs convey a contemporary preoccupation with the lost Istanbul(s); nonetheless, they are instrumental for narrating the dynamism in the everyday life of the city. Through the words and the images in *Istanbul*, the conflicting, dislocated, and fragmentary stories of the urbanscape are both inscribed in the city's collective memory and transformed into an aesthetic whole.

Pamuk's memoir does not attempt to demonstrate the inaccessibility of the truth; instead, the memoir focuses on the aesthetics of the gap, materialized through the combination of word and image, black and white, promising pleasure to the eye and the I, all of which emerge in the text. The city is imagined as static

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yet moving, monumental yet ephemeral, where the personalized visions intermingle with the pasts and the presents of the city. The tension between photographs and memories, movements and monuments, refers to the quintessential metropolitan dynamic of constant vacillation between past and present.

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FEDERICO FASTELLI

SENSO E FUNZIONI DELLA FOTOGRAFIA NELLA POESIA VERBO-VISIVA

ABSTRACT: The essay analyses the essential role of photography in Visual Poetry experimentation, with specific reference to the European context. It aims to exemplify the complexity and aesthetic relevance of this kind of works within the twentieth-century phototexts. It also studies the relations between Visual Poetry and the methodological acquisitions of visual culture studies. In this sense, a paradigmatic sampling of authors (L. Pignotti, L. Ori, E. Miccini, L. Marcucci) is proposed. In them, photography represents, through a constant dialectic with verbal language and pictorial sign, a construction that is a sort of interlingua or super-language to be opposed to advertising.

KEYWORDS: Phototexts, Neo-Avant-Gard, Gruppo 70, Visual Poetry, Visual Studies.

1. Nella proteiforme vicenda degli indirizzi sinestetici che caratterizzano la modernità letteraria, secondo una nota utopia nata col romanticismo, ma, come si sa, genealogicamente di antica discendenza, gli anni Sessanta del Novecento rappresentano un momento liminare. La soglia che vi si inscrive indica una disgiunzione non più ricomposta nel sessantennio successivo. In primo luogo gli anni Sessanta segnano la realizzazione pratica e imprevista, nonché la diffusione capillare di forme espressive che impiegano contemporaneamente più codici comunicativi. Ciò avviene secondo declinazioni avversative e degradate rispetto a quanto inteso dalle posizioni originarie – disalienanti, universalistiche o semplicemente rivoltose che fossero – di poeti ed artisti che, da Baudelaire in poi, si impegnarono a ricomporre quanto Lessing aveva disunito. Non solo la televisione si impone in questa fase a livello mondiale come incarnazione emblematica dell'universo stesso della comunicazione, e lo fa dall'alto della sua pervasività paradigmatica di *mixed-medium*. Ma pure l'intero complesso mediatico della società dello spettacolo (dalla cartellonistica pubblicitaria al fotoromanzo, dall'enigmistica ai fumetti) tende programmaticamente verso modalità inedite di ibridazione sinestetica, ovvero investe sull'alterità dell'immagine le risorse comunicative appartenute un tempo al linguaggio verbale e al testo. Come ha scritto Guy Debord, in effetti, «lo spettacolo è il capitale ad un tal grado di accumulazione da divenire immagine» (Debord 1968, 22). Non per caso, è proprio in questa fase che prendono forma le principali categorie con cui si è (solo più tardi) interpretata la cosiddetta postmodernità, dal rizoma, alla traccia materiale della differenza/differimento, sino al concetto, oggi di centrale rilevanza per gli studi di cultura visuale, di regime scopico. È, in altri termini, tra gli anni Sessanta

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e gli anni Settanta che i parametri con cui la società misura regressioni e progressi, acquisizioni e perdite trovano un assetto simile a quello che ancora oggi utilizziamo (ma che, per la verità, appare ormai in via di dismissione). Non occorre attendere gli anni Novanta, almeno a mio avviso, per avere chiara l'idea di una rivoluzione dell'iconosfera, sebbene sia solo con gli anni Novanta che metodologicamente si è provveduto ad una sostanziale rielaborazione critica degli strumenti con cui possiamo approcciarci ad essa e alle sue variazioni. Con una buona dose d'ottimismo, diamo per buono il postulato teorico per cui in ogni impresa conoscitiva è opportuno almeno distinguere i parametri dagli strumenti. Comunque, se la rivoluzione concettuale dell'iconosfera è perfettamente emblematizzata dalla Pop Art sul piano della dialettica tra rappresentazione artistica e posizione del fruitore entro la società dei consumi di massa, i suoi riflessi, come precipitato generale nell'immaginario degli anni dell'avvento mondiale del cosiddetto neocapitalismo, si rendono perfettamente manifesti nell'opera di artisti assai meno noti e osannati. Per esempio, in una serie di sorprendenti decollage su carta degli anni Sessanta, emblematicamente intitolati *Iconosfera*, Roberto Malquori tematizza l'impatto delle immagini massmediatiche sulla percezione collettiva della storia e dell'attualità, anche a scapito di una testualità ridotta, nella rappresentazione figurativa, a brevi brani pubblicitari o illeggibili didascalie per oggetti di consumo.

2. In secondo luogo, negli anni Sessanta, la ripetizione dell'opposizione radicale e utopica rappresentata compiutamente dall'avanguardia nella forma, a questa altezza cronologica, delle neoavanguardie, porta all'ordine del giorno, e, almeno, alla coscienza dei teorici più avvertiti, la sua stessa impossibilità all'interno di tale rinnovato universo della comunicazione: il momento eroico-patetico delle neoavanguardie corrisponde immediatamente, se si coglie nel segno, al loro momento cinico, per usare l'essenziale terminologia posta da Edoardo Sanguineti (1965). All'anarchica sovversione dell'artista ribelle – e allo *shock* che questi può realmente provocare al pubblico borghese – si deve sostituire la prassi ideologica consapevole dell'artista strategicamente e tatticamente rivoluzionario. Seppure, in entrambi i casi, il gesto d'avanguardia risulterà alla fine velleitario, nel primo l'azione è (almeno apparentemente) spontanea e comunque è condotta in nome di una libertà o di una ricerca del nuovo capaci di cannibalizzare le stantie resistenze della produzione artistica più conservatrice; nel secondo, l'azione, per così dire, suicida dell'avanguardia è progettata razionalmente e preparata rigorosamente sul piano tattico. Il percorso verso l'inevitabile scacco è compiuto, in quest'ultimo caso, in maniera perfettamente cosciente, tutt'al più straniata. Sta, credo, in questa diversa consapevolezza la spiegazione del destino d'oblio toccato agli irriducibili che tra Bruxelles e Parigi, Vienna e Genova, Napoli e Roma, vollero riproporre il candore ribelle delle prime avanguardie nel rinnovato contesto comunicativo che si apre con gli anni Cinquanta. Se Raymond Williams (1958) poteva sostenere, in maniera piuttosto massimalista, che l'intera rivoluzione romantica deve intendersi come reazione all'orrore suscitato negli scrittori inglesi

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dall'apparizione della stampa di massa, allo stesso modo possiamo noi considerare la vicenda complessiva della neoavanguardia, dai *nouveaux romanciers* francesi all'italiano Gruppo 63, come risposta critica (più o meno) consapevolmente ideologizzata alla perturbazione comunicativa imposta dal successo di massa di certi canali mediatici, con in più questa precisazione: mentre gli artisti tardo-romantici e, subito dopo, le avanguardie storiche potevano coltivare il miraggio dell'innocenza e l'illusione, quindi, di un potere antireificante della propria azione artistica nei confronti, diciamo allegoricamente, del museo, le neoavanguardie possono soltanto segnalare la caduta di ogni convinzione sull'efficacia del proprio intervento sociale, e cioè la sostanziale ed oggettiva eteronomia del discorso artistico, o – ancora – il proprio essere situati in un contesto comunicativo fagocitante e onnicomprensivo, nel quale anche la più radicale infrazione alla norma è subito riassorbita. Paradossalmente, nell'irrisolvibile dialettica tra il gesto velleitario e fallimentare – consapevolmente fallimentare – e il proponimento – gramsciano, checché se ne dica – della conquista dell'egemonia consistono l'esemplarità e la rilevanza storica di questi movimenti.

3. In tale contesto, la declinazione neoavanguardista che in maniera meno mediata e per certi versi più ingenua si è incontrata e scontrata con i mutamenti della comunicazione è quella che fa capo alla cosiddetta poesia verbo-visiva. Con l'espressione "poesia verbo visiva" – per la verità – si è inteso storicamente due differenti oggetti: da un lato essa ha indicato in generale la prassi artistica di estensione internazionale e di proporzioni diacroniche assai ampie che prevede forme di visualizzazione dichiarata e per così dire significativa del linguaggio verbale, ovvero, in assoluto, l'interrelazione su di un unico supporto di parola e immagine nelle sue molteplici possibilità, comprendendo perciò assieme ai prodotti pensati come utopica fusione tra i due codici, o *imagetext* per dirlo con Mitchell (1994, 89), anche esperimenti di altra natura, dal carme figurato – e la sua lunga tradizione – alla poesia concreta, dalla tavola parolibera sino alla cosiddetta Nuova scrittura. Dall'altro lato, con poesia visiva si è inteso, più propriamente, la prassi poetica specifica dell'italiano Gruppo 70, fondato a Firenze dai poeti Eugenio Miccini e Lamberto Pignotti nel maggio del 1963, poi allargatosi negli anni Settanta al cosiddetto Gruppo Internazionale di Poesia Visiva, al gruppo Technè e al gruppo di Logomotives. In questo secondo senso, l'espressione "poesia visiva" indica una specifica produzione artistico-letteraria di natura deliberatamente intermediale, caratterizzata da un preciso indirizzo icono-testuale e più spesso foto-testuale col quale praticare quella che Lamberto Pignotti ha definito "una guerriglia semiologica" rispetto alla comunicazione massmediatica negli anni del neocapitalismo. Pur sapendo che non è sempre semplice discriminare in tassonomie ferme i singoli risultati, e che di fatto la poesia visiva eccede i limiti dei gruppi cui poco fa ho accennato, essendo stata praticata,

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effettivamente, sebbene sporadicamente, da molti altri poeti e artisti,[1] preferirei soffermarmi su questa seconda e più limitata accezione del termine. Ciò non tanto perché i traguardi estetici e ideologici raggiunti in tal senso abbiano una qualche priorità – ed anzi credo che essi soffrano, talvolta almeno, di una generica tendenza alla semplificazione, che, specie all'inizio degli anni Sessanta, denuncia forse più spontaneità che strategia, più volontarismo che seria teorizzazione. Piuttosto, nell'ambito dell'interrelazione tra le semiotiche del testo e quelle delle immagini fotografiche, credo che la "poesia visiva" costituisca un capitolo assai significativo e oserei dire pionieristico nell'individuazione sia di una nuova categoria di spettatore e, in generale, rispetto al concetto di spettatorialità – penso ovviamente a Rancière –, sia di una profonda frattura tra un regime del vedere propriamente moderno e uno embrionalmente postmoderno. E si tratta, in quest'ultimo caso, proprio di quel regime visivo che prevede, come ha scritto Régis Debray (2010, 148-149), uno sguardo economico e operativo ideal-tipico dell'epoca audiovisiva. Le recenti acquisizioni metodologiche di cultura visuale, rese familiari anche in area italiana da alcuni autorevoli e direi ormai imprescindibili lavori, permettono quindi una rilettura integrale degli iconotesti e dei fototesti nati nell'ambito di tale esperienza d'avanguardia.

4. Nella comprensione della rilevanza determinante dell'immagine (in ogni sua espressione) non soltanto rispetto al suo noto uso estetico, politico e ideologico, ma nel senso complessivo dell'immagine come atto sociale, il Gruppo 70 sembra metaforicamente ripartire dal motto benjaminiano del "non ho nulla da dire ma soltanto da mostrare". Sin dall'inizio, per Pignotti e compagni, l'intervento poetico consiste, infatti, nell'impiego mediato o immediato dei contenuti "suggeriti dalla nuova situazione socioculturale" (Pignotti 2003, 10). L'idea è, in una prima fase, quella di "adottare i codici tecnologici con lo scopo di farli entrare in crisi" (Pignotti, Stefanelli 2011, 131), attraverso una tecnica detta "collage largo", che consiste nel prelievo dei materiali verbali, ovverosia nella scelta dei sottocodici tecnici individuati nei sintagmi più rappresentativi nei confronti di una determinata situazione storica, generalmente considerata in alcuni suoi momenti emblematici (138), per esempio la guerra del Vietnam, e del montaggio degli stessi secondo sei differenti intenzioni: il calco, la trascrizione, la contaminazione, il paradosso, la ripetizione, la concentrazione. Ai ritagli testuali si aggiungono presto quelli di immagini tratte da rotocalchi e pubblicità. Evidentemente i soli aspetti visuali del linguaggio verbale, che pure stavano alla base delle ricerche concretiste degli anni Cinquanta, sono percepiti come insufficienti dal Gruppo 70, nel senso, forse, che, come direbbe Horst Bredekamp, "le immagini non possono essere collocate davanti o dietro la realtà" (2015, 266). Esse infatti contribuiscono a costruirla: "non sono una sua emanazione, ma una sua condizione necessaria" (*ibid.*). Come si

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[1] Lo dimostrano ad esempio i primi sorprendenti lavori del poeta napoletano Stelio Maria Martini, per non dire della produzione verbovisiva di noti poeti lineari di ambito sperimentale e neoavanguardista, da Nanni Balestrini ad Antonio Porta.

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capisce, "la critica ai mezzi tecnologici diviene […] un momento centrale nelle elaborazioni della poesia visiva traducendosi, oltre che in dichiarazioni di poetica, anche nel tentativo di strutturare un codice alternativo, capace, cioè, di portare alla luce le contraddizioni della tecnologia e le arbitrarietà mistificanti dei suoi linguaggi" (Pignotti, Stefanelli 2011, 129). Questa fase, che inizia con il Convegno fondativo dedicato per l'appunto ad *Arte e comunicazione* e trova precisazione, poi, l'anno successivo, con un secondo Convegno dalla diversa e più analitica titolazione, ovverosia *Arte e tecnologia*, si sostanzia teoreticamente della definizione di *stile tecnologico* avanzata negli stessi anni da Max Bense (1966, 4-9) e soprattutto delle teorie che Pignotti e Miccini deducono, piuttosto arbitrariamente si deve dire, dalla lettura *Praxis ed empirismo* di Giulio Preti (1957): in primo luogo viene assunta una concezione di testo molto ampia, in conformità con la teoria testuale del filosofo tedesco; in secondo luogo si rovescia la posizione di quest'ultimo relativamente alla materialità del segno verbale. Invece che delegare il significato alle possibilità funzionali estetiche e strutturali del segno come elemento nel particolare mondo linguistico dei nessi del testo – questa è propriamente la definizione di poesia concreta –, ovvero costruire analogie disegnate o auto-illustrazioni del testo, come invece avviene nel carme figurato o, per un altro verso, nelle tavole parolibere futuriste, il Gruppo 70 procede alla "sintesi di due sistemi percettivi, quello linguistico e quello iconico, tenuti distinti dalla tradizione delle arti" (Pignotti, Stefanelli 2011, 136). In terzo luogo, attraverso il prodotto iconotestuale, si interviene in maniera oppositiva nell'agone di una comunicazione che, pur sclerotizzata e alienante, è letta con la mediazione di Giulio Preti come il fondamento creativo e dinamico della cultura stessa. In opere come *La cultura di massa* (1964) o *L'impegno degli scrittori d'avanguardia* (1966) di Pignotti, si ha l'esempio di una esplicita dichiarazione di poetica. La seconda, in particolare, tematizza in maniera immediata l'utopica volontà di utilizzare in ambito estetico la lingua verbovisiva della comunicazione massmediatica: la traduzione dell'impegno artistico dell'avanguardia – che è già di per sé politico – vorrebbe estrinsecarsi infatti in una sintassi capace di coinvolgere parola e immagine, un neo-volgare – come dirà più tardi la poetessa visiva Lucia Marcucci – che, d'altra parte, è già, secondo il Gruppo 70, la lingua reale della comunicazione, e che occorre grammaticalizzare, piegandola così a fini estetici e soprattutto di critica sociale. Donde opere di aperta contestazione dei modelli dominanti della società massmediatica, come *Più bella* (1963) di Luciano Ori, dove il fotomontaggio reiterato sullo stesso volto femminile ironizza sulla pratica del *maquillage* e indovina la pratica "mostrificante" cui la chirurgia estetica ci ha oggi abituati. Oppure come *Sana come il pane quotidiano* (1963) di Ketty la Rocca: qui l'immagine della donna occidentale avvenente e sessualmente maliziosa – come immediata incarnazione del desiderio nella comunicazione pubblicitaria – è paragonata alla santità del pane, in stridente contrasto con l'immagine ritagliata di una donna vietnamita che condivide del riso con i propri figli. E, d'altra parte, la connessione tra appetito/desiderio e economia capitalista è questione assai rappresentata dai poeti verbovisivi. La ritroviamo, per esempio,

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anche in *L'appetito vien mangiando* di Lucia Marcucci. Alcune icone dell'industria alimentare come Simmenthal o il formaggio Galbani emergono in questo caso dal fondo costituito da una pagina di Sismonde de Sismondi dedicata agli usi culinari delle civiltà contadine. L'espressione del desiderio è naturalmente allegorizzata dalle labbra femminili sovrapposte all'immagine in posizione verticale, che richiamano l'ancestrale associazione bocca-vagina e dunque si connettono al titolo dell'opera: l'appetito vien mangiando è molto di più di uno slogan pubblicitario tratto da un noto proverbio. È, si potrebbe dire, uno slogan assoluto della società dei consumi.

5. Sarà chiaro dai pochi esempi proposti che in questa prima fase l'obiettivo è riconquistare un'egemonia comunicativa che la televisione e la pubblicità hanno precedentemente strappato proprio alla letteratura. Cercando di cambiare di segno il messaggio pubblicitario, lo spazio che gli iconotesti tecnologici creano è tuttavia uno spazio palesemente contraddittorio: sembrerebbe ovvio che a sostenere l'intera poetica del gruppo vi sia la ferma fiducia nel potere pervasivo delle immagini. Probabilmente, a questa altezza cronologica, il Gruppo 70 considera le immagini – parafrasando una celebre pagina di Mitchell – più potenti di quanto non siano in realtà. Il fine è quello di esercitare a posteriori una forma in fondo semplice di smascheramento critico e di opposizione politica. D'altra parte, la scelta di una pratica intermediale che di per sé è immediatamente transmediale risulta già una forma di interrogazione complessiva sulla subalternità dell'immagine rispetto al *logos* verbale. In effetti il disancoraggio dell'immagine pubblicitaria ritagliata dal testo d'origine, che ne intrappolava il significato in precise catene semantiche, mostra implicitamente la sostanziale impotenza dell'immagine nuda. Lo *studium* delle immagini pubblicitarie, il loro valore informativo, ovvero le canoniche funzioni di mostrare l'oggetto, le qualità e l'uso che se ne può fare, e ancora, la capacità di impreziosirlo o di testimoniarne l'importanza sociale vengono facilmente sovvertite, come si vede, per fare qualche altro esempio, in *Non facciamo le solite cose* (1965) ancora di Luciano Ori – e si deve prestare attenzione a come le immagini del bidet, degli slip anatomici e dell'orologio tratte da alcune note pubblicità dell'epoca perdano completamente il valore informazionale che possedevano nell'uso precedente. Oppure in *Superleopardi* di Lamberto Pignotti (1963), nel quale è proprio Giacomo Leopardi, con il suo *Infinito*, ad essere reclamizzato, diventando "super". Un Leopardi "nuovo" e soprattutto "utile", come un qualsiasi elettrodomestico moderno, come la lavatrice, il forno o la televisione. Un Leopardi, allo stesso tempo, "vivo" e addirittura "insuperabile", sebbene non si riesca più a capire se è il grande poeta a venir degradato al rango delle merci in vendita, o siano le merci ad essere elevate al rango della grande poesia. Ciò che è certo è che Pignotti ha perfetta consapevolezza del fatto che, come recita un noto brano del *Laborintus* sanguinetiano, riceviamo la qualità dai tempi. E, perciò, non ha alcun timore nel portare questa consapevolezza alle estreme conseguenze. Comunque sia, delle immagini fotografiche della pubblicità, in tal modo, non resta che il *punctum* a

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stimolare, come prima della transmediazione praticata dal ritaglio, i luoghi nevralgici dell'io nello spirito neocapitalista: l'autoconservazione, l'autoaffermazione e l'autoassicurazione – secondo un'ipotesi, ancora acerba a questa altezza cronologica, ma che, sostanzialmente, pretende di trasporre il consumo di oggetti in consumo di cultura. Occorre attendere le tarde opere di Lucia Marcucci per vedere perfezionato e compiuto questo processo, come si capisce dalla serie *Ecce femina docta* – siamo nei primi anni del Duemila. Qui la retorica della pubblicità non è più sovvertita, ma utilizzata deliberatamente per reclamizzare il prodotto *Donna colta*. L'immagine femminile come simbolo oggettivato nell'universo di significati creati dall'uomo viene risemantizzata e quindi sottratta al dominio da cui proviene: è solo a partire da quell'immagine, quindi, che si può riformulare una nuova e libera identità femminile.

6. In nessun caso la poesia visiva si configura come un ordinamento assiologico della produzione culturale: non si tratta mai di rivendicare la superiorità della letteratura lineare o dell'arte visiva rispetto a forme di comunicazione percepite tradizionalmente come degradate, ad esempio la pubblicità, ma anche il fumetto o l'enigmistica. Al contrario, il proponimento, forse paradossale, è di riallacciare il rapporto tra messaggio poetico e destinatario secondo un'idea di poesia come bene pubblico e collettivo:

> il contesto – sottoposto a critica ideologica – veniva evocato mediante l'uso di caratteri tipografici o di immagini fotografiche particolari; ma il senso profondo di tali sperimentazioni – magari non sempre portato a livello di piena consapevolezza – era ed è la creazione di un rapporto propriamente interlinguistico tra due codici diversi (quello iconico e quello verbale) tramite un impatto non mediato tra brani di linguaggio verbale e spezzoni di linguaggio visivo (Pignotti-Stefanelli 2011, 149).

Si dovrà quindi fare attenzione al fatto che i poeti verbovisivi concepiscono già nei primi anni Sessanta la cultura come processo di interrelazione tra le forme della rappresentazione, con particolare attenzione per la rappresentazione del corpo, e le istituzioni che ne sovrintendono il funzionamento. Effettivamente, appare quasi naturale da questo punto di vista l'evoluzione cui si assiste a partire dagli anni Settanta: il Gruppo 70 si scioglie già nel 1969, ma tutti i suoi animatori continuano a praticare poesia visiva, passando, come scrive Luciano Ori, "dalla guerriglia semiologica all'appropriazione dei codici di tutte le diverse aree di comunicazione ed espressione artistica" (Ori 1979, 10). Spesso, tale allargamento espressivo coincide con una postura politica maggiormente incline al radicalismo, come dimostrano le opere del Gruppo Internazionale di Poesia Visiva, di cui fanno parte poeti visivi, concreti e performativi come il belga Paul De Vree, i francesi Julien Blaine e Jean-François Bory, l'americano Alain Arias Misson, e gli italiani Sarenco (Isaia Mabellini, all'anagrafe) e Eugenio Miccini. Il *Piano regolatore insurrezionale della città di Firenze* (1972) realizzato da quest'ultimo può essere preso a modello di questa seconda fase: si tratta di una serie di cartoline numerate

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e ordinate[2], che diventano, con effetto paradossale, strumento ironico per mettere in atto una insurrezione nel capoluogo toscano.

7. Con intuitiva consapevolezza di un mutamento epocale del visibile, e quindi anche del dicibile e del fattibile, i poeti verbovisivi elaborano pionieristicamente una retorica dell'immagine intendendola come sempre relata alle retoriche dello sguardo, dei media e del dispositivo. Non solo, infatti, tutta la poesia visiva può essere concepita come una modalità peculiare di *showing seeing*, poiché espone artisticamente e analizza criticamente l'atto stesso del vedere nelle sue diverse declinazioni massmediali. Ma soprattutto è solo pensando alla visione come pratica sempre tecnicamente, socialmente e storicamente situata che si spiega la straordinaria attenzione del Gruppo 70 per ciò che, con Michele Cometa, possiamo chiamare retorica dei *parerga* (Cometa 2016): la produzione verbovisiva, in effetti, sperimenta nel corso degli anni, soluzioni eccezionalmente differenti, creando fototesti su supporti che vanno dal quadro al manifesto, dal formato libro – pur in modalità assai specifiche, come dimostra il lavoro generoso e raffinato di Enrico Riccardo Sampietro – sino al riuso di media inattivi, come vecchi televisori o telefonini. Se, quindi, la poesia visiva tende sempre a rappresentare implicitamente o esplicitamente lo sguardo stesso – e penso ad opere di Eugenio Miccini come *Il volto* e *Ogni volta che dico io* –, pure, talvolta, finisce per dar luogo a delle vere e proprie *metapictures*, come nel caso della serie di collage su televisori realizzati da Lucia Marcucci alla fine degli anni Novanta. I brani tratti dai rotocalchi e le immagini pubblicitarie sono qui riportati sugli schermi spenti dei vecchi apparecchi, e creano una sorta di ambigua tautologia, se mi si passa il termine. Come dire, per capirsi, "questa non è un'immagine massmediatica".

8. L'uso della fotografia nella sperimentazione verbovisiva raggiunge traguardi particolarmente notevoli con l'opera della più sfortunata e forse della più talentuosa tra le artiste che militarono nel Gruppo 70, ovverosia Ketty La Rocca. Se il fototesto, come spiega Cometa, mette in scena su di un unico supporto mediale l'irriducibilità della differenza tra il medium fotografico e il medium letterario, nell'opera di La Rocca la fotografia supplisce palesemente anche al ruolo del terzo escluso di questa storica dialettica: il gesto. È così che si devono interpretare opere come il libro d'artista senza titolo del 1974, costituito di soli ritratti fotografici dell'autrice, dove l'espressione facciale tende a creare una sintassi e una narrazione per immagini, e il linguaggio non verbale del volto si fa unità minima di una grammatica della visione. Oppure il capolavoro *In principio erat*, dove le fotografie delle mani dell'artista alludono ad una stagione primigenia dell'uomo, che precede il linguaggio. Si è di fronte, in questo caso, ad una rappresentazione potentemente espressiva, ma programmaticamente muta, di quel luogo originale che era, appunto, in principio, cioè prima del verbo. In questo luogo

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[2] Il *Piano regolatore insurrezionale* è stato pubblicato sia in forma di serigrafie che in formato di libro, in una raffinata edizione approntata dall'editore bolognese Enrico Riccardo Sampietro.

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privo di tempo, il significato deve concepirsi sempre come già compiuto – cioè mai differito. L'estensione dello scarto tra verbale e visuale è colmata, allora, da qualcosa di anteriore. Il gesto, sommerso e rimosso nella società moderna, precede ogni significazione e fonda la cultura. Ma in questo senso, se ci si pensa bene, tutta l'attività del Gruppo 70 sembra indicare nient'altro che la rimozione del gesto, così come alluso, assai raffinatamente, da Ketty La Rocca. In una nota fotografia che emblematizza un momento della performance *Poesie e no*, si vede Miccini inginocchiato nell'atto di declamare un testo, mentre, alle sue spalle Pignotti e Bueno sono impegnati ad affiggere un manifesto. Né il suono delle parole, né la loro rappresentazione visiva, tuttavia, occupano il centro dell'immagine. Qui, a favore di camera, Lucia Marcucci, circondata metaforicamente da parole scritte e parole dette, sorseggia una Coca-Cola: un gesto innocente che riassume la logica del consumo in epoca neocapitalista e che significa molto di più di quanto se ne possa scrivere o dire.

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LAURENCE PETIT

BRIEF LIVES (JULIA ET MOI) D'ANITA BROOKNER (1990)

ou L'Invitation au dernier voyage

ABSTRACT: Drawing from Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, Jean-Marie Schaeffer, Georges Didi-Huberman, and Julia Kristeva, this essay examines the way in which this novel, through the sudden irruption of the Real of death (in the Lacanian sense)—already contained by nature in the image, but duplicated here in a most theatrical, if not hallucinatory manner—, comes to thwart what is in fact a relatively common photographic apparatus in which the inaugural "memory-photograph" triggers off in the female narrator a hermeneutic quest—as well as its resolution—in an essentialist perspective aiming at presenting the self—that is to say, Julia, the subject matter of the photograph—in its essential truth. Indeed, if the inaugural photograph tells about death in the literal sense in that it comes with Julia's obituary, it also "signifies" the narrator's death by becoming, more than a mere starter or shifter for the initial narrative, an invitation—an injunction even—to the final journey. The narrative indeed ends with the prophetic "You might give it a try one of these days", with which the deceased Julia seems to address the narrator from beyond death. As a result, the increasingly irresistible fascination that Fay seems to feel for this "mirror-photograph" in which she immerses herself to the point of drowning makes it possible to rethink the narrative no longer as an elegiac and truthful reminiscence (the newspaper obituary as the modern-day elegy), or even as an extended funeral oration, but rather as the symptom of a hidden, deep-rooted, and morbid melancholy which, for me, characterizes Anita Brookner's entire oeuvre.

KEYWORDS: Anita Brookner, *Brief Lives,* Photography, Trauma, Melancholy.

En parcourant les avis de décès du *Times*, Fay Langdon, qui approche des soixante-dix ans, apprend la mort de l'actrice Julia Wilberforce, qu'elle n'a pas revue depuis cinq ans. Le choc que procure à Fay la photo de Julia, jeune, au sommet de sa gloire, à la fin des années trente, l'amène à méditer sur la relation qui les a unies pendant tant d'années en dépit du peu d'affection qu'elles éprouvaient l'une pour l'autre. A mi-chemin entre nécrologie, autobiographie, et photobiographie, ce roman à la structure circulaire, qui s'ouvre et se clôt sur la photo *in absentia* de Julia scrutée par la narratrice Fay, se présente ainsi comme une longue anamnèse à la première personne dans laquelle Fay retrace la double histoire de sa vie et de celle de Julia. Le parcours des deux femmes apparaît en effet comme intimement mêlé dans cet univers théâtral et cinématographique narcissique, exhibitionniste, incestueux et endogame, régi par le spéculaire, le

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spectaculaire et le spectral, dans lequel miroirs et photographies décuplent à l'infini un soi perçu comme totalement aliéné à l'image.

En m'appuyant sur les écrits théoriques de Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, Jean-Marie Schaeffer, Georges Didi-Huberman et Julia Kristeva, je me propose de montrer comment ce roman vient en fait, par l'irruption brutale du Réel de la mort (au sens lacanien) – déjà contenue par nature dans l'image, mais dupliquée ici de manière très théâtrale, voire hallucinatoire –, déjouer un dispositif photographique de facture somme toute assez classique, par lequel la photo-souvenir inaugurale déclenche chez la narratrice une quête de type herméneutique – et sa résolution – dans une perspective essentialiste visant à présenter l'être – à savoir Julia, le sujet de la photographie – dans sa vérité. En effet, si la photographie inaugurale "dit" la mort au sens littéral en ce qu'elle accompagne l'avis de décès de Julia tel qu'il est rédigé et publié dans le *Times*, elle vient aussi dire, au sens de signifier, la mort de la narratrice, en devenant, au-delà d'un simple embrayeur de récit initial, une invitation ultime, voire une injonction, au dernier voyage. Le récit se clôt en effet par le prophétique « You might give it a try one of these days » (Brookner 1990, 217), que semble lancer à la narratrice, par-delà la mort, la défunte Julia, et la fascination de plus en plus irrésistible que semble exercer sur Fay cette photo-miroir dans laquelle elle plonge et menace de sombrer permet de repenser le récit non plus en tant que réminiscence de nature élégiaque (l'avis de décès comme élégie des temps modernes), ou même en tant que longue oraison funèbre, mais plutôt comme le symptôme d'une profonde mélancolie morbide qui, à mon sens, caractérise plus généralement toute l'œuvre de Brookner.

Mais commençons par un bref résumé de l'histoire: Fay Dodworth, fille unique choyée par des parents cinéphiles, connaît une enfance et une adolescence heureuses jusqu'à la mort brutale de son père, qui marque le premier épisode douloureux de son existence. Alors qu'elle jouit d'une certaine célébrité comme soprano dans des émissions pour la radio, elle fait la connaissance d'Owen Langdon, un riche et bel avocat qui l'épouse peu après mais lui fait renoncer à sa carrière. C'est par l'intermédiaire d'Owen qu'elle rencontre Julia Wilberforce, la femme de son associé Charlie Morton. Bien que les deux femmes aient peu d'affinités, l'amitié qui lie leurs maris les amène à se fréquenter et même à passer ensemble à plusieurs reprises des vacances dans le sud de la France. Julia est une femme très belle et très narcissique, qui traite son mari en esclave et utilise tous ceux qui, de près ou de loin, l'entourent. Fay, qui éprouve pour Julia à la fois de l'admiration et de la répulsion, n'échappe pas à ce schéma. Lorsqu'Owen se tue à cinquante-deux ans dans un accident de voiture dans le midi de la France et que Charlie devient l'amant de Fay, celle-ci évite volontairement Julia, mais bientôt Charlie meurt à son tour d'une crise cardiaque, et Julia, qui ne sort presque plus de chez elle, cherche à exercer à nouveau son emprise sur Fay. Julia est désormais une vieille femme acariâtre et cruelle qui garde le lit et requiert une attention constante. Jalouse de l'amitié ambiguë que Fay a nouée avec un médecin, Alan Carter, elle fait en sorte, à distance, de gâcher leur relation, et y

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parvient, au grand désespoir de Fay qui espérait trouver en Alan Carter le compagnon de ses vieux jours. En dépit du ressentiment qu'elle éprouve pour Julia, Fay accomplit néanmoins un ultime et noble acte : sachant la solitude intense dans laquelle se trouve Julia et les liens très forts qui l'unissent à son frère beaucoup plus jeune, elle organise le départ définitif de Julia pour l'Espagne où celui-ci réside. Le départ de Julia, tel que se le remémore Fay à l'annonce de son décès, est à l'image des relations ambivalentes des deux femmes, qui sont à la fois émues et soulagées de se quitter.

Raconté ainsi, le roman peut paraître quelque peu superficiel, ce que n'ont pas manqué de souligner les critiques, dont les commentaires acerbes au fil des ans ont peu à peu relégué au deuxième plan une romancière pourtant couronnée en 1984 par le Booker Prize, le plus prestigieux prix littéraire anglais, pour son roman *Hotel du Lac*, et – fait plus intéressant encore pour nous dans la perspective des rapports texte image –, par ailleurs reconnue sur le plan international en tant qu'historienne de l'art, spécialiste de la peinture française du XVIIIème siècle. Or c'est précisément l'intérêt des enjeux photolittéraires de ce roman que la critique semble avoir totalement délaissé et que je me propose d'étudier.

> Julia died. I read it in *The Times* this morning. There was quite a substantial obituary, but what immediately fixed my attention was the photograph, one of those studio portraits of the late 1930s or early 1940s, all huge semi-transparent eyes, flat hair, and dark lipstick. I never liked her, nor did she like me; strange, then, how we managed to keep up a sort of friendship for so long. (Brookner 1990, 1).

Ainsi s'ouvre le roman *Brief Lives*, dont on peut traduire l'incipit par ces mots :

> Julia est morte. Je l'ai appris dans le *Times* ce matin. Il y avait un avis de décès assez long, mais ce qui m'a tout de suite frappée, c'est la photo qui l'accompagnait, un de ces portraits de photographe professionnel de la fin des années 30, ou du début des années 40, avec d'immenses yeux semi-transparents, des cheveux très plats et un rouge à lèvres très sombre. Je ne l'ai jamais aimée, et elle ne m'a jamais aimée non plus. C'est étrange que nous ayons pourtant réussi à préserver cette sorte d'amitié pendant tant d'années.[1]

Plus que le texte qui l'accompagne, c'est donc la photo jointe à l'avis de décès de Julia qui provoque d'emblée chez Fay ce que Barthes et Sontag appellent respectivement le « choc photographique » (Barthes 1980, 51) ou « choc visuel » (Sontag 1973, 97). Dans le contexte commémoratif de l'avis de décès, la « photo-souvenir », pour reprendre la formulation de Jean-Marie Schaeffer (1987, 88), déclenche le « souvenir involontaire » (*ibid*.), en l'occurrence de vacances passées avec Julia et son mari dans le sud de la France (« I can see us now, strolling along Riviera esplanades in white pleated skirts, our husbands chatting behind us », Brookner 1990, 1; « Je nous revois avec nos jupes

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[1] Ma traduction (valable pour l'ensemble du texte).

plissées blanches, en promenade au bord de la mer sur la Côte d'Azur, tandis que nos maris bavardaient derrière nous »). La photographie inaugurale est ainsi le point de départ d'un long processus remémoratif ou anamnétique de la part de Fay – processus qui ne prendra fin qu'à la toute dernière ligne du roman –, par lequel cette photo « qui l'anime et qu'[elle] anime », pour paraphraser Barthes dans *La Chambre claire* (1980, 39), va faire l'objet d'un « commentaire verbal para-iconique » (Schaeffer 1987, 109) ou d'une « construction réminiscente » pour « essayer dire l'image », deux formulations de Didi-Huberman dans son ouvrage *Essayer voir* (2014, 17, 72). « 'Essayer dire une image', cela commence, en tout cas, le plus souvent, par une tentative pour la décrire », déclare Didi-Huberman (2014, 72), et c'est bien par une ekphrasis de la photo inaugurale que s'ouvre le roman, ekphrasis « notionnelle », selon l'expression de James Heffernan dans *Museum of Words* (1993), puisqu'il s'agit d'une photo fictive, présentée qui plus est, comme toujours avec les images chez Brookner – qu'il s'agisse de peintures ou de photographies –, *in absentia*. Il s'agit aussi « d'essayer dire l'image » à de multiples niveaux, puisque tout au long du roman, Julia, l'actrice professionnelle très soucieuse de son apparence, très maquillée, vêtue de toilettes extravagantes et adoptant sans cesse des poses éminemment théâtrales, n'est au fond qu'image – elle est d'ailleurs décrite par Fay comme « iconique » (Brookner 1990, 44) – ou peut-être qu'images (au pluriel), à l'instar de cette « image d'image » que représente la photo de l'incipit, photo de genre (le portrait de photographe) codée et construite selon des règles, des artifices (par exemple, le maquillage sombre) et des poses bien particulières. En scrutant la photo pour comprendre les raisons du choc qu'elle a éprouvé, Fay entame une démarche de type herméneutique qui l'amène à interroger la nature de cette pseudo-amitié qui les a liées quasiment toute leur vie, et par-delà cette « étrange » amitié, à interroger la nature même de Julia. Il est intéressant de constater que cette quête s'apparente totalement à celle de Barthes devant la photographie de sa mère dans *La Chambre Claire* ou au raisonnement tenu par Sontag dans *On Photography*. Dans les trois cas, il s'agit d'une démarche essentialiste visant à « révéler », au double sens du terme, à « dévoiler », ce qui est « caché » (Sontag 1973, 121), « l'essence » du sujet photographié, sa « vérité », son « être » (Barthes 1980, 155), afin d'aboutir, selon Schaeffer, à une « présentification de l'essence dans l'apparaître » (Schaeffer 1987, 175) propre selon lui à l'esthétique romantique, esthétique d'ailleurs chère à Brookner qui a écrit un ouvrage d'histoire de l'art à ce sujet, intitulé *Romanticism and its Discontents* (« Malaise dans le Romantisme », Brookner 2000). La « stratégie réflexive » (Schaeffer 1987, 133) qui se met en place par le biais d'un commentaire verbal « para-iconique » qui « sature l'image » (109), dans le cadre plus général de ce qu'il nomme une « herméneutique linguistique » (161) dont le terrain d'investigation va être un savoir latéral situé dans le « hors-champ » de l'image (120), a pour but de « présenter l'être dans sa vérité » (175), la photographie étant censée révéler ce « moment propice » (186) où le caractère entier se dévoile, à la façon du « moment décisif » de Cartier-Bresson. Ce qui est

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frappant dans le roman de Brookner, c'est que cette révélation quant à « l'être vrai » de Julia intervient en fait dans un deuxième temps seulement, et ce bien plus tard dans le roman, en l'occurrence à sa toute fin, lorsque la narratrice se remémore une deuxième photographie, cette fois du frère de Julia, photographie que celle-ci lui avait montrée par le passé, et dont l'ekphrasis, dans une sorte de mise en abyme de l'incipit, va déclencher le processus heuristique :

> She had once shown me a photograph of a handsome enough young man in an open-necked shirt; the photograph, which had been taken some time ago, was faded, but one could see that the teeth were bad even then. He was part of Julia's personal mythology. (Brookner 1990, 199).

> Elle m'avait montré la photo d'un jeune homme assez beau qui portait une chemise dont le col était ouvert ; la photo, qui avait été prise un certain temps auparavant, ne se voyait plus distinctement, mais on pouvait constater qu'il avait de vilaines dents déjà à cette époque. Il faisait partie de la mythologie personnelle de Julia.

Lorsque Fay, animée à la fois par un sentiment de pitié et par le désir de se débarrasser de Julia, évoque avec elle la possibilité qu'elle aille rendre visite à ce frère chéri par-dessus tout dont elle ne cache d'ailleurs pas la nature incestueuse des liens qui les ont unis – à l'instar de ceux qui l'unissaient d'ailleurs à ce père également chéri, dont la photo occupe elle aussi une place de choix sur sa table de chevet (Brookner 1990, 5) –, le ou plutôt les masques tombent et Julia, abandonnant pour la toute première fois son expression « sardonique » habituelle (Brookner 1990, 213), s'effondre en larmes et reconnaît à quel point Gerald lui a manqué : « With those words an incredible thing happened: tears came into her eyes, into those adamantine eyes whose gaze fell so pitilessly on others » (Brookner 1990, 205) : « A ces mots, il se passa quelque chose d'incroyable : des larmes lui vinrent aux yeux, ces mêmes yeux inflexibles qui regardaient le monde avec si peu de pitié ». Fay a alors la conviction que sa quête herméneutique est arrivée à son terme, que l'énigme que représentait Julia est résolue, et que le puzzle est ainsi reconstitué : « … as I thought about it the final piece of her enigmatic personality seemed to fall into place » (Brookner 1990, 200) : « … et alors que cette pensée me traversait l'esprit, la dernière pièce de son énigmatique personnalité sembla se mettre en place ».

On est ainsi passé d'un statut phénoménologique de l'image photographique, avec la photo inaugurale affichée à la fois dans le *Times* et à l'incipit du roman, à un statut épistémologique de cette même image à mesure qu'elle est à la fois construite par le texte (l'ekphrasis initiale étant, nous l'avons vu, purement notionnelle) et déconstruite dans la quête herméneutique, et c'est donc bien la deuxième photographie qui « révèle » la première en en faisant apparaître le sens. On pourrait presque dire, malgré la nature externe de cette deuxième photo, qu'elle fonctionne néanmoins un peu comme le « punctum » de la première, puisqu'elle représente bien, selon la définition de Barthes, ce « supplément » que j'ajoute à la photo « et qui cependant y est déjà » (Barthes 1980, 89), ce « hors

champ subtil » qui « lance le désir au-delà de ce qu'elle donne à voir » (Barthes 1980, 93), cette notion de « désir » étant ironiquement, dans le cas qui nous occupe, à entendre à la fois littéralement et métaphoriquement. Il me semble néanmoins qu'il serait réducteur d'arrêter là l'analyse car si, d'entrée de jeu, la narration semble se focaliser sur le personnage de Julia, c'est bien parce qu'elle représente, par sa nature iconique et son statut de défunte – et par conséquent plus encore que n'importe quel autre sujet photographié déjà réduit, comme l'ont montré Barthes et Sontag, à l'état de spectre ou de fantôme par l'acte photographique –, ce que Barthes dans *La Chambre claire* nomme le « Tout-Image » (Barthes 1980, 31), ce « Spectrum » qui a trait à la fois au spectacle et à la mort (Barthes 1980, 23). Car si la photo, déjà par nature pour le critique ce « théâtre mort de la Mort » (Barthes 1980, 141), est bien le théâtre dans lequel l'actrice Julia continue de se produire, surgissant sur la page du journal et à la vue de Fay comme une résurgence du passé ou une résurrection, ce à quoi la photo renvoie Fay est sa propre mort, qu'elle lui met en quelque sorte sous les yeux, qu'elle lui annonce : « Au bout de cette première mort (inscrite dans la photo), ma propre mort est inscrite », écrit Barthes (1980, 145); « photographs are portents of death » (« les photos sont des présages de la mort »), écrira pour sa part Sontag (1973, 70). Cet aspect prémonitoire des photographies pour Sontag se retrouve en effet à la toute fin du roman lorsque Fay n'est plus, dans la lecture interprétative de la photo, « ce sujet instance de maîtrise qui instaure le sens », pour reprendre les termes de Schaeffer (Schaeffer 1987, 175), mais se retrouve justement dépossédée de cette maîtrise en s'imaginant vivre une expérience de nature quasiment hallucinatoire dans laquelle Julia, semblant communiquer avec elle depuis l'au-delà, l'enjoint à goûter aux plaisirs de la mort :

> So irrelevant did her death seem that I almost looked forward to discussing it with her, felt something like a quickening of interest. 'What was it like?' I should have asked. The eyelids would have come down again as she considered. 'Not all that bad,' I can hear her say, in her almost famous throw-away tone. 'You might give it a try one of these days.' (Brookner 1990, 217).

> Sa mort était devenue tellement banale que j'avais presque l'envie d'en discuter avec elle et sentais mon intérêt croire. « C'était comment ? » lui aurais-je demandé. Les paupières se seraient abaissées à nouveau tandis qu'elle réfléchissait. « Pas si mal que ça », je l'entends me dire, avec ce ton détaché qui lui était propre. « Tu devrais essayer un de ces jours ».

La photo se fait alors réellement « médium », comme le dit Barthes (1980, 177), non pas tant annonciatrice d'une « catastrophe » (150) que porteuse d'une fascination mortifère que Barthes appelle la « mélancolie même de la photographie » (124). La photo inaugurale qui, d'emblée, disait littéralement la mort en accompagnant l'avis de décès, acquiert alors un pouvoir performatif en signifiant à Fay sa propre mort, en la lui suggérant, en la lui enjoignant. Le désir incestueux et endogame, qui depuis le début, semblait dominer ce huis clos

spéculaire et spectral, se fait plus clairement mortifère, et la photographie perd son statut commémoratif et élégiaque pour devenir ouvertement mélancolique.

J'ai déjà souligné ailleurs les liens étroits qui unissaient peinture et mélancolie dans l'ensemble des romans d'Anita Brookner (Petit 2014). Cette tendance mélancolique est ce qui pousse Frances Restuccia, dans son article « Tales of Beauty: Aestheticizing Female Melancholia » (« Contes de la beauté, ou comment esthétiser la mélancolie féminine »), et Deborah Horvitz, dans son article « Representations of the Dynamics among Mothers, Melancholia, and Men » (« Représentations de la dynamique qui se crée entre les mères, la mélancolie et les hommes ») – recension critique de l'ouvrage de Restuccia sur les représentations de la dépression féminine et des violences conjugales –, à ranger Anita Brookner parmi les écrivains femmes qui se caractérisent par ce que Restuccia nomme une « écriture mélancolique kristévane » (Restuccia 1996, 353), « mélancolie masochiste » (Restuccia 1996, 364) induite, d'après elle, par le trauma causé par la mort de la mère. Si j'ai choisi dans cet essai de ne pas explorer la possibilité d'un lien entre la mort de Julia et le décès (toujours) traumatique de la mère dans la fiction brooknérienne – bien qu'on puisse voir d'intéressants parallèles entre Julia et la figure de la mère théâtrale dans le premier roman de Brookner, *A Start in Life* (*La vie, quelque part*), par exemple –, je suis frappée par la parenté qui existe entre le roman *Brief Lives* (*Julia et moi*) et le cinquième roman de Brookner, *Family and Friends* (*Sofka*), le roman qui, dans toute l'œuvre de l'écrivain, utilise la photographie de la façon la plus spectaculaire, par le truchement de photos de mariage fictives regroupées dans un album de famille feuilleté par un narrateur ou une narratrice anonyme. J'ai montré comment, dans ce roman (Petit 2018), l'utilisation que fait Brookner de ces images photographiques pouvait être vue comme le retour du refoulé, à savoir la Shoah, à peine évoquée, et pourtant omniprésente dans son œuvre, Brookner étant la fille de Juifs en exil, « des gens très abîmés psychiquement » (« damaged people »), comme elle le déclarait dans une interview réalisée par Shusha Guppy en 1987 (Guppy 1987). La Shoah est elle aussi suggérée dans *Brief Lives* au détour d'une page lorsque la narratrice, associant dans un même âge d'or ou « rêve d'innocence » la période de la jeunesse (sa jeunesse) avec le cinéma des années trente, celui de l'avant-guerre, évoque ensuite la quasi-destruction de ce mythe par l'irruption de scènes de la vie réelle que « personne, homme ou femme, n'aurait jamais dû voir », allusion voilée aux atrocités de la seconde guerre mondiale et au génocide des Juifs :

> Those innocent films of the late 30s and early 40s influenced the outlook and the behaviour of a generation or two of young men and women […] Women with small children always appeared to me to be middle-aged when I was a child, while the cinema was the world of eternal youth. I learned, when I grew older, that eternal youth is too precious a delusion ever to be relinquished: it has to find a place somewhere, be enshrined in a myth, an ideal, even a fantasy. In those days before the war we lived a dream of innocence that the war years did not

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entirely shatter, even when we had seen sights which should never be seen by anyone, man or woman. (Brookner 1990, 13).

Ces films innocents de la fin des années trente et du début des années quarante eurent une influence sur la façon de s'habiller et de se comporter d'une, voire de deux, générations de jeunes hommes et de jeunes femmes […] Quand j'étais enfant, les femmes qui avaient des enfants en bas âge me semblaient avoir renoncé à leur jeunesse, tandis que le cinéma représentait au contraire le monde de l'éternelle jeunesse. J'ai appris, en vieillissant, que l'éternelle jeunesse était une illusion bien trop précieuse pour que l'on n'y renonce jamais. Il lui faut trouver une place quelque part, être vénérée dans un mythe, un idéal, ou même un fantasme. Durant cette époque de l'avant-guerre, nous vivions un rêve d'innocence que les années de guerre n'ont pas totalement détruit, même après avoir été témoins de scènes que personne, homme ou femme, n'aurait jamais dû voir.

Par ailleurs, un certain nombre d'éléments de la photo inaugurale accompagnant l'avis de décès, tels que l'ancrage référentiel de cette photo – la fin des années trente ou le début des années quarante (« the late 1930s or early 1940s », Brookner 1990, 1) – en pleine période de montée et apogée du nazisme, la maigreur quasi famélique de Julia (« as if there is too little flesh to protect the bones », Brookner 1990, 1), ou encore la fixité de son regard quasi spectral (« all huge semi-transparent eyes », Brookner 1990, 1) contribuent, rétrospectivement, à renforcer, comme dans le roman *Family and Friends*, cette présence indirecte de la Shoah dans le texte. On pourrait ainsi voir, à la fois dans cette photo matricielle de *Brief Lives* et dans la récurrence, dans *Family and Friends*, de photos de personnages qui sont en fait des survivants de la Shoah, l'inscription, ou plutôt le « cryptage », de ce trauma fondamental qui ressurgit de façon compulsive, les photographies comme traces devenant ainsi des « lieux de mémoire », pour reprendre l'expression de Pierre Nora, que le critique Dominick LaCapra se ré-approprie en « lieux de trauma » (« trauma sites », LaCapra 1998, 10) ou encore « lieux de deuil » (« mourning sites », LaCapra 1998, 44) dans son ouvrage *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (« Histoire et mémoire après Auschwitz »). J'ai ainsi été amenée à émettre comme hypothèse que la récurrence des photographies comme traces du passé dans *Family and Friends* de Brookner pourrait bien être la manifestation de ce que LaCapra nomme un « acting-out compulsif et mélancolique » (« a compulsive and melancholic acting-out », LaCapra 1998, 14) du trauma, dans lequel les photos de mariage, qui projettent une image institutionalisée d'ordre et d'harmonie, pourraient également être interprétées comme l'écran qui bloque l'accès au trauma refoulé de la Shoah tout en le dévoilant dans le même temps, et qui, de ce fait, empêche le « working-through » ou « perlaboration » de ce trauma. Cette observation quasi-obsessionnelle des photos de mariage par le narrateur ou la narratrice de *Family and Friends* n'est pas sans rappeler, dans *Brief Lives*, la propre fascination qu'éprouve Fay pour la photographie qui accompagne l'avis de décès,

ce « lieu de deuil » dans lequel elle plonge au risque de sombrer, comme pour répondre à l'appel d'une pulsion de mort que Kristeva a si brillamment analysée comme indissociable de la mélancolie dans *Soleil noir*. Si cette lecture de Brookner s'avère convaincante, on pourrait alors voir la manifestation de cette même compulsion de répétition à l'œuvre non seulement dans la récurrence des photographies de *Family and Friends*, mais également dans la récurrence des romans de Brookner eux-mêmes – vingt-quatre au total, au rythme d'un par an pendant plus de vingt ans –, suscitant à la fois la consternation de ses détracteurs et le ravissement de ses admirateurs. Tout se passe comme si Brookner, à travers son activité prolifique de romancière, ne cessait de nous présenter un « acting-out » ou « retour dans le réel » du passé traumatique et de la mélancolie de la diaspora juive sans jamais nous en proposer un « working through » ou une « perlaboration », en d'autres termes sans que le travail du deuil ne puisse jamais s'achever totalement.

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SERENA FUSCO

"FADING INTO UNBORN PHOTOGRAPHS"

Narrativizing/Allegorizing the Historical Object
in Michael Ondaatje's Fiction

ABSTRACT: Photography features prominently in the works of Canadian writer Michael Ondaatje. Its presence is to be found at a thematic level, as a key to the advancement of the plot(s), and at the level of the writer's idiosyncratic style. Photography often conveys odd elements and portrays the historically disempowered, who may, at certain moments, take on a voice that echoes their history of silence. In visual terms, historical objects, often immersed in darkness and oblivion, sporadically emerge into the light; in Ondaatje's fiction, such an emersion interrupts and then re-channels, in crucial moments, the flow of history in alternative directions, re-imagining history against the grain. Despite its intense relation with its referent(s), photography is characterized by a series of distances and ruptures—both between the instant it portrays and the flow of time, and between its "thingness" and its possible uses and interpretations. In a somewhat paradoxical analogy between photography and allegory, it may be observed that allegorical modes of reading and writing are also grounded in distances and ruptures, especially in the acknowledgment of a temporal gap between the allegorical sign and its meaning(s). I suggest that Ondaatje's literary engagement with photography—reread through Benjamin—may reconcile an allegorical tension with a historically materialist conception of art; this materialism emerges both in the attention devoted to the "small things" traversing history and in a consideration of art (informed by photography) as a historical agent in the material world. Ondaatje redeploys photography at the service of a "Benjaminian" conception of history—which is, in turn, substantially informed by Benjamin's own reflections on the invention of photography and its consequences.

KEYWORDS: Photography, Literature, History, Materialism, Allegory.

Photos Surrounded by Silence

One among an impressive array of different arts and codes, photography features prominently in the works of Sri Lankan Canadian contemporary writer Michael Ondaatje. It is present at a thematic level, at the level of the writer's idiosyncratic style, and (in the novels) as a key to plot advancement. In this essay, I shall discuss the presence of photography in the three novels *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987), *The English Patient* (1992), and *Divisadero* (2007), devoting special attention to the last one. I wish to maintain that *Divisadero* interestingly expands, and to an extent modifies, Ondaatje's long-term literary engagement with photography. Moreover, *Divisadero* also develops, and partly transforms, another consolidated interest of Ondaatje's: the relevance of the historical past to the present and future. In Ondaatje's oeuvre, the illuminated thread of history is

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interspersed with darkened zones. History is equally composed of an urge to move forward and of a "stilled" quality, a recurrence and reemergence of trauma and loss.

Generally speaking, Ondaatje's interest in photography brings out several of the themes and motifs historically associated with it in literary writing, cultural practice, and theoretical reflection. Family is one of these. As noted by Silvia Albertazzi, starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, collecting and displaying photographs in family albums became a consolidated practice, through which the middle class represented and established itself (Albertazzi 2017, 48). While the historical practice of photography has had a role in institutionalizing the "traditional" bourgeois family, Ondaatje's literary work is populated by several "non-traditional families", whose coming together, and whose often painful coming apart, is accompanied by photography—existing photos or missing ones; discussed images or, frequently, images surrounded by silence.

The (chronologically speaking) first novel under consideration, *In the Skin of a Lion*, centers on Eastern Ontario native Patrick Lewis. A young man in the 1920s, Patrick moves to Toronto in search of work and makes friends among the city's growing population of immigrant workers. Among events including revolutionary activism, violence, death, and love, a makeshift extended family is constructed: Patrick, the actress/activist Alice Gull, her actress friend Clara, Alice's daughter Hana, baker Nicholas Temelcoff, Italian thief David Caravaggio, and his wife Giannetta. Patrick falls in love, in succession, with both Clara and Alice. Much of the novel's interest revolves around the hasty construction of the Bloor Viaduct Bridge, connecting the western and eastern parts of Toronto—an enterprise realized at the cost of many workers' lives.

Patrick, who in the course of the novel becomes Hana's surrogate father, comes to learn about Cato, Hana's deceased biological father, discussing some "mementoes" (Ondaatje 1988, 139) that the girl keeps in a suitcase, including three photographs—among which, significantly, *not* a photo of Cato. Another key character whose photograph is evoked but missing is a nun who falls off the Bloor Viaduct Bridge before its inauguration: her body is never found and it is speculated (and never fully confirmed) that Alice once was this nun. Photography thus triggers expectations, both affective and narrative: missing images create an emptiness to be filled by research and imagination. Photography oscillates between tie and void, presence and absence.

Broadly speaking, other themes accompanying the presence of photography in Ondaatje include affect, desire, eroticism, social class, power, spying, truth, detection, identity, time, and art. As part of this complex network, the archival value of photography is underlined in all three novels under consideration. *In the Skin of a Lion* thematizes the way in which—elaborating on Pierre Bourdieu's idea—*reality is validated* through the sanction of photography. The photographic validation of reality is granted credibility by—and, correspondingly, grants credibility to—a given social order: "[Photography is] a representation of the real that owes its objective appearance not to its agreement with the very reality of

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things […] but rather to conformity with rules which define its syntax within its social use, to the social definition of the objective vision of the world" (Bourdieu 1990, 77). Patrick researches the history of the construction of the Bloor Viaduct Bridge, documented by photographs taken during various phases: "There are over 4,000 photographs from various angles of the bridge in its time-lapse evolution" (Ondaatje 1988, 26). "It had taken only two years to build. […] Commissioner Harris' determination forcing it through. He [Patrick] looked at the various photographs: the shells of wood structure into which concrete was poured, and then the wood removed like hardened bandages to reveal the piers" (143). According to the records, the bridge is Commissioner Harris' dream come true, propelled by his indefatigable entrepreneurial will; the deaths of many workers appear negligible, only "fleetingly mentioned" (144).

On the other hand, the novel suggests that photography can also serve to re-imagine history, capturing elements on the fringes of its institutionalized quality, like the blurred figure of an anonymous cyclist on the day of the inauguration of the bridge:

> During the political ceremonies a figure escaped by bicycle through the police barriers. […] Not the expected show car containing officials, but this one anonymous and cycling like hell to the east end of the city. In the photographs he is a blur of intent. He wants the virginity of it, the luxury of such space. (27).

This "non-official" image is actually a sort of middle layer, in-between official visual documents and no visual documents at all. The anonymous cyclist, who believed he was the first to cross the bridge, was actually not the first. Completely undocumented, a group of people had already made the crossing, in order to commemorate those dead during the construction: "The previous midnight the workers had arrived and brushed away officials who guarded the bridge in preparation for the ceremonies the next day, moved with their own flickering lights—their candles for the bridge dead—like a wave of civilization, a net of summer insects over the valley" (27).

Those who inhabit the fringes of history, as Gayatri Spivak (1988) has famously discussed, are often structurally hindered from making their voices heard. In narrative terms, the historically silenced, the subaltern, may, at certain moments, take on a voice, and tell their story. This voice is, however, not necessarily their own: for better or for worse, it often belongs to someone else attempting to tell their story on their behalf. (If one wanted to offer a parallel in visual terms, one might suggest that historical objects, often immersed in darkness and oblivion, intermittently emerge into the light.) Reflecting on photography can offer a way to approach the historically subaltern, the "historical objects" deprived of subjectivity. As a representational technology and practice, photography can objectify its subjects; it can reproduce power unbalances and ideologically validate the status quo—i.e., it can lend credibility to a version of reality purported to be reality per se. By contrast, several visual theorists have associated photography with an active, productive, even revolutionary potential. Mieke Bal, for instance,

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has proposed to regard visual art specimens—photographs included—as *thinking*: "art, too, thinks: it is thought. Not the thought about it, or the thought expressed in it, but visual thought, the thought embodied in form" (Bal 1999, 117). In *What Do Pictures Want?* (2005), W.J.T. Mitchell's disrupts the idea of images as inherently passive and analyzes them as having lives, loves, needs, and desires. Desire plays a crucial role: images stir desire in their viewers; correspondingly, they can be regarded as active subjects of desire on their part. If—to paraphrase Mitchell— photos "want" something, they can offer a space of articulated silence to be filled with the possibility of dialogue; it should be, though, a dialogue that offers the possibility to rethink language as we know it, making room for silence to resound within language itself.

The entwinement of power, representation, and history is clearly present in Ondaatje's 1992 novel *The English Patient*, possibly his most widely known work to date, dealing with the preparation as well as with the slow, painful unraveling— and conclusion—of WWII. In *The English Patient*, Geoffrey Clifton, husband to Katharine—a young woman with whom the mysterious eponymous "patient" has an affair—is an aerial photographer. In the course of the novel, Clifton is revealed to be an agent with the British Intelligence service, complicit in turning the North African desert into a theater of war. David Caravaggio, the Italian Canadian thief of *In the Skin of a Lion*, has become an Allied spy in *The English Patient*. He is captured, and his thumbs are horribly cut off during a torture session, because he was accidentally photographed and failed to retrieve and destroy the camera containing the film (Ondaatje 1996, 34-39). While, in these examples, photography is associated with war, exploitation, imprisonment, and violence, *The English Patient* also uses a photograph as an emotional catalyst for a key event in the text. After hearing on the radio that Hiroshima and Nagasaki have been bombed, the Sikh sapper Kirpal Singh, nicknamed Kip, threatens to kill the "patient"—whom he sees as an embodiment of all the lures and betrayals of the West—and eventually leaves Villa San Girolamo, the ruined villa in the Tuscan hills where he had been living in the company of the "patient" (who turns out to be not an Englishman but, instead, a former Hungarian desert explorer and former agent for the Germans) and two Canadians: the already mentioned Caravaggio and young nurse Hana, with whom he is having a romance. (Hana, Alice's daughter, was also a character in *In the Skin of a Lion*.) Kip's departure is a gesture of rebellion that re-aligns him, in his own words, with "the brown races of the world" (286). With this gesture, Kip seems to be claiming a pan-Asian and/or "colored" identity for himself, while he radically takes distance from the other inhabitants of the villa:

> He feels all the winds of the world have been sucked into Asia. […] All he knows is, he feels he can no longer let anything approach him, cannot eat the food or even drink from a puddle on a stone bench on the terrace. […] In the tent, before the light evaporated, he had brought out the photograph of his family and gazed at it. His name is Kirpal Singh and he does not know what he is doing here. (287).

The family picture is a token of Kip's belated identification with his past and his Sikh identity, marking his estrangement from the white/Anglo/militarized world he has lived in up to that moment. When Kip leaves, he discards most of his possessions, including the photo, which is found and observed by Hana:

> From within the collapsed tent she unearthed a portrait that must have been of his family. She held the photograph in her palm. A Sikh and his family.
> An older brother who was only eleven in this picture. Kip beside him, eight years old. *"When the war came my brother sided with whoever was against the English".* (291).

In a way—as we will presently see, reprised in *Divisadero*—the family photo underlines the painful rift between two brothers, one serving in the British Army (Kip) and the other, the eldest, fighting against the colonial power. Separated by an unbridgeable divide because of the war, the two brothers seem to come prospectively closer after Kip's renunciation of the British and the awakening of his postcolonial consciousness. At the same time, *The English Patient* as a whole does not work in the direction of an easy recuperation of the past: Kip's moving forward—and, overall, the novel's moving forward—comes at the price of suffering and recognizing losses that cannot be easily integrated, neither in the characters' lives nor in the ravaged post-war world.

According to Roland Barthes in *La Chambre claire* (1980), one of the consequences of the invention of photography is that we cannot deny the pastness of the past anymore. Photography is a token from another time that remains irredeemably real *in its being past*, both (almost tangibly) "here" and radically separated from the present of the onlooker. After the invention of photography history cannot be mythicized anymore (Barthes 1980, 87-89). As underlined by Barthes—and as also testified by the ambivalent function of Kip's family picture—, despite its intense relation with its referent(s), photography is actually characterized by a series of distances and ruptures: ruptures, for instance, between the instant it portrays and the flow of time, and between its "thingness" and its possible uses and interpretations.

Photography, Allegory, and Historical Materialism

Steve Edwards (2007) has observed that everyday details in a photographic image, brought out by photography's apparently non-selective, "democratic" realism, can be regarded as allegorical in their evocative, "silent" quality. Odd details in a photograph can be perceived as enigmatic, awaiting interpretation, requiring a pre-existing "encyclopedia" in order to be read. As is well known, allegory and photography are both key concepts in the highly influential philosophical work of Walter Benjamin. In a somewhat paradoxical analogy between photography and allegory, it may be observed that allegorical modes of reading and writing are, for Benjamin, as well as in Paul De Man's authoritative

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reprise of Benjamin's argument, also grounded in distances and ruptures, especially because of a temporal gap between the allegorical sign and its meaning(s). In De Man's terms: "[the] relationship between signs necessarily contains a constitutive temporal element; it remains necessary, if there is to be allegory, that the allegorical sign refer to another sign that precedes it. The meaning constituted by the allegorical sign can then consist only in the *repetition* [...] of a previous sign with which it can never coincide" (De Man 1983, 207; emphasis in the original).

In reading Benjamin's conception of photography, Jae Emerling (2012) attempts to follow a non-allegorical trajectory. Emerling criticizes (what he sees as) the prevalence of a theoretical line informed by deconstruction (De Man but also Jacques Derrida and, in the field of art history, Craig Owens) that tends to equate the innovative quality of Benjamin's thought with a celebration of both the emptiness/fluidity of language *and* the disentanglement of the (photographic) image from both its referent and its *hic et nunc*, its aura. Thinking differently, Emerling maintains:

> Rather than merely privileging the allegorical or celebrating the indeterminacy of meaning, Benjamin's interest in language as such *and* images interrupts the allegorical movement of human language with the "expressionless power" immanent within each and every signifying endeavor. The "expressionless" (das *Ausdruckslose*) is the "truth content" that both originates and impedes representation, what he calls the "material content" […]. (Emerling 2012, 43; emphasis in the original).

Emerling argues—rightfully, I believe—that, for the German philosopher, photography has the potential of transforming art itself into "a fragment of the true world"; due to this transformation, art can function as an agent within a historically materialist conception of history, one that values the future as the (messianic) actualization of a silenced past—"the actualization of the as yet unlived, the potentiality of the what-has-been that dislocates the past. […] [T]o recollect is to grasp oblivion, the *agrapha* […] within the present" (Emerling 2012, 46).

In his "Short History of Photography", Benjamin maintains that "the accents change completely, if one turns from photography as art to *art as photography*" (Benjamin 1972, 23; emphasis added). Following Benjamin and inspired by Emerling's reading of him, I would emphasize that the invention of photography urges all art to face both its truth value and its material quality, which is *not* tantamount to denying it the status of art; to the contrary, it is, I would suggest, tantamount to opening up a space where art and reality can dialogue without one becoming the touchstone of the other: "there remains something that does not merely testify to the art of […] the photographer, but something that cannot be silenced, that impudently demands the name of the person who lived at the time and who, remaining real even now, will never yield herself up entirely into *art*" (Benjamin 1972, 7; emphasis in the original).

In Benjamin's historical materialism, it is on the leftovers and ruins of (to paraphrase the philosopher) the "tempest we call progress" that one must build a

sense of the future and of revolution. Benjamin's interest in photography is part of a related effort to politicize art. Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* celebrates the revolutionary potential of photography exactly in the sense that it invests in the mobilization of the aura, in the intervention of temporal distance between the production and the reception of art: "Patrick would never see the great photographs of [Lewis] Hine, as he would never read the letters of Joseph Conrad. Official histories, news stories surround us daily, but the events of art reach us too late, travel languorously like messages in a bottle" (Ondaatje 1988, 145-146). In *In the Skin of a Lion,* art, including photography—or maybe, one might suggest, photographically informed art, "art as photography"—is made of floating objects from another time, objects that may become, in some way and some time, historical agents: "nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history" (Benjamin 1969, 254). Nonetheless, (photographic) art crucially preserves a component of silence, darkness, and enigmatic quality. In this respect, the most significant photo is perhaps the photo *not taken*: "A chain was pulled that forced wet steam into the room so that their bodies [bodies of workers from the abattoir and tannery on Cypress Street in Toronto] were separated by whiteness coming up through the gridded floors, tattoos and hard muscles *fading into unborn photographs*" (Ondaatje 1988, 136; emphasis added).

This tension, within photography, between presence and absence, between the importance of the photos that were indeed taken and the effort, it seems to me, to conceive of the darkness surrounding the photo, and even of photos that were never taken, is a key feature of Ondaatje's work. Ondaatje pays attention to the dark spaces that inevitably surround the momentariness of the image: this is where the pan-artistic—or intermedial—quality of Ondaatje's writing is most evident (see Fusco 2017). Literature and words constitute the other side of the visual image, attempting a contrapuntal presence while preserving the fragmentary, silent, mysterious, somewhat stillborn quality of photography, as the previous quotation emphasizes.

Both Beverley Curran and Marlene Goldman have noted echoes of Benjamin in Ondaatje. Goldman remarks how Ondaatje redeploys Benjamin's idea of the "fragmented character of human history" (Goldman 2001, 903), paying attention to the debris left in the wake of "progress", as in Benjamin's famous description of Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus*. Goldman suggests that Benjamin's angel is evoked in *The English Patient*—for instance, in the way the novel's characters direct their gaze towards the past (Goldman 2001, 910), as well as in Kip's encounter with a sculpted angel in the Neapolitan church of San Giovanni a Carbonara (Ondaatje 1996, 279-281; Goldman 2001, 913-914). Both thematically and stylistically, Ondaatje pairs a structural and idiosyncratic interest in photography with a "Benjaminian" interest in history—which is itself, in turn, substantially informed by Benjamin's own reflections on the invention of photography and its consequences.

While Emerling tends to see allegory and historical materialism as mutually exclusive, and situates Benjamin's interest in photography on the side of the latter,

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I would suggest that allegory and historical materialism are not necessarily at odds. Firstly, in a way remindful of De Man's discourse, it is a fundamentally temporal in/commensurability—the suspended/projected moment of interruption/reprise in a chain of signification, in which one brushes expressionlessness—which opens up a "corridor" for objects from the past, so that they can later resurface, like a message in a bottle through the dark waters of history, at another time. Secondly, I would suggest that allegory is as much reliant on the power of the incorporeal linguistic sign as on physicality. As noted by scholars such as Sharon Cameron and Cindy Weinstein, who have written on American post-Romantic allegory, from the nineteenth century onwards the allegorical mode of writing has been predicated on the "bifurcation between the palpable body and the meaning ascribed to it in some non-bodily sphere" (Cameron 1981, 79). As such, allegory especially reveals its ambivalence when confronted with the human body; in Hawthorne's allegories, for instance, "the unique synecdochic relationship of tenor and vehicle—with part made of the same bodily substance as the corporeality for which it stands—throws the double level of allegory into question. In Hawthorne's allegories, what (part of) the human body stands for is the human body" (Cameron 1981, 79-80).[1] Moreover, as Benjamin himself has noted, the tension towards sacrality and abstraction in allegorical writing finds its counterpart in a problematic proliferation of signifying objects: "it will be unmistakably apparent, especially to anyone who is familiar with allegorical textual exegesis, that all of the things which are used to signify derive, from the very fact of pointing to something else, a power which makes them appear no longer commensurable with profane things […]. Considered in allegorical terms, […] the profane world is both elevated and devalued" (Benjamin 1998, 175). What I especially wish to underline is that if, in allegory, there is—to use a deconstructivist term—a reiterated *différance* of meaning, and full meaning remains elusive, the visible/physical emblem(s) whose meaning remains elusive acquire a physical translucence that marks them, in their in-between state, as presence and absence at the same time. If, as Barthes famously maintains, photography, in its unprecedented entanglement with reality, is nonetheless haunted by an unbridgeable distance from what it is supposed to represent, photography appears to be the means of expression that most epitomizes the "absent presence" of meaning and materiality, the tension of tenor and vehicle, that characterizes allegory.

Small Seeds: Visual/Literary Blow-up in *Divisadero*

I shall now proceed to discuss *Divisadero*, originally published in 2007, in order to explore how Ondaatje further expands his literary use of photography. I

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[1] As Sharon Cameron has argued, in Hawthorne's allegories the truth of a character is often distilled in a single bodily part; accordingly, the reading process entails dissection as well as zooming-in.

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shall especially pay attention to how the presence of photography in *Divisadero*
matches a thematization and presence of history that is—when compared with the
thematization and presence of history in *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English
Patient*—"smaller" in scale, as well as less dependent on the human element. Small
things, objects, and natural elements open up temporal lines next to, sometimes
even independently from a human presence.

Divisadero is divided in three parts of uneven length. Part One, titled "Anna,
Claire, and Coop", narrates the entwined lives of the three eponymous characters.
When Anna's mother, Chicana Lydia Mendez, dies in childbirth, her father brings
the infant home together with another baby girl, Claire, born to another deceased
mother in the same hospital during the same week. The girls grow up like twins on
their father's farm near Petaluma, California. On the farm also lives Cooper,
nicknamed Coop, the slightly older orphaned son of the neighbor farmers, who
were murdered. The girls' father treats Coop as a farmhand rather than an adopted
son. When the girls are sixteen, Anna and Coop begin a secret romance. They are
discovered by Anna's father, who attempts to kill Coop and is wounded by Anna
in a counter-attempt to protect her lover. Anna flees the farm, never to come back,
while Claire saves an injured and temporarily blind Coop from freezing to death.

Years later, Anna, Claire, and Coop are leading separate lives. Anna is a literary
historian, living in France while researching the obscure French writer Lucien
Segura. Of all places, she is renting and living in Segura's former house in the
countryside near Dému, Gascony. Claire has become the assistant of a public
defense attorney in San Francisco. Coop, who makes a living as a professional
cardsharp, becomes a partner in a successful sting and is later lured into a trap by
other cardsharps with the help of Bridget, a drug addict Coop has fallen for. Claire
and Coop are brought together again by a fortuitous turn of events. Claire
eventually takes care of Coop, who suffers from amnesia after having been badly
beaten. Part One also narrates Anna's romance with Rafael, a French-Romani
guitarist who personally knew Segura when he was a child.

Part Two and Three move back in time and narrate two chunks of the life of
Lucien Segura. Part Two focuses on his meeting Rafael's nomad family in his old
age. Part Three goes all the way back to his childhood, starting with the death of
his father, narrating his life with his mother, marriage, fatherhood, and role in
WWI. The core of Part Three is probably the love triangle involving Lucien as
well as Roman and Marie-Neige, a married couple of neighbor farmers he has
known since youth. After Marie-Neige dies during the final months of the Great
War, Lucien brings her back to life in his adventurous novels, written under a
pseudonym, in the guise of several female characters.

In Part Three, it becomes evident that Anna herself is the narrator of Lucien's
(imagined? reconstructed?) life. Anna, who has the role of first-person narrator at
the beginning of the text and for several sections of it, has changed her name after
experiencing trauma and fleeing her family. We never learn her new name.

The initial pages of the novel immediately reveal the importance of
photography. Anna narrates her father's yearly ritual of taking a photo of herself

and Claire:

> Between Christmas and New Year's—the picture was always taken at that time—we'd be herded onto the pasture beside the outcrop of rock (where our mother was buried) and captured in a black-and-white photograph […].
>
> We would study ourselves in this evolving portrait. […] We were revealed and betrayed by our poses. […] In spite of having been almost inseparable, we were diverging, pacing ourselves privately into our own version of ourselves. And then there was the last photograph, when we were both sixteen, where our faces gazed out nakedly. (Ondaatje 2010, 10-11).

As this quotation makes clear, this photo series works as a token/process of identification and, eventually, dis/identification between the sisters. In a way that is remindful of *The English Patient*, a photograph stands for both the past and the unbridgeable distance from it. Not casually, when Anna leaves the family, she rips out the last photo of herself and Claire from the album and takes it with her (134).

In diegetic as well as meta-narrative terms, after the forced separation, the two sisters keep thinking of each other, imagining each other's lifeline and—less explicitly in the case of Claire, and quite overtly in the case of Anna, who is a narrator and a historian—inventing stories about each other. I wish to underline that each sister is, to an extent, "stilled" in her narrative development from the perspective of the other, because she's gone from sight and excluded from contact. On the other hand, the "stilled" one takes on a new shape in the other sister's creative imagination, becoming larger-than-life. This creative act also entails the possibility to live with the consequences of trauma:

> "We have art", Nietzsche says, "so that we shall not be destroyed by the truth". For the raw truth of an episode never ends, just as the terrain of my sister's life and the story of my time with Coop are endless to me. They are the possibilities every time I pick up the telephone when it rings suddenly, some late hour after midnight, and I hear the beeps and whirrs that suggest a transatlantic call, and I wait for that deep breath before Claire will announce herself. I will be for her an almost unrecognizable girl save for an image in a picture. (261).

The "mitosis" of the twins—which may be identified as the event that allows Anna to take on her narratorial role—is accompanied by a passage suggesting that Anna has grown up absorbing Claire, and has retained particles of Claire within herself. Significantly, it is also suggested that the absorption may actually have worked the other way round, and that Anna the narrator may be the product of Claire's imagination, brought back to life by Claire:

> One fetal twin may absorb the other without malice, and retain in its body a loose relic or two of one of the absorbed twin's femurs. […] That marvel, Annie Dillard, wrote that. And perhaps this is the story of twinship. I have smuggled myself from who I was, and what I was. But am I the living twin in the story of our family? Or is it Claire?
> Who is the stilled one? (135)

It is important at this point to consider the peculiar structure of correspondences offered by the novel. The novel's title is thus motivated by Anna:

I come from Divisadero Street. Divisadero, from the Spanish word for "division", the street that at one time was the dividing line between San Francisco and the fields of the Presidio. Or it might derive from the word *divisar*, meaning "to gaze at something from a distance". […] It is what I do with my work, I suppose. I look into the distance for those I have lost, so that I see them everywhere. (136)

In Sofie de Smyter's opinion, this word choice "foregrounds that both sign and subject are always already divided, split, double, and in the process of becoming" (2009, 99). The novel itself is a two-faced mirror, connecting/separating distant places, times, and beings. Events and characters echo each other, showing difference in similarity; they repeat themselves, while displaying variations in this pattern of repetitions. Among the many occurrences, I shall only mention two: both Coop (in Part One) and Lucien (in Part Three) are involved in an aggression during which a window shatters and glass shards cut them; and, in Part One, Coop is twice beaten within inches of his life—the first time by Anna and Claire's father, the second time by a gang of cardsharps attempting to blackmail him ("'[…] say you will work with us, or we'll beat the hell out of you'. 'I've been there', Cooper said quietly", Ondaatje 2010, 125).

Photography has a structural role as a porous thematic and stylistic boundary. The presence of photography underlines that reality and representation, history and fiction, life and art, are located on the two sides of a mirror that can be imperceptibly, electrically brushed against, but not really touched nor traversed. In Anna's terms: "I work where art meets life in secret" (135). At the end of Part One, Claire wants to "fold the two halves of her life together like a map" (158), but this perfect correspondence, like the full redressal of past trauma, is impossible—as stressed by the image at the novel's closure: "Some birds in the almost-dark are flying as close to their reflections as possible" (268).

Let us now consider the much-quoted chapter titled "Two Photographs", which closes Part Two. "'Two Photographs' is the threshold chapter that connects/separates the first part of the novel about Anna, Claire, Coop and their father, as well as about Lucien Segura, the thief, Aria and Raphael, from the second one, or better from the last eighty pages or so, that correspond to the biography of Lucien Segura" (Concilio 2009, 20). In this short chapter, an external focalizor zooms in, one at a time, on two photographs hanging side by side on a wall of the house in Dému. The two photos are ekphrastically described by a third-person external narrator. The first photo portrays Lucien Segura "in this last phase of his life" (Ondaatje 2010, 181); while Lucien is the central subject of the picture, "[o]n the righthand side […] is a dark blur […] the only photographic capturing of Lucien's friend Liébard, or Astolphe" (*ibid.*). ("Liébard" and "Astolphe" are two of the temporary, self-given names of Rafael's father, a thief who has fallen in love with Aria, a Romani woman; thanks to some clues, he can be *a posteriori* identified with David Caravaggio from the other two novels.) The second photo is of Anna "naked from the waist up […] she has woven the roots of two small muddy plants into her blond hair, so it appears as if mullein and rosemary are growing […] on

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her head" (Ondaatje 2010, 182).[2] The picture was taken by Rafael: "He used her camera, and the image has been blown up to be the same size as the other, so it is, in a way, a partner to it" (181).

Above I used Mieke Bal's narratological concept of the "external focalizor" to render the idea of two lenses positioned in line with each other, thus constructing this chapter as meta-visual: the lens of the external focalizor frames the implied lens(es) of the photographic devices that have produced the pictures. On the other hand, this chapter is also meta-narrative and broadly meta-textual. The fact that one of the images—Anna's—has been blown up to match the other—Lucien's—is, Julia Breitbach (2012, 185) suggests, the stylistic metaphor that reveals the artistic intention behind the whole book. With the help of this photographic threshold, Ondaatje literally turns the novel on its head, enlarging one component of Anna's life—her interest in the life and work of Segura—into a full-scaled presence of its own. As the novel moves on from the life stories of Anna, Claire, and Coop to Lucien Segura's story, the focus shifts to "the other side" of the book, which becomes visible beneath/next to the other one. If, for Breitbach, Ondaatje realizes "the superimposition of two life stories to create beautiful art" (2012, 194), the choice of a "blow-up" (i.e. photographic enlargement) technique reveals that the matter of the reciprocal relations of the two (or three) parts of the novel—as well as of their mutual proportions, determined by an act of zooming in and out of them—is highly significant. In my view, the most conspicuously "photographic" novelty in *Divisadero*, when compared to other uses of photography in Ondaatje, is exactly this "blow-up" technique at work; this is, besides, a more "specifically photographic" technique, perhaps, than other visual stylistic devices at work in Ondaatje's oeuvre.[3] The act of zooming in on a detail / blowing up an image finds a correspondence in Anna's research interest in the obscured zones of cultural history. She excavates ancillary characters and makes them central: "My career exhumes mostly unknown corners of European culture. My best-known study is of Auguste Maquet, one of Alexandre Dumas' collaborators and plot researchers. Another is a portrait of Georges Wague, the professional mime who gave Colette lessons in 1906 to prepare her for music-hall melodramas" (Ondaatje 2010, 135).

I would also suggest that this matching act, in which a portion of a visual text is enlarged to be read side by side with / superimposed on another one, can be regarded as *meta-allegorical*. I would remark that, as a signifying structure, allegory works *both horizontally and vertically*: while it is predicated on the vertical impulse of excavating meaning under a surface, each layer of signification has a horizontal pull, an existence of its own. While the two layers can be

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[2] Anna's photo is, once again, a token of dis/identification: "This person who is barely Anna" (182). The adverb "barely" suggests that this person is not "fully" Anna; or, to the contrary, it might suggest a sense of nakedness and authenticity, with the photographic image "laying bare" the truth of Anna.

[3] Among these other visual techniques is, for instance, the constant dialogue between light and darkness, black and white, which can be regarded as photographic but also pictorial. See Fusco 2017. On Ondaatje's "Caravaggesque" style, see Ingelbien 1995.

"stretched" and read side by side, their reciprocal scale relation also matters: a "blown-up" detail can set forth a new, diverging signifying chain, its specific value becoming enlarged when compared to the other details situated, so to speak, within its purview. This coexistence of horizontality and verticality is beautifully evoked at the end of Part One, with Anna and Rafael walking along a river and coming upon a road: "Eventually we come to a ford where our river meets a road and covers it, or from another perspective, where the road has come upon the river and sunk below its surface, as if from a life lived to a life imagined. […] They merge, the river and the road, like two lives, a tale told backwards and a tale told first" (162).

I shall now go back to the problem of the "historical object", focused from a slightly modified perspective. Compared to *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient*, *Divisadero* places more emphasis on the connective, historical quality of material objects, especially small things. Among these "small things" are photos themselves, both remnants of a bygone past and agents, materials that can re-direct the flow of the present: the "suspension of photography between objecthood and thingness: […] the photo-as-thing, resonating with an unruly resistance to […] discursive domination" (Breitbach 2012, 170).

The emergence of history as one of the text's components is specifically related to the text's "blown-up", materialist/allegorical aesthetics. History with a capital "H", historically meaningful events—WWI, WWII, and the 2003 U.S. attack on Iraq among else—form a background for the smaller-scale events that characterize the life of the characters. At the same time, it is precisely these smaller-scale events that, as if in counterpoint, carry and scatter, so to speak, the seeds of history: "The past is always carried into the present by small things. So a lily is bent with the weight of its permanence. Richard the Lion-Heart may have stepped up to this same flower on his journey to a Crusade and inhaled the same presence Anna does before he rode south into the Luberon" (Ondaatje 2010, 70-71).

While the relationship between reality and imagination, art and truth, is openly tacked in Ondaatje's broader oeuvre, it seems to me that *Divisadero* further develops a line of signification that valorizes unpredictable events, unexpected divergences, the products of small seeds brought and carried over by winds as well as animals' intestines (4), birds, and insects, in an "awkward moral balance of nature" (175) that seems to be only peripherally influenced by human intentions. Caravaggio/Liébard/Astolphe "was as much of a traveller in some ways as a blown seed or a bee" (174). (In this respect, the photo itself can be regarded as a paradoxical agent, a subject—and Kip, for instance, in the previously quoted passage from *The English Patient*, as the "historical object" of the photo-agent.) Again in Benjamin's terms: "It is by virtue of a strange combination of nature and history that the allegorical mode of expression is born" (Benjamin 1998, 167). This is especially hard to reconcile with a view of history as an encompassing, rational totality. One may suggest that *Divisadero* reveals a lesser degree of investment in history and historicity than *In the Skin of a Lion* or *The English Patient*; or, to the contrary, that *Divisadero* refines Ondaatje's long-term interest in history by means

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of a subtler depiction of the small dramas that both accompany and feed it, illuminating it against the grain. History emerges in *Divisadero* not only—as elsewhere in Ondaatje, in a classically postmodern fashion—as textuality and fiction; it also emerges as family rituals, consumerism, broadcast news, grassroots activism, festivals in costumes, California landmark bars and diners, and other everyday habits and objects.

From *In the Skin of a Lion*, through *The English Patient*, to *Divisadero*, Ondaatje explores the implications of photography for art, literature, life, and history, making increasing room for the camera's and the picture's "thingness". The very idea of photography—in William Henry Fox Talbot's terms—as the "pencil of nature", as a technology assisting nature in reproducing itself, finds an interesting, belated expression in *Divisadero*. On the other hand, photographs, like things, brush against the lives of people and open up unexpected paths in them. We have already observed that Benjamin sees the invention of photography as an opportunity—perhaps a paradoxical one—to advance a materialist conception of history, and a historically materialist conception of art. If Ondaatje's use of photography echoes Benjamin's conception, *Divisadero* shows historical materialism as inevitably blended with both the human and the natural element in subtle, understated ways.

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RODRIGO FONTANARI

L'INSTANT DEVIENT L'INSTANT DANS LA PHOTOGRAPHIE

Haruo Ohara et le haïkaï

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this essay is to reflect on the relationship between photography and *haïkaï*, using as an example the work of Brazilian photographer of Japanese origin, Haruo Ohara. His photographs are not meant to capture a moment as if they were made suddenly in time and space. However, Haruo Ohara makes a kind of deconstruction of this conception by removing it from the condition of a simple memory (of remembrance) and placing it into a condition of suspended and live moment. Moreover, this photograph which seems to be close to the *haïkaï*, becomes, to put it in a very western literary manner, a kind of "incident": an image that captures the world in the immediacy, without seeking any effect.

KEYWORDS: *Haïkaï*, Photography, Literature, Haruo Ohara.

Sur Haruo Ohara

Cette intervention est une invitation à un voyage à l'intérieur des cadres de certaines photographies d'un agriculteur brésilien d'origine japonaise devenu photographe, Haruo Ohara, qui s'inspire aussi bien de la terre que de la photographie pour faire de ces deux terrains de vraies œuvres d'art.

Avant de se pencher sur ses photographies, je voudrais vous donner quelques grandes lignes de la vie d'Haruo Ohara. Né en 1909 à Kochi au Japon, il est fils d'une famille d'immigrants japonais arrivés au Brésil en 1927 pour travailler dans des plantations, en particulier celles de café, et qui se sont installés dans une communauté japonaise à Londrina, au sud du pays. Quelques années après son arrivée, en 1933, Haruo Ohara débute son aventure autour de la photographie de façon quasi autodidacte. C'est un photographe de ville qui lui offre son premier appareil photographique. Un appareil tout simple dont Ohara dira ultérieurement – dans son journal intime – qu'il s'agissait plutôt d'un jouet car sur dix photos trois seulement n'étaient pas ratées (Losnak et Rogério 2005, 66).

C'est ce même photographe qui guide ses premiers pas et qui lui enseigne les procédés de développement, ce qu'Ohara faisait avec tant de soin que j'oserais qualifier ce travail de sorte d'alchimie.

La photographie conquiert peu à peu sa place dans le quotidien de Haruo Ohara à tel point qu'en 1951 il devient membre du Photo Club de Londrina ainsi que du Photo Club Bandeirantes de São Paulo. À cette époque également, il révèle quelques-unes de ses photographies au monde à l'occasion de ses premières

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participations aux Salons de Photographie aussi bien au Brésil qu'à l'étranger. Au cours de l'année 1956, ses photos reçoivent un prix à l'Exposition Internationale de la Photographie de Paris. Il décède en 1999 au Brésil à l'âge de 90 ans. Actuellement, ses photos sont reconnues aux quatre coins du monde et tous ses négatifs et archives sont entreposés à l'Institut Moreira Salles à Rio de Janeiro.

La photographie comme un poème

Détachés de toute contingence historique ou sociale, les clichés de Haruo Ohara ne cherchent pas à convaincre, mais invitent surtout à philosopher. Haruo Ohara mêle sa vie d'agriculteur et de photographe, rendant au monde de profondes images de la vie quotidienne ainsi que des expériences artistiques qui font que la photographie devient paradoxalement un art plasticien.

Cet essai ne se dédie pas simplement à penser aux convergences et aux divergences entre littérature et photographie, Il s'agirait d'entrevoir l'image photographique elle-même comme une sorte de poème. C'est en fait la proposition du sémiologue et critique littéraire, Roland Barthes (2003, 113), dans ses deux derniers cours au Collège de France, *La Préparation du roman* : « la forme d'art qui permet de concevoir le haïku = la Photographie » qui suggère qu'une photo d'Ohara s'assimile à un haïkaï.

Il s'agit, par hypothèse, des images photographiques qui sont en fait des formes dont le sens existe en tant qu'appel, invitation à réflexion, mobilisation des possibilités interprétatives, sens inachevé, incertain, variable, indéfini. Lisant les photographies de cette façon nous sommes aussi face à une autre dimension de la compréhension, où comprendre n'est pas forcément comprendre le sens, mais un appel au sens, avec toute sa force de résistance.

Toute ma recherche autour de l'œuvre de Haruo Ohara m'amène à penser qu'on est devant un poète photographe ou photographe-poète, car certaines de ses photos s'approchent d'une forme d'art, particulièrement de la forme poétique du haïkaï. Si ses photos peuvent être très proches du haïkaï, c'est avant tout parce que ses images, comme autant de poussières lumineuses, conduisent le regard au-delà de l'image en soi, c'est-à-dire à l'invisible. Je m'explique. Reprenant les idées de Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964a, 94) dans son essai *L'Œil et l'esprit* – où il note que toute l'énigme célébrée par la peinture n'est autre que celle de la visibilité, que l'invisible n'est pas quelque chose qui se situe au-delà du visible –, c'est tout simplement ce que devient la vision possible, voir l'inapparent sous l'apparent, rendant visible ce que la vision profane croyait invisible. D'ailleurs, c'est ce que Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964b, 120) lui-même appelle « perception pure » : l'évidence donc de quelque chose que l'on ne peut ni voir ni toucher, mais c'est ce qui rend ces images aussi consistantes, aussi vraies.

La tâche du photographe en tant que poète est ainsi de faire mieux voir le visible, rendant en fait tangible le monde et le corps par ceci : le mot et l'image où ils sont absents.

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Avec les yeux de Haruo Ohara, on apprend qu'il faut savoir voir dans certaines images ce qui parfois nous échappe, par exemple la beauté des petits gestes et le rythme particulier et singulier du silence des paysages. De cet entrelacement entre le regard du photographe et le monde naît une image qui n'est plus une simple image mais un poème, un vrai poème construit à partir d'une texture tangible du photographe – de sa matière – qui rend à la photo une superficie perceptuelle, une fenêtre par laquelle le regardeur pénètre et se meut à travers la trame et le thème.

L'acte photographique – que l'on veut croire théoriquement un registre automatique – peut en certains moments et par les mains de certains photographes, révéler une vraie poésie.

Le photographe-poète serait alors plus proche du peintre, qui est capable de rendre visible le monde originel. Il sait que sa manière de voir le monde ne fige rien, au sens étymologique du terme « photographie » – graphie de la lumière. Il ne faut pas que sa photographie devienne image.

Bien que cette idée puisse sembler paradoxale, c'est par cette empreinte que la photographie se distingue de la peinture et le photographe-poète montre un autre sens bien moins apparent de la photographie : la présence à partir de laquelle les choses photographiées apparaissent.

Dans une telle perspective, l'acte photographique repose sur une sorte d'étonnement face au fait que quelque chose est ou vient à être, de telle manière que le photographe et le spectateur deviennent témoins d'un *vide de parole*. La photographie-poème révèle ce *vide de parole* car le photographe n'y cherche plus à signifier le fait de photographier. Il n'essaie pas de le qualifier. Mais par les subtilités de son geste, il parvient à juste le montrer. Il n'est pas par ailleurs si loin de ce que le philosophe allemand Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (2010, 61) dans *Éloge de la présence* nomme non-langage, autrement dit l'ininterprétable où les signes ne sont plus ornés de signification. Ils y sont plutôt pure désignation : le dernier degré du sens, l'après quoi rien-de-plus-à-dire.

Ce que j'appelle le photographe-poète, c'est celui dont l'acte de photographier ne se résume pas à célébrer ce qui serait déjà devant l'objectif. Cet acte ne consiste pas à appréhender la beauté ou l'angoisse d'un événement ou d'un visage, mais à révéler un sentiment, un affect – au sens fort du terme – de ce qui est affecté par ce qui est vu. L'image s'efforce de rendre visible ce qui ne l'est pas, en introduisant en quelque sorte le rapport humain dans cette matière visuelle.

Et c'est sur ce point en fait que la photographie-poème touche de près la forme poétique orientale du haïkaï : « une image forte, suffisamment forte pour faire taire notre bavardage mental et notre désir de tout maîtriser » (Bashô *et al*. 2010, 22), soulignent les poètes japonais. Ce texte assez bref constitué en trois vers de cinq, sept et cinq syllabes, vise à ouvrir une relation à la fois méditative et poétique avec l'instant. Il s'agit d'un exercice littéraire d'extrêmes ténuité et difficulté. Tout y est codifié et en même temps dénué de signifié particulier et de contexte (il ne véhicule aucune notion de système organisationnel politique, économique ou social), ce qui neutralise ce qui est décrit, libérant la pensée de l'arbitraire.

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FOCUS • BORDERS OF THE VISIBLE
R. FONTANARI • L'Instant devient l'instant
dans la photographie

La photographie et le haïkaï

La rencontre entre la photographie et la poésie est déjà annoncée par Susan Sontag (2010b, 196) dans son œuvre *Sur la Photographie*. Elle est peut-être la première critique de photographie à suggérer ce contact entre les arts, entrevoyant la poésie comme une « activité liée au visuel ». Et plus encore, « l'engagement de la poésie au concret et à l'autonomie du langage du poème correspond à l'engagement de la photographie à la vision pure ». Ce sont des formes d'art désarticulées, discontinues qui, par leur propre force d'expression, renouvellent la manière de voir et de percevoir les choses car elles réapparaîtraient déjà elliptiquement réarrangées par la subjectivité du regard qui les recoupe. La poésie est l'amalgame entre l'être et le mot, autant que la photographie est l'amalgame entre l'être et les choses saisies.

C'est par ailleurs par ces mêmes mots que j'entends la définition-même de haïkaï comme ce qui « refait la naissance », au fur et à mesure qu'il propose l' « éveil attentif de qui voit pour la première fois et se voit, c'est-à-dire, qui isole du chaos fondamental ou primordial » (Forte et Ribeiro 1995, 44).

Le haïkaï, par définition, est « un style de vie, une manière d'être, une approche sensuelle du monde » (Atlan et Bianu, 2007, 7), car ce qui fascine le lecteur est la façon d'écrire la vie pure et subtile. Une observation bien précise du monde par des vers rigoureusement scandés amène le lecteur à appréhender la même image vive qui a touché le poète. C'est d'ailleurs « le flux de la perception » (Bonefoy 1978, XVI) tels frémissements et rides que les poètes haïkaïstes intéressent à isoler par les traits mêmes du poème.

Le haïkaï, selon Shuichi Kato (2009, 101) se caractérise comme étant l' « expression de l'expérience instantanée ». Tel un *flash* qui illumine et presque au même instant s'éteint, « le temps s'arrête dans ce moment. Il n'y a pas d'espace pour que les souvenirs s'y insèrent ». Il est plutôt question d'une expérience sensitive, « une sorte de symptôme entre le but de la perception (le monde extérieur) et l'intime ».

La photographie et le haïkaï s'emparent d'un *flash* logique, d'une philosophie de l'instant qui ne fait pas *retrouver* au spectateur le temps vécu mais le *trouver*, car ce temps y est sauvé dans son immédiateté. Une sorte d'*instant pur*, une fois que la trace lumineuse inscrite sur le négatif n'est ni immobilisation, ni prétention aucune à figer ou à retenir. Ce qui se voit développé sur le papier photographique c'est l'instant dans toute sa fraîcheur, ne provoquant ni la nécessité ni la volonté de plonger dans l'image. Enfin, on vit l'instant photographique : l'expérience directe dont il s'agit n'appelle aucun commentaire comme dans un haïkaï.

Si l'on observe certaines photos de Haruo Ohara, la relation entre photographie et haïkaï qui peut s'y établir ne se fonde pas sur une traduction inter-sémiotique – du moins il ne semble pas qu'il photographie en pensant à un haïkaï – mais à partir d'une intertextualité. Cet entrelacement de textes (tissus) qui s'entremêlent, se rapprochent, s'emboîtent, car en effet l'intertextualité, telle que la définit Julia Kristeva (1969, 85), montre que « tout texte se construit comme une mosaïque

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de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d'un autre textes », résonne dans certaines photos de Haruo Ohara. C'est le trait qui déflagre, capture le regard du spectateur, faisant retentir dans l'image photographique une *textualité*, une texture bien proche de celle d'un haïkaï.

Certaines photos de Ohara montrent que son regard est attiré par des scènes du quotidien de la même manière qu'un poète haïkaïste qui compose un haïkaï. Haruo Ohara convertit ainsi ce produit d'un travail physique et chimique en un système de transcription de perception visuelle.

D'ailleurs, les photographies de Haruo Ohara surprennent notamment ceux qui ne connaissent pas les caractéristiques de la culture orientale. Elles évoquent généralement cette particularité de la culture japonaise : « l'amour de la nature », cette « passion ardente, devant laquelle tout se tait » écrit Paul-Louis Couchoud (2003, 15) dans *Les épigrammes lyriques du Japon*.

L'acte de photographier d'Ohara est guidé par une pratique subtile du monde et par une vision si minutieuse qu'elle n'impose pas au produit de la photographie la tyrannie d'un concept. Tout au contraire la singularité de son regard inscrit son geste photographique dans un rien vouloir-saisir, dans une esquive de la violence du sens, du sens unique. Et cela permet enfin de penser au rapprochement entre ces arts. Ils sont faits d'écriture et de silence. Les images de Haruo Ohara sont en quelque sorte marquées par un silence, une sorte d'anti-éloquence où il n'arrive à l'intérieur des cadres photographiques rien ou presque rien. Ses compositions sont en effet minimales, rehaussant la notion même de *vide de parole* qui émane de chacune de ses images.

Si certaines photos de Haruo Ohara peuvent s'apparenter au haïkaï, c'est parce que les deux s'expriment dans un état d'esprit de « rien de spécial ». Le photographe comme le poète sait attendre et contemple le panorama du monde, tout en laissant les choses se configurer devant les yeux dans une objectivité – dans une vision sans commentaire – qui ressemble à la manière dont un enfant exprime son étonnement devant ce qu'il voit pour la première fois, permettant alors de « sentir le monde comme quand nos yeux atoniques l'ont vu pour la première fois » (Watts 1960, 122). C'est la conception même d'un regard *Zen* sur les choses. Tout cela me permet de dire alors que Haruo ne *cherche* pas forcément ce qu'il photographie, il le *trouve*.

À ce propos je pense à une photo de Ohara, celle intitulée « Coucher du soleil – Tomoko et Ciro, ses fils ». C'est une image d'invisible, dans un plan ouvert. C'est le geste délicat de Tomoko qui montre du doigt quelque chose. On ne sait pas très bien de quoi il s'agit parce que peu importe ce que ce mouvement veut dire, c'est son expression qui compte.

Fig. 1. Haruo Ohara | Fonds Instituto Moreira Salles.

Se penchant sur les photos de Haruo Ohara, il est impossible de ne pas être touché par sa sensibilité profonde, percevant la nature à son tour, les effets de lumière et d'ombre, les empreintes subtiles des personnes et des paysages. Ohara ne peut être nommé autrement que « photographe-poète » car il n'est pas un simple faiseur d'images, il ne photographie pas tout simplement un visage, un arbre, les nuages dans le ciel. Il ne cherche pas spécialement à saisir quelque chose, à retenir son attention sur quelque chose ou sur quelqu'un en particulier. La plupart de ses images sont plutôt une modalité d'espace, un rythme de temps mais aussi la dimension d'une rencontre.

Tout cela me permet en effet de penser que photographier, chez Haruo Ohara, ne relève pas simplement du geste d'illustrer une idée ou même de retenir une réalité, mais plutôt d'agir sur la réalité : contrôler et construire une idée.

L'acte photographique se fait pour transcrire le temps. Le photographe est celui qui guette le temps – le rythme du mûrissement, la ponctuation propre aux événements – et ainsi il laisse chaque geste ou événement se contaminer du temps dont il a besoin pour s'accomplir. Ignorant l'abrupte rupture et fragmentation qui opère l'acte photographique, la chose photographiée continue de vivre dans le même flux temporel qu'avant de devenir une image virtuelle. La photo ne vit pas simplement dans le temps, c'est comme si le temps aussi était vivant à l'intérieur même de cette image.

En fait, de quel temps parle-t-on ? On ne fait pas référence ni au temps que prend le photographe pour faire une photo, ni au temps (le moment historique) où la scène se déroule, ni même au temps nécessaire pour la scruter. La photo en elle-

même est un événement, une pure présence, comme s'il s'agissait d'une apparition soudaine du référent dans le paysage de la vie.

Malgré son instantanéité, le temps s'oppose totalement à la fugace accélération dans la contemporanéité avancée. L'instant saisi étrangement ne fragmente ni ne fracture le flux de temporalité, le mettant en collapse, dans un éternelle suspension.

Suspendant le flux vif du temps, Haruo Ohara crée un espace vide dans lequel nulle chose ne peut s'installer sinon un monde de la lenteur, ce qui permet au temps passé ou au temps perdu d'être présent comme une allusion, comme une brise qui souffle, laissant le spectateur vivre dans le flux de la temporalité.

C'est là le temps que Haruo Ohara préfère, celui qu'il registre dans ses images, aussi bien le temps qu'il fait (les saisons) que son passage, sa durée, c'est-à-dire comme si le temps, l'invisible, pouvait venir s'inscrire dans l'image. Les photos de Haruo Ohara sont sensibles et attentives à noter l'impression instantanée de la fuite du temps. Contrairement à celles des autres photographes, les images d'Ohara sont tout simplement des saisies qui documentent une fraction de temps. Elles sont en elles-mêmes l'expérience du temps, dans son *ici et maintenant*.

Je pense à une autre photographie de l'année 1948, intitulée « Ciel d'hiver (vent froid) » où la légèreté de l'action mène le regard à un instant imperceptible d'hiver – le temps qu'il fait (« le vent d'hiver ») est en soi le thème d'un haïkaï –. Le vent vigoureux vient frapper les tiges d'une végétation et, glacial, les poussent subtilement en les faisant légèrement pencher dans la même direction que son flux. À cet instant j'aimerais évoquer ce très bel haïkaï de Hikari (1970, 80) trouvé dans un recueil de poèmes et qui me semble résonner avec l'image décrite. Je le cite: « La force du vent / Rappels à tous les humains / Comme ils sont petits ! ».

Fig. 2. Haruo Ohara | Fonds Instituto Moreira Salles.

C'est comme si Ohara en quelque sorte semblait chercher à retenir le moment de surgissement du monde dans la composition de nuages qui forment un ensemble synchronique avec les hampes des graminées, cassant la logique de la perspective de la renaissance. L'image se présente alors sans profondeur, liant sur une seule ligne ciel et terre. Comme si le photographe guettait sur cette ligne ténue l'émergence d'un point duquel le regard va s'approcher et pourra recomposer l'espace. Il est en quelque sorte témoin de la formation primitive du réel dans le vol du vent qui se condense dans le cadre de la photographie. L'image devient une méditation sur l'origine du monde, tout en faisant de la superficie du cadre photographique une extension vide et silencieuse, qui n'est autre chose que le regard du photographe, en cherchant toujours à sonder l'épaisseur de l'expérience quotidienne.

Que cherche-t-il, le photographe, à y voir ? La réponse n'est pas forcément dans ce qui se serait passé au moment où la photo a été prise, mais dans l'événement qui a eu lieu et qui continue sans cesse de se produire sur l'image. C'est en fait comme si le spectateur, à chaque fois qu'il regarde la photographie, pouvait respirer ce même vent, vivre l'instant saisi qui se renouvelle à chaque nouveau regard posé sur l'image. Le spectateur est invité à entrer dans ce même instant silencieux d'un jour d'hiver et à s'y laisser plonger, sentir ce même vent provoquant le mouvement des fines et longues hampes des graminées. Un instant délicat révélant la même splendeur sublime que les grands paysages.

Le temps, dans cette photo, a une fonction phatique et une charge existentielle : la pure et mystérieuse sensation de vie. La même impression se produit devant d'autres photos de cet artiste. On saisit bien sa sensibilité pour cette intensité subtile par rapport à la durée d'une journée où, soudainement, par le travail de son regard, les unités mathématiques utilisées pour mesurer le passage du temps deviennent des unités sensitives.

Ce sont des photographies qui semblent faites aux marges des rythmes accélérés des événements de la vie quotidienne de la campagne, et qui offrent aux spectateurs la perception du temps d'une autre durée. C'est de l'ordre du propre événement, c'est l'instant qui devient l'instant devant l'appareil photographique. *Eidos* de l'instant : sans durée ni rétention, ni même figement. L'instant essentiel : l'instantané des choses, avant même qu'elles ne se dégradent car le temps passe.

J'évoquerais encore cette autre très belle photo de l'année 1948, où il me semble voir une certaine diminution d'éloquence du photographe, intitulée « Nuage ». Visiblement cette photo ne qualifie rien, elle ne fait que montrer. Haruo Ohara n'y dépeint pas la pluie, au contraire il a rehaussé le mauvais temps avec les cumulus noirs parsemés des derniers rayons du soleil. Le soleil se cache derrière ces gros nuages annonciateurs en quelque sorte du mauvais temps.

Fig. 3. Haruo Ohara | Fonds Instituto Moreira Salles.

Tel un haïkaï – cette sorte de « vision qui s'adresse directement à notre œil, une impression vive qui peut éveiller en nous quelque impression endormie » (Couchoud 2003, 29) –, les images d'Ohara ne me semblent signifier rien au-delà d'elles-mêmes, ne se laissant pas saisir par un dernier signifié. Ce n'est pas par hasard qu'Yves Bonnefoy (1978, VII) dans la préface du livre de Roger Munier, *Haïku*, s'attache à noter que pour bien comprendre un haïkaï, il faut « laisser s'annoncer tous les sens dans le pur hors-sens du poème. Mais surtout, laisser venir ce qui vient, opérer l'inattendu et son ravissement subit ».

En regardant toutes ces photographies de la vie quotidienne à la campagne évoquées auparavant, on s'aperçoit que le regard du photographe ne succombe pas à ce qui est dynamique, à ce qui bouge devant lui. Haruo Ohara dirige son regard vers les endroits statiques. Il réalise des images délicates ou grandioses qui doivent rester comme des empreintes dans la rétine habituée seulement à ce qui est de l'ordre de la fugacité, de l'éphémère. Ce sont des images presque imperceptibles : l'expression même d'un regard, la luminosité en particulier qui tombe sur les corps, les paysages ou même le dessin spontanément tracé par les nuages et leurs variétés de volumes et de tonalités.

Si les photos de Haruo Ohara permettent en quelque sorte d'être vues et lues tel un haïkaï, c'est parce qu'avant tout ces photos ne veulent pas à tout prix suggérer quelque chose. Mais, d'une manière ou d'une autre, elles parlent et pour cela elles touchent. Par ses photos, Ohara ne cherche ni à signifier ni à qualifier, mais à adopter ainsi un geste qui ne vise qu'à montrer l'événement, le paysage.

Néanmoins, il n'y est pas question de dire que ces photos n'ont aucune signification. Au contraire, comme dans un haïkaï, l'image ne se veut pas davantage qu'un acte de *vouloir dire*, un geste bref, un appel au sens. Ces photographies font alors taire le spectateur car elles sont dépossédées de toute intention, ne cherchant pas éterniser quelque qualité d'un événement ou paysage. Elles apportent simplement au spectateur un sentiment.

Pur art de l'ascèse qui rompt avec tout l'esprit discursif et le vertige émotionnel. Voyez la photo intitulée « Autoportrait de Haruo et Kô », de 1959 : quelques jours avant de fêter sa vingt-cinquième année de mariage, le couple, sous le contre-jour gracieux d'un coucher de soleil, se tient les mains, dos à la caméra et regarde l'infini d'un ciel plein de nuages. Aucune sorte d'interprétation de l'instant n'y est articulée par le photographe par rapport au mariage. On sait qu'il s'agit d'une célébration grâce à la légende. La photo en soi ne dit rien de cela, elle ne fait que souligner une union qui s'éternise et se réactualise dans le flux de la nature.

Fig. 4. Haruo Ohara | Fonds Instituto Moreira Salles.

L'instant devient l'instant

Enfin, pour conclure, loin de convertir les objets et les paysages en banalités par l'insistance d'un regard répétitif, les images de Haruo Ohara suscitent, au contraire, une interrogation sur la nature et le destin des images dans la modernité avancée. Mais encore plus que cela, le regard d'Ohara apprend à saisir la force dramatique du banal, faisant ressortir de ce qui est tout petit une énorme intensité. Or ce ne serait pas sur ce regard que se fonde tout l'art du haïkaï : « un étonnement sans cesse renouvelé devant la fraîcheur des plus petites choses qui – comme tout dans notre vie – ne sauraient durer ou se reproduire à l'identique » (Bashô et al,

2000, 13). L'hommage d'Haruo Ohara aux choses les plus triviales de la vie quotidienne a offert à l'histoire de la photographie moderne brésilienne des images qui dissipent toute rigueur d'explication.

Que veulent-elles dire ? Peu importe. Les images d'Ohara touchent par leur simplicité : toute notion s'y dissipe au profit d'une épiphanie du rien. C'est une invitation silencieuse à philosopher car, au lieu d'affirmer quelque chose, à mon avis, elles ne produisent que la paix.

C'est ainsi que Haruo Ohara regarde le quotidien. Il essaie de s'échapper des métaphores : pendant son travail journalier dans la plantation de café par exemple, le combat avec la terre n'est pas présent et toute la force du travail agricole vient de sa suspension – la houe, le tamis et autant d'autres outils sont mis dans une sorte de repos absolu ou encore deviennent les objets d'une sorte de jeux ludique. Il est donc impossible de ne pas lier tout cela au fait de « libérer la pensée du contenu pour goûter la chose elle-même », pour évoquer les mots mêmes de Susan Sontag (2010a, 29) dans *Contre l'interprétation*.

La photographie chez Haruo Ohara n'est plus une construction artificielle, mais un cri inarticulé éveillant le regard vers l'invisible qui cohabite avec le visible. Et dans cette perspective il me semble que la photographie a une certaine filiation avec ce que Barthes (2002, 725) même définit par l'incident : « tout ce qui tombe, comme une feuille ». Car l'incident se définit comme ce qui paraît, survient, étant alors saisi plutôt comme événement que comme substance. Ou encore comme l'entend Philippe Forest (2008, 118), l'incident est la « soudaine révélation du réel surgissant dans la nudité même d'une apparition irréductible à tout commentaire ».

Photographier, aux yeux de Haruo Ohara, consisterait à s'effacer devant l'évidence, faisant, à la manière un haïkaï, paraître sur l'image une sorte d'objectivité de sentiment, comme si le photographe ne voulait rien dire, ou mieux encore, ne voulait rien faire paraître. Il efface son ego devant l'évidence de ce qui est montré.

La photographie se transforme ainsi en un moment sans témoin, en une nomination sans sujet : une image en deçà de l'image, où le monde ne se montre plus devant les yeux comme représentation. C'est le visible venant en soi : soudain il semble l'inespérable qui fait signe à l'intérieur du vertige de la propre existence, sans qu'il ne faille rien faire. L'image fait donc voir l'invisible à travers le visible éternisé par ce flux pulsant de la vie qui est l'instant photographique et qui fait de chaque photo *l'expression de ce qui existe*.

On pourrait penser enfin que certaines photographies de Haruo Ohara, en exploitant seulement les qualités sensibles de ses propres matériaux – luminosité, texture, volume, proportion –, ne visent à exprimer rien au-delà d'elles-mêmes. Chaque photo peut donc créer à sa manière un ressenti, penser et concevoir le monde. Haruo Ohara ne travaille pas avec le signe, il travaille le signe, mettant en relief les fonctions poétiques et métalinguistiques de la photographie qui en font l'expression même d'une écriture (d'un graphisme photographique). Ce travail, conduit à des manifestations extrêmes, aboutit à une sorte de *degré zéro de l'écriture* – pour reprendre le titre du premier livre de Roland Barthes – il rend

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tangible, permettant au regardeur de voir, toucher, sentir, écouter la chose elle-même sans médiation, comme d'ailleurs dans un haïkaï où le poète s'engage à saisir un monde antérieur à sa propre arrivée.

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PERCORSI

BORDERS OF THE VISIBLE

GABRIELLA BOLOGNA

HENRY JAMES E ALVIN LANGDON COBURN
L'autorità dello scrittore e la libertà del fotografo
nei frontespizi per la New York Edition

ABSTRACT: Henry James's role in directing Alvin Langdon Coburn concerning the subjects of the photos for the New York Edition is well known. Not all the frontispieces, however, follow the detailed instructions of the writer. The paper explores the reasons of the shift from the original idea to the final result, and redefines the role of the photographer in the choice of subjects and compositions.

KEYWORDS*:* Henry James, Alvin Langdon Coburn, New York Edition, Photography, American Literature, Pictorialism.

Nel 1906, quando inizia a lavorare ai frontespizi per *The Novels and Tales of Henry James*, nota anche come New York Edition, pubblicata da Charles Scribner's sons, Alvin Langdon Coburn è un giovane fotografo pittorialista di appena ventiquattro anni. Henry James ne ha sessantatré, è uno scrittore affermato e sta elaborando il progetto editoriale più ambizioso della sua carriera: una raffinata pubblicazione in ventisei volumi, che considera l'edizione "definitiva" e più completa delle sue opere.

Molti studiosi hanno indagato la funzione culturale dei frontespizi di Coburn per la New York Edition e il loro rapporto con il contenuto dei volumi.[1] Come osserva Ira Nadel (1995a, 90), tra gli obbiettivi principali di questa edizione ci sono la necessità di restituire a James un ruolo di primo piano nella cultura letteraria americana e il recupero di una fetta di lettori che ha recentemente perso, come confermano un certo calo di popolarità e di vendite delle sue opere.

Sebbene James avesse espresso in più di una occasione le sue perplessità nei confronti dei libri illustrati, considerati uno strumento per avvicinare un pubblico più ampio senza reale attenzione e interesse a immagini di valore estetico e buona qualità, lo scrittore è ora consapevole che una raffinata edizione illustrata potrebbe attrarre un mercato di potenziali lettori generalmente restii ad avvicinarsi al suo stile complesso e astratto.

Quando invita Coburn a realizzare gli scatti per i frontespizi della New York Edition, ha le idee molto chiare su ciò che desidera ottenere. Le immagini devono avere una funzione estetica ma anche sociale e culturale, e stabilire una relazione

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[1] Si vedano Firebaugh 1955; Higgins 1982; Bogardus 1984; Tick 1991; Nadel 1995; Simon 2007; Horne 2008; Pearson 2010.

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con i romanzi senza rappresentare niente di specifico dei testi: fotografie come "concretizzazione" del mondo fisico descritto nei suoi lavori e al tempo stesso opere d'arte indipendenti.

Le lettere inviate da James a Coburn rivelano in molti casi idee precise sui soggetti delle fotografie e l'aspettativa di collaborare attivamente nella scelta di scene, oggetti, luoghi e punti di vista (Simon 2007, 28). James ha una evidente predilezione per le vedute architettoniche ravvicinate, in particolare porte e portoni (che infatti appaiono spesso nei frontespizi), ma anche strade. Il suo ruolo nel dirigere Coburn in questa ricerca è ben noto. Gli fornisce dettagliate istruzioni, consigli, tempistiche e suggerimenti in ogni momento del lavoro, dalla scelta dei soggetti al taglio delle immagini. Come osserva John Pearson, sembra cercare di "contenere le fotografie all'interno del linguaggio, controllare la visione referenziale di Coburn assoggettandola all'autorità del suo discorso" (Pearson 2010, 40).

Nella sua autobiografia Coburn dedica un breve capitolo alla collaborazione con lo scrittore per la New York Edition, dove esprime rispetto ed entusiasmo per quella che considera una grande esperienza con un Maestro che sa esattamente ciò che vuole:

> Although not literally a photographer, I believe Henry James must have had sensitive plates in his brain on which to record his impressions! He always knew exactly what he wanted, although many of the pictures were but images in his mind and imagination, and what he did was to browse diligently until we found such a subject. It was a great pleasure to collaborate in this way. (Coburn 1978, 58).

Nel capitolo compare soltanto una frase che lascia trapelare l'indipendenza di Coburn come fotografo in questo progetto: "H.J. knew so perfectly what we should achieve, for after all it was *his* books we were illustrating, but in spite of this, the photographs were essentially mine!" (Coburn 1978, 58).

In effetti, non tutti i frontespizi seguono le dettagliate istruzioni dello scrittore. Nonostante le pressioni e le richieste di James, in alcune occasioni è evidente una discrepanza tra l'idea originale e il risultato finale, ed emerge la partecipazione attiva di Coburn nel processo creativo.

Si consideri il frontespizio per *The Ambassadors* (fig. 1). In una lettera inviata il 6 ottobre 1906 James fornisce a Coburn vari suggerimenti sui soggetti parigini:

> Place de la Concorde etc., look out *there* for some combination of objects that won't be hackneyed and commonplace and panoramic, some fountain or statue or balustrade or vista or suggestion (of some damnable sort or other) that will serve in connection with the Ambassadors, perhaps; just as some view, rightly arrived at, of *Notre Dame* would also serve – if sufficiently bedimmed and refined and glorified, especially as to its Side on the River and Back ditto. (Edel 1984, vol. IV, 417).
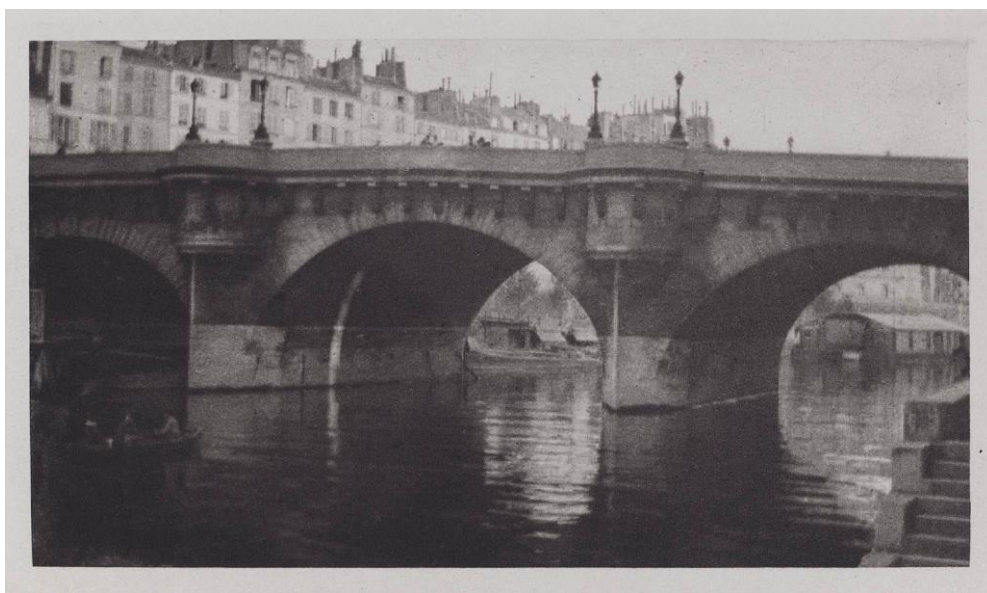
Fig. 1. Alvin Langdon Coburn, *By Notre Dame*, fotoincisione.

La veduta della chiesa più celebre di Parigi ripresa da Coburn è però un ponte sulla Senna, piuttosto che l'architettura della chiesa. *Notre Dame* appare come un'ombra lontana seminascosta dal ponte, un elemento architettonico strettamente legato al contesto culturale in cui Coburn lavora e al suo personale gusto artistico. Il ponte appare spesso nella fotografia pittorialista, in particolare in alcuni celebri scatti di Alfred Stieglitz ed Edward Steichen con cui Coburn è in contatto,[2] ma anche nelle incisioni di Whistler e nelle stampe di Hiroshige, entrambi artisti che hanno una notevole influenza sul giovane fotografo nei primi anni del XX secolo.

Se James è ossessionato dalle porte, Coburn lo è dai ponti. Tre frontespizi della New York Edition riproducono ponti, e per nessuno di essi è nota una richiesta esplicita di tale soggetto da parte di James. *Dome of St. Paul* (fig. 2), per *Princess Casamassima*, ha una composizione simile allo scatto realizzato vicino a Notre Dame: la chiesa compare sullo sfondo e il ponte di Southwark sul Tamigi a Londra è il vero centro dell'immagine. Anche la Cattedrale di St. Paul è menzionata raramente nel testo del romanzo, e nessuno degli eventi principali della storia avviene lì.

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[2] L'influenza di Stieglitz emerge chiaramente in almeno uno dei frontespizi per la New York Edition. La carrozza su una strada innevata di *Portland Place* a Londra (1906) rimanda a *Winter – Fifth Avenue* di Stieglitz, una fotoincisione realizzata nel 1893 e riprodotta nel 1905 su *Camera Work*, la più influente rivista della Photo-Secession.
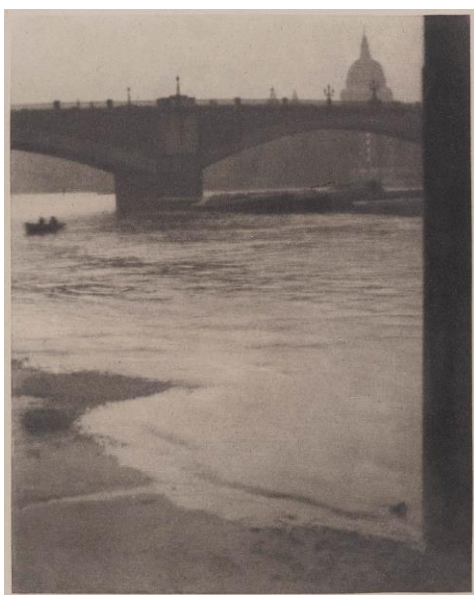
Fig. 2. Alvin Langdon Coburn, *The Dome of Saint Paul's*, fotoincisione.
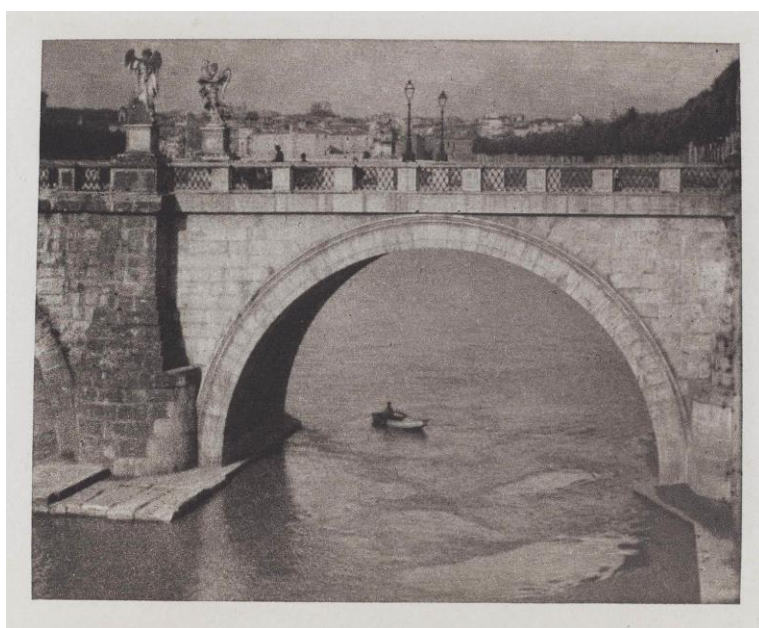
Fig. 3. Alvin Langdon Coburn, *The Roman Bridge*, fotoincisione.

Il terzo ponte è a Roma (fig. 3) e si tratta del celebre Ponte Sant'Angelo sul Tevere, decorato da dieci monumentali sculture barocche di Gian Lorenzo Bernini, ciascuna delle quali rappresenta una figura con un simbolo della Passione di Cristo. Il titolo del frontespizio è *The Roman Bridge*, e apre il secondo volume di *The Portrait of a Lady*. Secondo Nadel (1995a, 104) tale ponte ha un collegamento con la trama del romanzo, perché introduce

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allegoricamente alla passione di Isabel, rappresentata dalle statue di Bernini. Quelle che compaiono nella fotografia però, sono soltanto due, e il vero centro dell'immagine è la grande arcata del ponte. Sebbene non sia noto alcun suggerimento o istruzione da parte di James sui soggetti romani di Coburn, la città ha un ruolo fondamentale nel romanzo *The Portrait of a Lady*, essendo il luogo dove Osmond guida Isabel come il "più gentile dei ciceroni". Come osserva Marianna Torgovnick, la protagonista è sedotta al tempo stesso da Osmond e dall'architettura e dall'arte della città (Torgovnick 1985, 162-163).

Un ruolo moto diverso ha Venezia, l'unica altra città italiana dove Coburn viaggia in cerca di soggetti per i frontespizi. Nella città lagunare è ambientato *The Aspern Papers*, sebbene buona parte della trama si svolga all'interno di un antico palazzo e del suo piccolo giardino. Nelle idee di James il frontespizio dovrebbe riprodurre Palazzo Cappello in Rio Marin, per il quale fornisce indicazioni minuziose in una lettera inviata a Coburn il 6 dicembre 1906:

> It has a garden behind it, and I think, though I'm not sure, some bit of a garden wall beside it. […] Has a small paved Riva or footway in front of it and then water-steps. […] You must judge for yourself, face to face with the object, how much, on the spot, it seems to lend itself to a picture. I think it *must*, more or less or sufficiently, with or without the rest of the scene, as may seem to contribute or complete—to be needed in short for the interesting effect. […] What figures most is the big old Sala, […] from which, from the larger rather bare Venetian perspective of which and preferably looking towards the garden end, I very much hope some result. In one way or another, in fine, it seems to me it ought to give something. If it doesn't, even with the help of more of the little canal view etc., yield satisfaction, wander about until you find something that looks sufficiently like it, some old second-rate palace on a by-canal with a Riva in front, and if any such takes you at all, do it at a venture, as a possibly better alternative. But get the Sala at Ca Capello, without fail. If it proves at all manageable or effective. (Edel 1984, IV, 427).

Nella sua autobiografia Coburn (1978, 56) cita la lunga lettera come prova della perfetta sinergia e collaborazione con lo scrittore. Ciò che omette di ricordare è un'altra lettera di James, inviatagli il 9 dicembre dello stesso anno, che rivela una certa impazienza dell'autore:

> I think, on further and intenser reflection, that you HAD better go to Venice and proceed as we arranged. I *want* the Casa Capello, and will arrange (in order, purposely to *get* it) to change my order of combination somehow, putting "In the cage" with "The spoils" and "The Aspern Papers" with something else where it's picture will still be so valuable. The more *foreign* plates we have the better. […] Therefore, start for Venice on Thursday if you are still minded—and do both subjects. (Edel 1984, IV, 431).

Nonostante le dettagliate istruzioni di James, il frontespizio per *The Aspern Papers* non rappresenta la grande Sala o la veduta del canale, né la Riva davanti al Palazzo. L'immagine raffigura una piccola corte con un alberello in un vaso, senza nessun elemento identificativo, architettonico o topografico (fig. 4). Il piccolo giardino del palazzo ha un ruolo centrale nella storia, perché è il luogo dove Juliana trascorre molto tempo e in cui incontra spesso il protagonista.

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Tuttavia Coburn, nella sua ricerca di astrazione, non fotografa un vero giardino, ma solo un piccolo albero in un vaso, simbolo di giovinezza. La porta che appare nell'immagine è, come già ricordato, un elemento architettonico molto caro a James, sebbene nelle sue lettere sugli scatti veneziani lo scrittore non faccia specifica richiesta di tale soggetto.
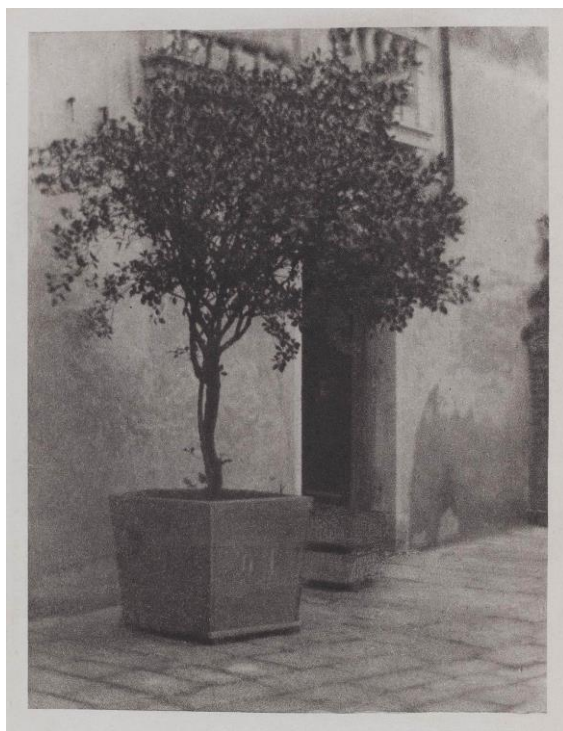
Fig. 4. Alvin Langdon Coburn, *Juliana's Court*, fotoincisione.

Nella medesima lettera del 6 dicembre James fornisce precise istruzioni anche per l'altro frontespizio veneziano:

For the other picture, that of The Wings, I had vaguely in mind Palazzo Barbaro [...] The Barbaro has its water-step. […] But I don't propose you should attempt here anything but the outside, and you must judge best if you can take the object moist effectively, from the bridge itself, from the little campo in front of the Academy, from some other like spot further. […] And do any other odd and interesting bit you can, that may serve for a sort of symbolised and generalised Venice in case everything else fails; preferring the noble and fine aspect however, to the merely shabby and familiar (as in the case of those views you already have)—yet especially *not* choosing the pompous and obvious things that one everywhere sees photos of. (Edel 1984, IV, 427-428).

In questo caso l'immagine rappresenta Palazzo Barbaro sul Canal Grande (fig. 5), con un punto di vista obliquo (un taglio molto apprezzato dallo scrittore, caratteristico di molti frontespizi). I gradini sull'acqua menzionati nella lettera,

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tuttavia, sono nascosti da una gondola, un soggetto già esplorato da Coburn durante il suo primo viaggio a Venezia nel 1905.

Fig. 5. Alvin Langdon Coburn, *The Venetian Palace*, fotoincisione.

L'influenza del primo soggiorno veneziano del fotografo sui frontespizi veneziani è stata a lungo sottovalutata. È probabile che James conoscesse gli scatti di Coburn del 1905 raffiguranti ponti, canali e riflessi sull'acqua, come dimostrerebbe la frase della lettera "those views you already have" riferita a soggetti che considera banali. Nel 1905 tuttavia Coburn aveva riprodotto non solo le vedute più note della città ma anche luoghi meno frequentati come Rio dei Barcaroti e il Ponte Storto o Caotorta sul Rio Menuo nel Sestiere di San Marco.

Ricordando i suoi scatti veneziani il fotografo narra di essere rimasto affascinato dai riflessi del sole sull'acqua in movimento: "I have spent hours on the canals of Venice […] feasting my eyes on the rhythmic beauty and the poetry of liquid surfaces" he says in his autobiography (Coburn 1978, 44-45). Osservando l'immagine del canale davanti a Palazzo Barbaro è evidente una striscia bianca sulla superficie nera dell'acqua, che suggerisce il passaggio di una gondola e rappresenta il contributo più personale di Coburn all'immagine.

Dopo i viaggi del 1906 a Parigi, Londra e Roma in cerca di soggetti per i frontespizi, Coburn prosegue saltuariamente la sua collaborazione con James. Non sempre, tuttavia, lo scrittore è soddisfatto dei risultati. In una lettera del 22 gennaio 1909 James scrive di essere deluso del l'immagine *Halls of Julia*, (fig. 6)

realizzata per il volume XXVII recentemente aggiunto, *Julia's bride*: "it had all your technical merit, and it's not your fault if the subject, quite prescribed and imposed by our fatal conditions, isn't more entrancing" afferma. (James collection, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, quoted in Nadel 1995b, 277). Sebbene James cerchi di esprimerlo con molto tatto, ciò che probabilmente non apprezza è il punto di vista frontale dello scatto, un taglio che preferisce evitare nei frontespizi.

Fig. 6. Alvin Langdon Coburn, The halls of Julia, fotoincisione.

A quell'epoca la New York Edition, pubblicata tra il 1907 e il 1909, è già un fallimento dal punto di vista delle vendite, ma James non sembra preoccuparsene.

Quattro anni dopo, il 29 aprile 1913, scrive ancora a Coburn riguardo a un possibile frontespizio per un volume da aggiungere all'edizione, suggerendo un'immagine di Parigi e una di un grattacielo di New York. Benché la risposta di Coburn non sia nota, conosciamo la sua opinione attraverso un'altra lettera di James, inviata il 2 maggio dello stesso anno, dove esprime apprezzamento per il suggerimento di una veduta di Montmartre da un punto di vista rialzato (Nadel 1995b, 277). L'ultimo incontro tra i due avviene un paio di mesi più tardi, nel giugno 1913, quando James fa visita al fotografo ad Hammersmith (Nadel 1995b, 277), ma il volume aggiuntivo dell'edizione non vedrà mai la luce. James morirà tre anni dopo a Londra mentre Coburn proseguirà una lunga carriera di successo come fotografo.

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"TRUTH! TRUTH! TRUTH!"

Image and Text, Fact and Fiction in Virginia Woolf's Orlando

ABSTRACT: The use of photographic "evidence" was of particular interest to Virginia Woolf and it is well known that she included photographs in her real (though unconventional), as well as fictional biographies *Roger Fry*, *Orlando* and *Flush*. The use of such pictures, however, serves to problematise the reality of the photographic or biographical subject/object, the relationship between fact and fiction, and therefore the biographical genre itself. This essay focuses on *Orlando* (1928), a text through which Woolf wanted to "revolutionise biography in a night," and where she undermined the supposed faithfulness of the form towards its subject by presenting false photographic evidence. In this mock biography both image and text are fakes, thus altering the purported adherence to facts which is a prerogative of the genre and highlighting the self-referentiality of both the photographic subject and the text. The combination of words and pictures determines the collapse of denotation and knowledge: concepts of "reality" and "meaning" fall apart, and a new idea of "truth" begins to evolve. Woolf's creative construct of her subject through words and pictures shows that the photographic image is never neutral, thus reminding us of Susan Sontag's claim that "although there is a sense in which the camera does indeed capture reality, not just interpret it, photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings are."

KEYWORDS: Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*, Biography, Photography, Truth vs. Fiction.

In recent times, considerable critical attention has been devoted to exploring the multiple relationships between Virginia Woolf and photography. As several studies have shown,[1] Woolf was thoroughly familiar with, and deeply interested in what she herself described—in an introductory essay to the retrospective collection *Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women* by her great-aunt and famous photographer Julia Margaret Cameron—as a "new born art" (Woolf 1926, 6).[2] Beyond the mere biographical evidence that she frequently dealt with the issue

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[1] There is an extensive bibliography on the subject. See, for example, Gillespie 1993; Wussow 1994; Caughie 2000; Humm 2002, 2006, 2010, 2012. Special issues of journals devoted to the theme of Woolf and photography include *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 74 (2008), ed. by T. Stearns (2008) and, more recently, *Études Britanniques Contemporaines* 53 (2017), ed. by A. Cassigneul (2017). For more general theories of photography, also in relation to twentieth-century literature, see Sontag 1977; Barthes 1981; Hansom 2002; Cunningham, Fisher, and Mays 2005.

[2] The tone of this piece is sometimes ironic, especially as regards Cameron's allegorical and idealised photographic arrangements, showing that Woolf's interest in photography faded when the new art could be compared to what she termed contemporary "materialist" fiction in being merely representational and superficial. Natasha Aleksiuk aptly defines Woolf's introductory essay, characterised by a combination of the fantastic and the real in narrating events in her great-aunt's life, as "mock-biography" – a label usually employed by critics to refer to *Orlando* – and

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of photography in her diaries, letters and essays, that she exchanged pictures with acquaintances and regularly preserved memories of her family and friends in photo albums, what is far more relevant to the purpose of this essay is that Woolf often employed photographic terms and techniques in her works. Moreover, the use of photographic "evidence" was of particular interest to the author in her own experiments with the varying relationships between fiction and reality, and it is well known that she included photographs in her real (though unconventional) biography *Roger Fry* (1940), as well as in her fictional ones *Orlando* (1928) and *Flush* (1933).[3] As Helen Wussow has pointed out in a seminal essay, in these works the use of pictures "serves to call into question their factuality and the overall stability of the photographic subject/object" (1994, 2), the relationship between fact and fiction, and therefore the biographical genre itself with its supposed adherence to real events in people's lives. "These simultaneous commitments to photography and biography," as Floriane Reviron-Piégay has more recently suggested, "are far from coincidental and show that photography was never far from her preoccupations with biographical representation. [...] indeed, photography claimed to give the truth of the character which is precisely what Woolf was after in her biographical works" (2017).

Flush, for instance, shares with *Orlando* the lighthearted tone of a divertissement, as well as the subversive character of the author's attempt to parody the tradition of Victorian biography with its focus on male, eminent and respectable protagonists. Although the title and subtitle—*A Biography*—prefigure the narration of the life of a dog (an expectation also corroborated in the first Hogarth edition by the frontispiece picture of Woolf's spaniel Pinka), an attentive reading reveals not only a "mock-ponderous application of the conventions of human biography to a dog" (Saunders 2010, 442) and a "reversal of biographical andro-centrism" (Aleksiuk 2000, 140), but also the fact that the book is actually an account of the famous love story of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning told from the point of view of her pet, a narrative strategy which, in Woolf's view, would undoubtedly relieve the female protagonist from undeserved obscurity. The first edition also contained nine additional illustrations interwoven through the text, including four original drawings by Vanessa Bell, a lithograph of Flush's

claims that "by juxtaposing 'Julia Margaret Cameron' with Cameron's photographs Woolf practices the ironic techniques that she will later put to use in *Orlando* (1928) and *Flush* (1933)" (2000, 126).

[3] Anna Snaith contends that "with *Roger Fry* we see Woolf straining against the restrictions of the genre, longing to mix accuracy with imagination" (2000, 97). In her introduction to the Oxford World's Classics edition, Rachel Bowlby defines *Orlando* as "not exactly a fake biography, of a purely fictitious subject" (1992, xix), alluding to the fact that it was inspired by a real person (Vita Sackville-West), while Elizabeth Cooley employs the term "quasi-biographical novel" (1990, 71) to refer to the purposely misleading use of the subtitle *A Biography* in a fictional work, which is – as the reader immediately recognises – clearly a spoof. Angeliki Spiropoulou at first considers the book as "one of the novels by Woolf which at first sight could be called 'historical'," then labels it "a mock biography" and "a hybrid construct that subversively blurs the boundaries between historiography and fiction" (2010, 75-76).

birthplace, a drawing of Elizabeth Barrett as well as one of Robert Browning, and two photographed paintings of the characters "Miss Mitford" and "Mrs. Browning," both reproduced—as the captions have it—by permission of the National Portrait Gallery. As for *Roger Fry*, Woolf's only formal biography, the book shares with *Orlando* a use of pictures that is closely related to the pivotal issue of capturing the reality of character—whether fictional or not—that she frequently dealt with in her diaries and letters during its weary gestation. Elizabeth Cooley finds an analogy between the two texts in the fact that both show Woolf's concern "not with creating fictional characters but with discovering and 'recreating' real personalities" (1990, 71), those of two intimate friends. Although the results of such concern are quite dissimilar, I believe that in *Roger Fry*, as in *Orlando*, the use of photographs is non-mimetic and emphasises the elusiveness of the central character. As Wussow aptly remarks, "of the eighteen plates Woolf includes in Fry's biography, only seven are images of Fry himself. The others are of rooms or houses that he inhabited or reproductions of his paintings. It is as if Woolf feels that no portrait of Fry can be painted, either by words or images" (1994, 7). We might therefore argue that, by introducing actual photographs into some of her books alongside writing, Woolf set up a deliberate dialectic between verbal and visual, and engaged in a long-standing discussion of the interconnections between truth and fantasy, image and text, ultimately to reveal the fictionality of both.

The present essay aims to analyse the author's use of photography in terms of narrative technique. It will focus, in particular, on *Orlando: A Biography*, a work through which Woolf admittedly wanted to "revolutionise biography in a night" (Nicolson and Trautmann 1977, 429) and where she undermined the supposed faithfulness of the form towards its subject by presenting false photographic evidence. In this mock biography both image and text are fakes, thus altering the purported adherence to facts which is a prerogative of the genre, and highlighting the self-referentiality of both the text and the photographic subject. The combination of words and pictures determines the collapse of denotation and knowledge on a double level, both visual and verbal. In Wussow's words, "when text and image are brought together in *Orlando*, concepts of meaning disintegrate and new definitions of truth begin to evolve" (1994, 3). At a close analysis, the book "reveals the oscillation and vacillation in the photograph between the signifier (the iconic message) and the infinitely deferred signified" (4). The breach between language (both verbal and visual) and reality is such that in this work "the photographic mirror is cracked. The subject cannot be identified, and the viewer of the photographs included in the text is left without any reference around which to center the self" (*ibid.*). Woolf's use of false photographic evidence in this book thus seems to be in line with her own equivocal, sometimes even hostile, reactions to cameras,[4] as well as her not wholly unambiguous conception of the "new born

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[4] While we know for sure from her numerous photo-albums (recently digitised by the Harvard Library and available at https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs: 17948758$1i) that Woolf

art." As Diane Gillespie aptly remarks, although she employed such definition, "Virginia Woolf usually ranked photographs, in spite of their relative newness, with the traditional representational or narrative paintings her artist friends scorned" (1993, 113). When photographic documentation meant faithful but sterile adherence to objective facts and truth, as it happened with realist fiction, the new medium received the same disparaging treatment as the "materialism" of H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett and James Galsworthy—that Woolf famously ridiculed in her essay "Modern Fiction" (1919)—or as the Victorian tradition of life-writing. Conversely, in her view, narrative techniques reminiscent of photography risk becoming artificial and pretentious. To borrow Gillespie's words again, "'photographic' to Woolf, then, frequently meant superficial, representational, whether in paintings or in novels" (1993, 115). Similarly, Timothy Mackin maintains that "Woolf often dismisses photography, and in particular the idea of 'the snapshot,' as superficial and 'obvious' [...], a form that for all its supposed realism fails to capture anything essential about its subject [...], an indictment of a shallow realism that presents its subjects only in incoherent fragments" (2010, 117). Therefore, we may interpret the author's effort to renew fiction through narrative experimentalism as matched by her own attempt to refashion the biographical genre by having recourse, both in words and in pictures, to what she calls "creative fact" (Woolf 1966a, 228), a term which—as Ira Bruce Nadel reminds us—represents "not the impurity of fact but a near oxymoron recognizing the confusion, complexity and disorder of our lives and the determination not to make a biographical life a falsely ordered world" (1984, 205).

While scholars have mainly discussed Woolf's penchant for photography on the one hand and biographical experiments on the other in a largely separate way, it is my contention here that the author questioned the strict adherence to facts of both traditional biography and realist fiction in parallel with, and by means of, her own challenging the widespread idea that only photographs, among different artforms, can represent reality in a truly objective and accurate manner. In the specific case of *Orlando* with its apparatus of subtitle, marked chapters, preface, acknowledgements, illustrations and index, where the pretence of accuracy reveals nothing but the fictionality of biographical material, Woolf's use of pictures is obviously "playful and ironic as she satirizes their function along with the affectations of traditional biographers" (Gillespie 1993, 136). The composite of verbal and visual is an essential aspect of the book, which contains three photographs of her intimate acquaintance Vita Sackville-West—upon whose ancestry and life it is whimsically based—in the guise of Orlando, as well as four photographed paintings of Vita's ancestors, and a picture of Woolf's niece, Angelica Bell, costumed as the Russian princess. As Max Saunders aptly points

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was amused by both taking and being taken pictures together with her family and friends in relaxed and informal contexts, during her lifetime she only accepted, and not without hesitation or embarrassment, the possibility of being portrayed by three professional photographers: George Charles Beresford, Man Ray and Gisèle Freund.

out about the interplay between words and images in the book, "Woolf saw how photography, and the play between the paintings and the photographs, could lend itself to her purposes. [...] The photographs pull the text's fantasy into the real; the text pulls the photographs' reality into fantasy" (2010, 479). To put it differently, the pictures are inserted in the text of the novel to prove the existence of its protagonist and other characters, while they clearly point to the fictionality of both the narrative and the photographic subject. Woolf's creative construct of her subject through words and pictures shows that the photographic image is never neutral, thus reminding us of Susan Sontag's claim that "although there is a sense in which the camera does indeed capture reality, not just interpret it, photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings are" (1977, 6-7).

To quote Saunders again, "of all modernist engagements with life-writing, Virginia Woolf's is the most visible, and her work represents the most sustained and diverse exploration of the relation between fiction and auto/biography" (2010, 438). As daughter of Sir Leslie Stephen, the founding editor of the monumental *Dictionary of National Biography*, and as inheritor of a family tradition of biographical writing stretching back several generations, Woolf "was critically engaged all her life in the problem of writing lives and, in particular, the problem of writing women's lives" (Anderson 2001, 92). The author, however, did not conceive of life-writing merely as a legacy she received from her family connections. Quite the contrary, she felt the strong need to question the linear, fact-based style of Victorian biography and redefine the genre, as her critical essays on the subject—"The New Biography" (1927), "The Art of Biography" (1939)—and the biographies she wrote clearly demonstrate. "The New Biography" was occasioned by a review of Harold Nicolson's *Some People* (1927), which Woolf praised for its method of writing about subjects "as though they were at once real and imaginary" (1966b, 232). In this essay, the author acknowledges the existence of "those truths which transmit personality" (229) and believes that "a little fiction mixed with fact can be made to transmit personality very effectively" (233). In other words, the biographer is not to disregard facts completely, but to present them in a creative fashion: "in order that the light of personality may shine through, facts must be manipulated; some must be brightened; others shaded; yet, in the process, they must never lose their integrity" (229). It seems more than coincidental, therefore, that on 20 September 1927 Woolf noted down in her diary the idea of a project that would be "like a grand historical picture, the outlines of all my friends. [...] It might be a most amusing book. The question is how to do it. Vita should be Orlando, a young nobleman. There should be Lytton. & it should be truthful; but fantastic" (Olivier Bell and McNeillie 1982, 156-157). The new book was envisioned as "a biography beginning in the year 1500 & continuing to the present day, called Orlando: Vita; only with a change about from one sex to another" (161). In announcing her bold attempt, Woolf clearly positioned herself at the heart of the modernist reinvention of life-writing parodying and mocking the traditional biographical genre, and she decided to do so by merging fact and fiction

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in what Max Saunders compellingly illustrates as "auto/biografiction," a label that Woolf herself seems to have foreshadowed in defining Nicolson's *Some People* as a "mixture of biography and autobiography, of fact and fiction" (1966b, 235). *Orlando*, Saunders notes, "combines the telling of a biographical story with a recurrent unease with biographical conventions" (2010, 444), first and foremost the necessity of sticking to true facts and solid evidence. To quote a revealing example, Chapter II opens with a discussion of the primary role of the biographer as a conveyor of facts and pursuer of plain truth from birth to death of the protagonist. On closer reading, however, such task is actually the object of mockery, exactly as in her diary Woolf would deride the "appalling narrative business of the realist: getting on from lunch to dinner" (Olivier Bell and McNeillie 1982, 209). The tone is evidently parodic:

> The biographer is now faced with a difficulty which it is better perhaps to confess than to gloss over. Up to this point in telling the story of Orlando's life, documents, both private and historical, have made it possible to fulfil the first duty of a biographer, which is to plod, without looking to right or left, in the indelible footprints of truth; [...] on and on methodically till we fall plump into the grave and write *finis* on the tombstone above our heads. But now we come to an episode which lies right across our path, so that there is no ignoring it. Yet it is dark, mysterious, and undocumented; so that there is no explaining it. [...] Our simple duty is to state the facts as far as they are known, and so let the reader make of them what he may. (Woolf 1992, 63).

Such sense of unease and uncertainty led Woolf to envision a different kind of biography which would bring together fiction's attention to the intangible personality and the inner life of the character with the truthfulness of historical facts, or which could somehow create, as she famously wrote, "that queer amalgamation of dream and reality, that perpetual marriage of granite and rainbow" (Woolf 1966b, 235). Unsurprisingly, therefore, at the beginning of Chapter III Orlando's biographer ironically laments the lack of documents and true facts to rely upon; however, speculation, supposition and imagination may come to his aid:

> It is, indeed, highly unfortunate, and much to be regretted that at this stage of Orlando's career, when he played a most important part in the public life of his country, we have least information to go upon. [...] the revolution which broke out during his period of office, and the fire which followed, have so damaged or destroyed all those papers from which any trustworthy record could be drawn, that what we can give is lamentably incomplete. [...] We have done our best to piece out a meagre summary from the charred fragments that remain; but often it has been necessary to speculate, to surmise, and even to use the imagination. (Woolf 1992, 115).

It is by now a well-established view that the book plays with the conventions of both biographical and historical writing, as well as with their adherence to facts, by exceeding the fundamental biographical categories of lifespan (the protagonist living for nearly 400 years) and gender (Orlando turning spontaneously into a woman midway in the book). Angeliki Spiropoulou, for instance, convincingly

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argues that "in technical terms, *Orlando* can be read as a parody and pastiche of tropes of historical representation, historical events and literary passages that render the 'spirit of the age.' This fictional history explodes the conventions of standard bio/historiographical discourses and brings into relief those historical conditions which are traditionally overlooked" (2010, 76). The narrative voice—always intruding with the solemn tone of the historian of his own time as well as of other times, and interrupting the narrative with metanarrative comments on the method of life-writing—satirises the evolution of literary history and of the biographical style throughout the centuries. It is mainly for this reason that Ira Bruce Nadel refers to *Orlando* as "metabiography" (1984, 141), claiming that the book "not only contains a theory of biography but shows that theory at work," holding the unique position of "being at once criticism and fiction" (140). Similarly, Harvena Richter maintains that it is "a raffish portrait of [...] Vita Sackville-West" and at the same time "a casebook on how to write" biography (1986, 61). In particular, the narrator parodies the tradition of Victorian life-writing and the monumental work which represents "the apex of the Victorian belief in, and commitment to, fact" (Nadel 1984, 53) by affirming, for instance, that "the true length of a person's life, whatever the *Dictionary of National Biography* may say, is always a matter of dispute" (Woolf 1992, 291). In Chapter I, for example, no sooner has the biographer introduced the main character—in a manner not devoid of contradictions: "for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it" (13)—than he displays metanarrative self-consciousness—"directly we glance at eyes and forehead, we have to admit a thousand disagreeables which it is the aim of every good biographer to ignore" (15). Furthermore, he satirises the Victorian practice of recording the lives of great men: "happy the mother who bears, happier still the biographer who records the life of such a one! Never need she vex herself, nor he invoke the help of novelist or poet. From deed to deed, from glory to glory, from office to office he must go, his scribe following after, till they reach whatever seat it may be that is the height of their desire" (14). Ultimately, Woolf's mockery of the biographer's pursuit of truth reaches its climax precisely when the most absurd event and turning point of the whole book—Orlando's change of sex—is narrated:

> But here, alas, Truth, Candour, and Honesty, the austere Gods who keep watch and ward by the inkpot of the biographer, cry No! Putting their silver trumpets to their lips they demand in one blast, Truth! And again they cry Truth! and sounding yet a third time in concert they peal forth, The Truth and nothing but the Truth! (129).

> The trumpeters, ranging themselves side by side in order, blow one terrific blast:—
> "THE TRUTH!"
> at which Orlando woke.
> He stretched himself. He rose. He stood upright in complete nakedness before us, and while the trumpets pealed Truth! Truth! Truth! we have no choice left but confess—he was a woman. (132).

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It seems evident that everything in the text (even such historical events as the Great Frost or the advent of the Victorian age) is presented as a playful exaggeration. Furthermore, in line with the author's view that any biography worthy of the name should give us "the creative fact; the fertile fact; the fact that suggests and engenders" (Woolf 1966a, 228), *Orlando* shows how the limitations of the genre can be overcome by the creative writer. It is particularly revealing that, in this mock biography, Woolf chose to merge fact and fiction on a double plane, that is not only on a verbal level, but also on a visual one. The contamination of biographical truth with the realm of fantasy parallels the twofold nature of the illustrations as both real pictures of real people and fakes, thus reminding us of Susan Sontag's claim that photographs are "both objective record and personal testimony" (2003, 23), simultaneously recording and interpreting reality.

The idea of a fictional biography—a book that is both a biography (as the tongue-in-cheek subtitle indicates) of Vita Sackville-West while at the same time clearly a novel—seems to have allowed Woolf to break the hegemony of the text of the novel itself by introducing photographs which function integrally in the work as a whole, being pictures of real people in the guise of fictional characters, placed at appropriate positions throughout the text. Exactly as Maggie Humm has noted about *Three Guineas*, the illustrated feminist-pacifist pamphlet that Woolf published in 1938,[5] *Orlando* can be seen as one of those books which use photographs in conjunction with words, in order to produce what W.J.T. Mitchell names "image/texts:" "composite, synthetic works" that act as "a site of dialectical tension, slippage, and transformation" (1994, 89; 106). Such tension, or slippage, is doubled precisely by the ambiguous nature of the pictures contained in the portrait gallery of illustrations, alternating between photographs of actual portraits at Knole, the Sackville-West stately home in Kent ("Orlando as a Boy," "The Archduchess Harriet," "Orlando as Ambassador," "Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, Esquire," as the images are captioned), and photographs of real people—Angelica Bell, Vita Sackville-West—dressed up and posing in order to appear as someone else ("The Russian Princess as a Child," "Orlando on her return to England," "Orlando about the year 1840," "Orlando at the present time"). The photographed paintings place the photographic/biographical subject at a further remove from reality for the main reason that they are not unmediated renditions of flesh-and-blood people just captured by the camera eye; therefore, there is no substantial evidence that they actually correspond to the characters referred to in the captions. In particular, "Orlando as a Boy" matches the text's description of

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[5] In this book, "a prose picture of the indissoluble link between the physical violence of fascism and patriarchal tyranny to women and children in the private home" (Humm 2003, 648), the five published photographs ("A General," "Heralds," "A University Procession," "A Judge" and "An Archbishop"), strategically distributed throughout the text, "are copies of some of the newspaper photographs that Woolf collected together with press cuttings, quotations, and letters in three scrapbooks dating from the early 1930s" (*ibid.*). As Wussow suggests, these pictures "reveal how an image can be manipulated to serve a rhetorical purpose" (1994, 2), that is the harsh condemnation of totalitarian regimes and of female oppression in a masculine patriarchal world.

Orlando's attire—his "crimson breeches, lace collar, waistcoat of taffeta, and shoes with rosettes on them as big as double dahlias" (Woolf 1992, 20)—but not such physical traits as his red cheeks, almond teeth, dark hair, small ears, "eyes like drenched violets [...] and a brow like the swelling of a marble dome" (15). Here, it is obviously Woolf who took inspiration from the painting to describe Orlando, and not the painting which replicates and bears witness to the text. It seems remarkable, therefore, that the author willingly created a sort of friction between words and pictures. The same tension applies to the actual photographs, producing a crisis of faith. Since readers can more or less easily identify the real photographic subjects as Angelica Bell and Vita Sackville-West, they inevitably tend to both mistrust the captions singling them out as Sasha and Orlando, and judge the pictures as fakes, as perhaps suggested by the exaggeratedly artificial quality of a photograph such as "The Russian Princess as a Child," for instance. Furthermore, in "Orlando about the year 1840," the floral gypsy blouse, plaid kilt-like skirt and velvet Renaissance-style hat worn by the subject do not match the fashion of the time the picture supposedly dates back to. Perhaps the only elements of reality shown by these images are the pearls hanging around Orlando/Vita's neck in "Orlando on her return to England" (a favourite jewel of both the fictional character and the real person who inspired it), as well as the setting of "Orlando at the present time," showing Vita with her dogs in a real-life moment that Woolf captured and made part of a work of fiction. As scholars have variously pointed out, the visual material stands in a complex and problematic relationship to the literary text and, at the same time, is also questioned as an objective conveyor of true facts exactly as the mock biography is. According to Wussow, for instance, "although the captions that accompany the photographs appear to identify or anchor the iconic message, they only serve to confuse it. [...] Woolf's quarrel in *Orlando* is not only with the form of biography and the illusion of factual evidence but also with a culture that expects a subject to be visually revealed and clearly defined. Throughout *Orlando* Woolf rejects the concept of effortless recognition of the (photographic) subject and, therefore, the self" (1994, 3-4). Similarly, Spiropoulou maintains that "by providing us with pictures of the fictional heroes and, inversely, by modelling her fiction on a 'real' person, namely her lover Vita Sackville-West, Woolf confounds the codes of distinction between story and history. She attempts to confer a credibility on the existence of these fictional characters while simultaneously she 'derealizes' historically existing persons" (2010, 76-77). It seems evident, therefore, that the photographs play with the blurred boundary between fiction and reality that the text itself tries to undermine by means of language and (meta)narrative technique. Most of the portraits in this gallery are—or at least are said to be—of a single character (Orlando), though they are actually pictures of different people (real or imaginary, contemporaries or ancestors) pretending to be whom they evidently are not. All these stratifications point to, and are a *mise en abyme* of, the book's central technique of superimposing a fictional identity over a real one (Orlando over Vita). According to Max Saunders, this is mainly the reason why the portrait gallery "stands as an emblem

of the whole book, which could be described as a series of portraits of Orlandos from different periods;" therefore, "insofar as it runs these different avatars into a single figure, it is better described as a composite portrait. [...] *Orlando* is a composite of snapshots taken through history" (2010, 473). To put it a different way, the fictionality of the photographs doubles the fictionality of the biography's subject matter and narrative voice: "*Orlando* presents imaginary portraiture through imaginary authorship" (477). Woolf was fully aware of the dual nature of both photographic and biographic realities, and the fact that Orlando is both a fictional character and a historical one (that is, Vita) seems to justify the technique of inserting imaginary portraits alongside real people.

It is also particularly noteworthy that the pictures appearing in *Orlando* show the same playful juxtaposition of fact and fiction, the same mixture of artefact and reality pervading the allegorical portraits of Julia Margaret Cameron, whose photographic style and artistic conception strongly influenced Woolf's visual aesthetics—at least more than she was willing to admit. In a compelling study, Marion Dell (2015) suggests that both Woolf's narrative technique and her practice of domestic photography bear the mark of her great-aunt's art. In *Orlando*, the author adapts Cameron's frequent use of real people to pose as fictional characters, as well as her practice to give sitters imaginary identities by employing fictional or historical captions. For instance, Woolf's choice to have her niece Angelica Bell dressed up as Princess Sasha and photographed in disguise may have been inspired by her great-aunt urging family members and friends into costumes to make them pose as characters from the Bible, English poetry or Greek mythology. In doing so, Woolf clearly demonstrates that, despite her somewhat scornful treatment of Cameron's typically Victorian sentimental vein, the work of her artistic forebear turns out to be instrumental when it comes to investigating the complex relationship between reality and illusion on a both visual and verbal level in her fictional biographies. A number of studies of *Orlando* and *Flush* suggest that the images they contain are parodies of Cameron's work.[6] Whether or not this might be the case, it seems manifest that, as with Cameron's idealised pictures, the photographs in *Orlando* show that the camera lens may reproduce the subject truthfully, but may also betray its inner nature; in other words, photography can give birth to the simulacrum of an identity as well as to a fake. Needless to say, readers of the book immediately recognise that the photographic subject at the same time *is* and *is not* Orlando, Vita, Sasha, Angelica, and so on. They might even wonder whether it is the caption or the photo which holds the truth, considering that both are in positions of authority, though contradicting each other. As Wussow remarks, "Woolf asks the reader to [...] accept the photograph as evidence of Orlando's existence. [...] The reader may wish to comply with Woolf's captions and read the photographs as representing Orlando. There remains, however, a disconcerting sensation that Woolf's text trifles with the evidence and the reader. In *Orlando* both image and text are jokes and the best joke of all is on the reader"

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[6] See on this point Flesher 1997; Schaffer 1994; Wussow 1994, 1997.

(1994, 3). The biographer, for instance, plays with the idea of superposed identities in a passage in which the text is made to describe the pictures it includes, directing the reader's attention to the ambiguity that characterises both:

> So, having now worn skirts for a considerable time, a certain change was visible in Orlando, which is to be found if the reader will look at plate 5, even in her face. If we compare the picture of Orlando as a man with that of Orlando as a woman we shall see that though both are undoubtedly one and the same person, there are certain changes. [...] Had they both worn the same clothes, it is possible that their outlook might have been the same. (Woolf 1992, 180).

Such statement is partially, and voluntarily, misleading: Orlando as a man and Orlando as a woman are not in the least "one and the same person," the former being an ancient member of the Sackville family portrayed at Knole and the latter being Vita recently photographed. Therefore, the narrative voice directs the reader towards false photographic evidence, actually preventing any possibility of proving such sameness by means of a comparison between the two pictures. While on the one hand this affirmation of identity is utterly preposterous, on the other hand the biographer's assertion that "a certain change was visible" undoubtedly holds true. However, by a willing suspension of disbelief, the reader may as well decide to trust the captions and accept the idea that all the different pictures represent Orlando, or that the different Orlandos coincide. This superposition of identities is clearly reminiscent of Cameron's pictures, which, as Natasha Aleksiuk remarks, "challenge the idea that all 19th-century portrait photography refers naïvely to a stable biographical subject" (2000, 125-126). Moreover, it adds to a further level of ambiguity that is inherent in the photographic medium, namely the coexistence of the purely mimetic nature of the photograph with the possibility of creating illusory images: as Sontag suggests, "photographs are, of course, artifacts. But their appeal is that they also seem [...] unpremeditated slices of the world. Thus, they trade simultaneously on the prestige of art and the magic of the real" (1977, 43). Such view of photography seems to be in line with Maggie Humm's claim that the medium was "a tool which Woolf and Bell used, not simply as a documentary device but as a means of crossing the border between the visual and the unconscious" (2002, ix). Bearing in mind Cameron's belief that pictures "are not unmediated pieces of reality but are rather vehicles for blending the real with the fantastic or ideal" (Aleksiuk 2000, 126), the elusive quality of her portrait photography can be said to have paved the way for Woolf's "desire to release biography from the realm of the purely factual" (*ibid.*) on a both verbal and visual level.

To conclude, in *Orlando* Woolf uses a combination of historical/biographical facts, exaggeratedly fantastic fiction and photographic representation to cross the boundary between imagination and reality. Besides parodying the realism of conventional biography through deliberate distortions of the categories of time, space and gender in her narrative, Woolf disrupts such narrative through photographs which purport to ground the text in reality while simultaneously

turning that reality upside down, thus proving—as she wrote about Nicolson's *Some People* in "The New Biography"—"that one can use many of the devices of fiction in dealing with real life [...] trying to mix the truth of real life and the truth of fiction" (1966b, 233-234).

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SALVATORE GRAZIANO SPAMPINATO

"L'ARTE DELL'OSSERVAZIONE"

La Kriegsfibel *di Brecht e le sue traduzioni italiane:
prospettiva, intermedialità, didattica*

ABSTRACT: This paper aims to place an interpretation on some aspects of the Brechtian *Kriegsfibel*, as rendered in the two most important Italian editions of the text. The *Kriegsfibel* is a collection of "photo-epigrams" realized by Brecht during his exile and then published in 1955. In this work the topic of Second World War is discussed in the dialectic between photography and poetry. On the one hand, this operation aims to deconstruct the epistemological status of photography as *Apparat* able to reproduce the reality *tout court*; on the other, it questions the perception of reality in its historical, geographic and social aspects. In this way, the topicality of war photography is projected, through the epigram, in millennial History and, at the same time, the narrative of History activates in the reader the creation of meaning and, therefore, the concrete action in the present. In the light of this analysis, a study of *Kriegsfibel*'s Italian translations is proposed, i.e. the *Abicí della guerra* by Fertonani (1972), more literal and classical, and the one by Solmi (1975), freer and more actualising. The focus of discussion is on the second translation, which was proposed as an accompanying booklet for an audio-visual didactical experiment to take place in schools. This is a significant operation because it vivifies the didactic element and develops the performative character of Brechtian investigation, latent in the textual (and therefore visual) dimension of the original edition.

KEYWORDS: Bertolt Brecht, *Kriegsfibel*, *Abicí della guerra*, Literature and Photography, Translation Studies, Didactics, Vietnam War, Renato Solmi, Collettivo Cinema Militante.

> I produttori e i teorici culturali della sinistra […] si sono lasciati intimidire eccessivamente dal rifiuto, proprio dell'estetica borghese e soprattutto del modernismo avanzato, di una delle funzioni più antiche dell'arte: quella pedagogica e didattica.
> F. Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*

In un articolo intitolato *Betrachtung der Kunst und Kunst der Betrachtung* (*Osservazione dell'arte e arte dell'osservazione*), scritto nel 1939 e pubblicato postumo, Brecht affronta il problema della democraticità dell'opera d'arte, e, in contrapposizione a quegli artisti che portano avanti l'idea di un'arte per il popolo senza mediazioni, scrive: "Demokratisch ist es, den »kleinen Kreis der Kenner« zu einem *großen* Kreis der Kenner zu machen. Denn die Kunst braucht Kenntnisse. (Brecht 1988-2000, XXII/1, 570; "Democratico è trasformare la 'piccola cerchia

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degli intenditori' in una *grande* cerchia di intenditori. L'arte infatti richiede conoscenze", Brecht 1973, 163). E aggiunge: "Die Betrachtung der Kunst kann nur zu wirklichem Genuß führen, wenn es eine Kunst der Betrachtung gibt. (570; "L'osservazione dell'arte porta infatti a un reale godimento solo nel caso che esista un'arte dell'osservazione", 163).

Secondo Brecht, anziché semplificare e quindi appiattire le categorie attraverso cui l'opera d'arte può essere compresa e quindi goduta, è realmente democratico creare le condizioni per cui il fruitore acquisisca gli strumenti atti a comprenderle. L'opera d'arte per chi sa osservarla si configura come un lavoro, che è un lavoro tecnico-specialistico e insieme un lavoro di osservazione. Ogni artista è "ein *Künstler* der Betrachtung" (572; it. "un *artista* dell'osservazione", 164), ed è anche un insegnante perché "Er lehrt einen die Kunst der Beobachtung der Dinge" (572; it. "può insegnare l'arte di osservare le cose", 164). In modo specifico, afferma Brecht:

> Es ist ein Charakteristikum *unserer* Zeit, die Dinge in ihrer Entwicklung, als sich verändernde, von andern Dingen und allerhand Prozessen beeinflußte, veränderbare Dinge zu betrachten. (572).

> È un'esigenza propria della *nostra* epoca osservare le cose nel loro sviluppo, considerandole come cose mutevoli, esposte all'influenza di altre cose e di processi di ogni genere, modificabili. (165).

L'arte del presente educherà ad un nuovo modo di vedere per cui l'opera d'arte, come la realtà, si mostri non come qualcosa di dato definitivamente, ma come un insieme dialettico di contraddizioni nel quale intervenire.

Un aspetto costante di tutta l'opera brechtiana è rivestito dall'attenzione per lo sguardo e l'educazione dello sguardo (cfr. Lang 1986). La stessa *Verfremdung*, teorizzata proprio nella seconda metà degli anni '30, può essere vista come un nuovo modo di osservare, che trasforma le cose in processi, la natura in storia, la mutevolezza in mutabilità. Dice il Signor Keuner in una delle sue storie: "*Denken heißt verändern*" (Brecht 1988-2000, XVIII, 31; it. "*Pensare significa cambiare*", Brecht 2008, 18). Il tipo di conoscenza a cui punta Brecht si poggia su un tipo di verità che non mira a definire la sostanza di un oggetto, come nel pensiero occidentale da Aristotele in poi, ma su una verità eminentemente relazionale, che si manifesta come rapporto tra soggetti.

Da questa esigenza nasce anche la *Kriegsfibel* (Brecht 1955: copertina fig. 1; it. *Abicí della guerra*), una raccolta di fotoepigrammi a cui Brecht lavora durante il suo lungo esilio e che pubblica solo nel 1955, dopo alterne vicende editoriali riguardanti la censura nella DDR (cfr. Hecht 2013, 232-248).

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Fig. 1. Brecht 1955, copertina.

L'opera consta di sessantanove fotografie, ritagliate dai giornali senza citare né autore né fonte (con una critica implicita alla concezione autoriale della fotografia: cfr. Kienast 2001, Fragapane 2015), sotto cui vengono inserite sessantanove epigrammi di quattro versi in rima alternata scritti da Brecht. Foto e versi, secondo schemi diversi (cfr. Cometa 2015), sono applicati su uno sfondo nero, sulla pagina destra del libro. La pagina sinistra rimane invece bianca e contiene le didascalie originali riportate dai giornali.

Qui la didattica brechtiana dello sguardo viene sperimentata sul linguaggio tecnico dell'immagine fotografica, con un'operazione che punta a destrutturarne lo statuto epistemologico come *Apparat* (Brecht 1988-2000, XXI, 466-467) in grado di riprodurre *tout court* la realtà (cfr. Fiorentino 2013; Fiorentino, Valentini 2015, 61-76). La fotografia, per sua natura, congela l'oggetto raffigurato in un tempo e lo rende definitivo, mentre la verità in esso contenuta è nella sua relazione, sempre mutabile, con gli altri oggetti: "Der Photographenapparat kann ebenso lügen wie die Setzmachine" (Brecht 1988-2000, XXI, 515; it. "L'*Apparat* fotografico può mentire così come una macchina da scrivere" tr. mia). Così, per conoscere e verificare le capacità di rappresentazione della fotografia, essa deve essere resa in azione drammatica, deve entrare in dialettica con dell'altro. In questa operazione è chiaro come sia centrale il procedimento del montaggio, che, creando nessi e contestualizzazioni inedite e stranianti, attiva nel fruitore la creazione di senso, ponendolo al centro della creazione artistica, come osservatore dell'arte e della Storia, in una unità in cui godimento artistico, riflessione politica e azione concreta nel presente sono strettamente connesse.

Tale esperimento risulta particolarmente interessante perché applicato a un evento storico fondamentale per la Storia occidentale, ovvero la Seconda Guerra Mondiale, letta da Brecht andando oltre la sua "estetizzazione" compiuta dal

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fascismo (cfr. Benjamin 2000, 49) per comprenderne la struttura portante, fatta di rapporti sociali. A proposito, Didi-Hubermann ha scritto:

> La *Kriegsfibel* nous renseigne précisément sur le fait qu'à une image de l'histoire, il ne suffit pas d'accoler la légende choisie par le photographe, le magazine d'information ou le centre d'archives dont elle émane. À toute image de l'histoire il faut, non seulement une légende [...] mais une *légende dialectisée*, une légende au moins redoublée. (Didi-Huberman 2009, 172-173).

La dialettica intermediale tra fotografia ed epigramma può essere interpretata in svariati modi; in questo breve saggio accenneremo solo ad alcuni aspetti, che ci sembrano importanti per comprendere la ricezione dell'opera in Italia. [1] Innanzitutto, essa mette in gioco la storicità stessa della percezione del reale, in quanto provoca nell'immaginario del fruitore uno straniamento dato dall'urto tra la stretta attualità degli eventi e un orizzonte millenario di largo respiro, ovvero tra la modernità tecnica dello scatto e la classicità di versi brevi, la cui comunicazione icastica è vicina a ciò che Benjamin, parlando della sezione *Deutsche Kriegsfibel* delle *Svendborger Gedichte*, aveva definito "stile lapidario":

> Questa parola viene dal latino *lapis*, la pietra, e designa lo stile che era stato elaborato per le epigrafi. Il suo connotato più importante era la brevità. Questa era condizionata, da un lato, dalla fatica di incidere le parole nella pietra, dall'altro dalla consapevolezza che per colui che si proponeva di parlare a tutta una serie di generazioni fosse opportuno esprimersi in breve. [...] Il carattere del *Breviario* può venir identificato in una contraddizione del tutto peculiare: in parole alle quali, per la loro forma poetica, viene attribuita la facoltà di sopravvivere all'imminente fine del mondo, si fissa il gesto di tracciare una scritta su uno steccato, una scritta che il perseguitato butta giù in fretta. In questa contraddizione si concentra la straordinaria carica artistica di queste proposizioni, fatte di poche parole rudimentali. Il poeta conferisce la dignità dell'oraziano *aere perennius* a ciò che un proletario ha scritto con il gesso su un muro lasciandolo in balìa della pioggia e degli agenti della Gestapo. (Benjamin 2000a, 157).

È chiaro come questa *Verfremdung*, che si configura *in primis* come *Verfemdung* della prospettiva storica, rimarchi un'ulteriore e centrale forma di straniamento, di natura sociale: la contrapposizione dialettica "des UNTEN und des OBEN" (Brecht 1955, 19; it. 19: "del *sopra* e del *sotto*"). Nella *Kriegsfibel* la guerra è interpretata innanzitutto come un conflitto di classe più che come un conflitto tra nazioni. Ma ciò acquisisce anche una non marginale connotazione geografica. Insomma, ciò che avviene è una *Verfremdung* radicale della percezione umana della realtà attraverso la fotografia, percezione che è sempre storicamente, socialmente e geograficamente determinata.

La Seconda Guerra Mondiale è per Brecht un conflitto essenzialmente imperialista. E anche le forme in cui viene narrato non sono neutre, anzi, il suo *Apparat* rivela saldamente questa sua natura strutturale. Come sottolinea Franco

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[1] Per uno studio esaustivo sulla *Krigesfibel,* tra la bibliografia sconfinata in merito si considerino, oltre i testi già citati, almeno Stammen 1999 e lo storico Grimm 1969.

Fortini (Fortini 2003, 140-141) Brecht è un intellettuale attento a congiungere alla ricerca della scientificità le "eredità preborghesi o protoborghesi [...] o extraeuropee", è un poeta "sensibile alle forme di sfruttamento «arretrato», elementare, coloniale o semicoloniale". Così, l'esigenza di considerare la globalità del conflitto, lo porta a dedicare quasi un terzo del libro a fotografie scattate fuori dall'Europa. C'è in lui un decentramento della prospettiva, un'esigenza di narrare che Edward Said avrebbe definito "per insiemi contrappuntistici", una coscienza che le identità per esistere hanno bisogno di opposti (Said 1998, 77). Per scegliere un esempio tra tutti, ciò è fortemente visibile nel fotoepigramma 37 (fig. 2) che rappresenta una donna africana a seno scoperto nell'atto di trasportare qualcosa sopra la testa. La didascalia riporta concisamente "Afrika"; l'epigramma sotto la foto recita:

Die Herren raufen um dich, schöne Schöpfung,
Und rasend stoßen sie sich aus den Schuh'n.
Denn jeder rühmt sich kundiger der Schröpfung
Und mehr im Rechte, dir Gewalt zu tun. (Brecht 1955, 37).

Per te, bella creatura, i padroni vengono alle mani,
e furiosi si fanno le scarpe a vicenda.
Ognuno si vanta più esperto nello sfruttarti
e più in diritto nel farti violenza. (trad. it. Brecht 1972, 37).

Fig. 2. Brecht 1955, 37.

Come già notava Sorlin riguardo alla fotografia etnografica (Sorlin 2001, 185-187), essa ha carattere ontologicamente predatorio, frutto di una volontà di conoscenza che è anche possesso e sopraffazione; la fotografia, con la forza tecnica che porta in sé, è anche una forma di dominio verso i popoli colonizzati. La "bellezza" della fotografia, e dell'oggetto che essa rappresenta, è inserita nell'epigramma nel contesto dei rapporti di oppressione e colonialismo in cui

nasce. Alla foto "imperialista", occidentale, Brecht pone in dialettica quello che Hans Mayer ha chiamato "il linguaggio degli schiavi" (Mayer 1972, 92-101), ma perché, attraverso il riflesso dialettico della narrazione dominante, possa intravedersi la loro dignità e la loro tradizione, in un monumento alla loro resistenza (Evans 2003). Lontana dal terzomondismo banalizzante e pur non essendo refrattaria alla tecnica, anzi, intenta a comprenderla e usarla ai propri scopi, l'estetica intrinsecamente didattica di Brecht, in questo testo come in molti altri della sua produzione, è spinta da una concezione della Storia in cui storicismo e antistoricismo si intrecciano, in cui rifiutando il progresso lineare ed eurocentrico è possibile ritrovare un senso di civiltà e di forza di cambiamento anche in culture percepite come antiche e precapitalistiche, ma non per questo meno contemporanee.

In questa operazione, l'aspetto grafico riveste un ruolo importantissimo. Lo sfondo nero rappresenta di per sé una forma immediata di straniamento dello sguardo, per cui il nero su bianco del giornale diventa bianco su nero. D'altronde questa inversione cromatica potrebbe alludere a molti significati: è per esempio coerente con l'immagine quasi ancestrale dell'incisione sulla roccia (cfr. *supra*: Benjamin 2000a; l'introduzione di Ruth Berlau, Brecht 1955), ma anche, in modo complementare, con l'immaginario della modernità più stretta, ovvero con il cinema muto, riferimento che un lettore degli anni Quaranta non poteva non cogliere. La scritta bianca su sfondo nero rimanda poi, in modo molto indicativo, anche alla lavagna, strumento didattico per eccellenza.

Questi tre elementi della *Kriegsfibel* – lo straniamento della prospettiva storica, l'attenzione per l'intermedialità e l'intento primariamente didattico – si rivelano indispensabili per comprenderne la ricezione italiana e, in particolare, le due principali traduzioni, edite nella prima metà degli anni '70. [2] L'impatto che quest'opera deve avere avuto sulla poesia italiana, ai tempi della sua traduzione, dev'essere stato ingente. Si considerino, ad esempio, alcune affermazioni di Didi-Huberman riguardo a *La rabbia* di Pasolini:

> Trovo che il raddoppiamento inventato da Pasolini sulle due voci sia l'equivalente di quello che fece Brecht raddoppiando le legende delle tavole della *Kriegsfibel*: da una parte le legende "fattuali" sono ritagliate e rese visibili in ciascuna immagine, e, dall'altra, troviamo quella "voce in poesia" che è l'epigramma. In fondo si potrebbe pensare che Pasolini compia un gesto brechtiano, un gesto dialettico – quello della voce in prosa, voce in poesia. Bisognerebbe vedere la data in cui è stata tradotta in italiano la *Kriegsfibel* – L'*Abc della guerra* è stato pubblicato da Einaudi, ma non ricordo esattamente in quale anno – non mi stupirebbe che fosse prima del 1975... In ogni caso Pasolini sicuramente lo conosceva. (Didi-Huberman, Rebecchi 2010).

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[2] La traduzione dell'edizione Brecht 2002, pur ripresa da quella di Fertonani, è in alcuni passi leggermente modificata.

Ma si veda anche l'opera simile di Gianfranco Ciabatti, l'*Abicí d'anteguerra*, del 1997, in cui il rimando all'operazione brechtiana è esplicito ed eloquente (Ciabatti 1997; cfr. Latini 2011).

La *Kriegsfibel* è pubblicata in Italia da Einaudi in due edizioni molto ravvicinate tra loro: una del 1972, nella collana "Letteratura" (Brecht 1972), e una seconda del 1975, in "Letture per la scuola media" (Brecht 1975), entrambe con il titolo *Abicí della guerra* ma con due traduzioni differenti. Il fatto che lo stesso editore nel giro di tre anni abbia deciso di pubblicare due traduzioni diverse della stessa opera è un fatto che risulta singolare e spinge la nostra attenzione a comprendere la peculiarità delle due operazioni editoriali.

La prima traduzione, del 1972, è di Roberto Fertonani, traduttore storico di Brecht, forse il più importante insieme a Fortini fra i traduttori della sua poesia. Sua è la prima edizione italiana in assoluto di poesie brechtiane, *Io Bertolt Brecht* (Brecht 1956). Fertonani, rispetto a Fortini, è un traduttore fedele alla lettera del testo, che sovente trascura l'aspetto metrico per concentrarsi sul significato dei versi che traduce. Inoltre, è un attento studioso del primo Brecht, quello meno "classico" e più post-espressionista, ed è traduttore della raccolta giovanile *Hauspostille* (it. *Libro di devozioni domestiche*, Brecht 1964) e quindi più incline a rendere i versi brechtiani con un linguaggio semplice e schietto, estraneo alle invece frequenti arcaizzazioni di Fortini (cfr. Barbon 1987). Anche la sua traduzione della *Kriegsfibel* è interlineare. Le rime alternate scompaiono, i versi diventano irregolari. Ma la traduzione letterale e in quattro versi permette di conservare degnamente la fedeltà all'edizione iniziale. Dall'archivio Einaudi scopriamo che in un carteggio lo stesso Davico Bonino il 23 luglio 1970 scrive a Fertonani: "non dovresti incaponirti sul gioco delle rime" (Davico Bonino 1970, 132).[3] La differenza enorme con l'edizione originale sta invece nell'aspetto grafico (fig. 3): per motivi presumibilmente soprattutto economici, l'effetto album fotografico è totalmente eliminato. Le dimensioni sono totalmente alterate, conformate totalmente alla collana "Letteratura". Si perde anche lo sfondo nero, che tanto invece era importante nell'impatto visuale dell'opera: se ne trova traccia solo vagamente nella copertina (fig. 4). In compenso, l'impaginazione rimane invece fedele all'originale: quattro versi sotto o dentro la fotografia; accanto, nella pagina sinistra, le didascalie dei giornali (tradotte in italiano). L'unica introduzione è quella originale di Ruth Berlau; viene accantonata l'idea di Fertonani di far introdurre il libro da un testo di Fortini che spieghi il nesso tra l'età di Brecht e l'attualità (cfr. Fertonani 1971, 162; Fertonani 1972a, 165). Sono presenti solo le *Nachbemerkungen zu den Bildern* (it. *Postille alle fotografie*) presenti nell'edizione tedesca del '55 e nella successiva ristampa del 1968. Quella del 1972, nonostante l'impatto grafico sia alterato, nel testo e nel paratesto rimane un'edizione che vorrebbe restituire il testo nel suo contesto di origine.
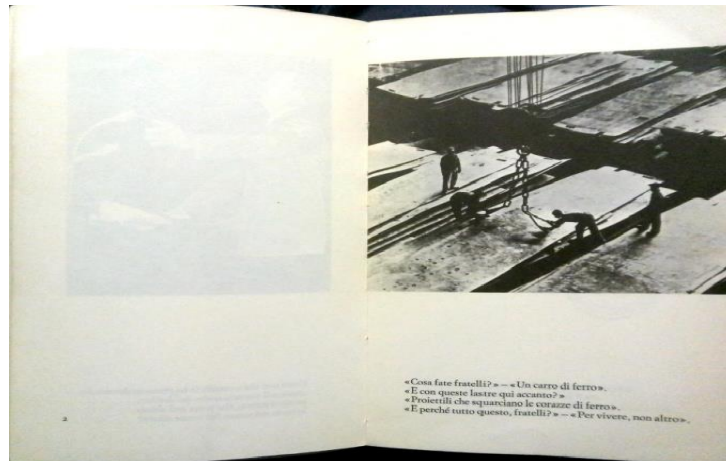
Fig. 3. Brecht 1972, 2.
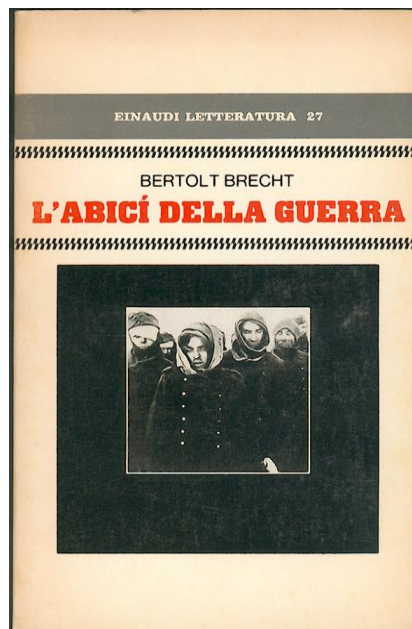
Fig. 4. Brecht 1972, copertina.

Un lavoro totalmente diverso e con altri obiettivi è invece quello del 1975 a cura di Renato Solmi e del Collettivo Cinema Militante di Torino per la collana "Letture per la scuola media", a seguito della preparazione di "*una versione audiovisiva di questo testo per le scuole e i circoli di cultura*" (Brecht 1975, V). L'*Abicí della guerra* è l'unica opera poetica curata e tradotta da Solmi, che non è un traduttore di poesia, ma un importante intellettuale. Scrittore militante in *Nuovi argomenti*, *Quaderni rossi*, *Quaderni piacentini* e *Il manifesto*, è conosciuto soprattutto come traduttore di *Angelus Novus* di Benjamin e di *Minima moralia* di Adorno, ma che ha tradotto anche Marcuse e Lukács e Spitzer.

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L'edizione nasce dalla presa di coscienza che si è in una prospettiva storica ormai diversa da quella di Brecht. E non nel modo della imbarazzata introduzione di Michele Serra alla più recente edizione dell'*Abicí* del 2002 (cfr. Lenzini 2003). La sua presa di coscienza nasce dalla costatazione che negli anni '70 le immagini della Seconda Guerra Mondiale non sono più l' attualità, ma un documento storico, un fossile che benjamianamente rompe il continuum della Storia e viene attivata nella *Jetztzeit* con i suoi conflitti e le sue contraddizioni.

In questa operazione ad essere molto diverso è innanzitutto il paratesto. Oltre a perdersi totalmente lo schermo nero come nell'edizione precedente, anche il layout è qui totalmente stravolto (fig. 4): gli epigrammi si trovano nella pagina sinistra, impedendo così al fruitore di cogliere con una sola occhiata testo e foto; sono eliminate le didascalie originali riportate dai giornali, sostituite da delle note storiche che spiegano gli avvenimenti, il contesto e il significato della fotografia per metterlo in rapporto con il presente.
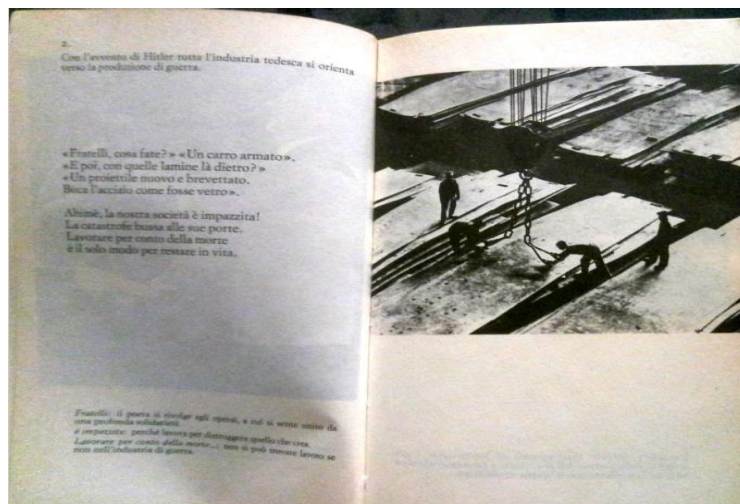
Fig. 5. Brecht 1975, 2.

L'*Abicí* brechtiana è preceduta una ricca introduzione storica di Solmi che spiega la posizione pacifista di Brecht e la connette al pacifismo europeo e statunitense degli anni '70. Vi è poi, in coda, una altrettanto ricca appendice che consta di una serie di voluminose note critiche di Solmi dedicate ad ogni fotoepigramma e delle *Note giustificative* riguardanti la traduzione. Se l'alterazione delle note e la presenza di un nuovo apparato critico potrebbero essere giustificati considerando l'intento esplicitamente didattico, riscontrabile fin dalla collocazione di collana, leggendo il commento di Solmi si comprende subito come le finalità si spingono molto al di là della semplice divulgazione. Non sono assenti suggestioni adorniane – come la riflessione sul sesso nella pubblicità nella nota al fotoepigramma 41 (Brecht 1975, app. 21) – e fin dalle *Note sui criteri della traduzione* si afferma che "l'esplosione della bomba atomica, la fine della guerra in Oriente, inauguravano la nuova epoca" (XXXIV). Soprattutto, la Seconda

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Guerra Mondiale, smascherata in quanto conflitto imperialistico, viene letta come una prefigurazione del nuovo imperialismo statunitense e della guerra in Vietnam. Numerosissimi sono i parallelismi tra i due conflitti: la diffusione di immagini sessuali tra le truppe (app. 21); il rovesciamento delle categorie di barbarie e civiltà, per cui "la civiltà bianca accecata deve farsi guidare per mano dalle forze […] che si affacciano alla ribalta della storia nei paesi del Terzo Mondo" (app. 22); la distinzione marcata tra i mandanti nascosti degli ordini sanguinari e i loro esecutori materiali (app. 9, 10), che può sfociare in entrambi i casi in sollevazioni e rivolte (app. 7, 29, 32). In particolare, nel commentare l'epigramma 8, Solmi paragona le sollevazioni dei soldati americani avvenute nell'ultima fase della Guerra in Vietnam agli episodi narrati nel romanzo di Emilio Lussu, *Un anno sull'altipiano*, con un riferimento non casuale considerando che il titolo era stato pubblicato nella stessa collana Einaudi nel 1972 e che qualche anno prima era stata prodotta una rivisitazione cinematografica, *Uomini contro* di Francesco Rosi, la quale aveva destato molte polemiche per la sua interpretazione marcatamente di classe della guerra (cfr. Faldini, Fofi 1984, 76). Centrale è poi la critica all'antinazionalismo ridotto a "luogo comune della pubblicistica" per "esigenza fondamentale dell'impero americano", mentre "la minaccia del militarismo è tutt'altro che scomparsa", anzi "l'esercito si presenta più chiaramente […] come uno strumento […] del controllo delle centrali imperialistiche sui paesi più piccoli o meno sviluppati" (Brecht 1972, app. 7). D'altronde come non pensare che, al di là dell'interpretazione marxista di Solmi, nell'immaginario dei lettori degli anni '70 le tante immagini dell'*Abicí della guerra* dedicate ai Paesi economicamente sottosviluppati indichino altro, una situazione mutata e pure ancora terribilmente presente. Eloquente è ad esempio il fotoepigramma 42, che contiene una famosa copertina della rivista statunitense *Life* (fig. 6), che Solmi commenta soffermandosi in una dettagliata digressione sui rifugi vietnamiti e sulla loro funzione militare, in un passaggio che vale la pena riportare per intero:

> Venticinque anni dopo, nella stessa regione del mondo, l'Indocina, un popolo intero, quello vietnamita (ma anche i laotiani, i cambogiani ecc.) sarebbe stato costretto a rifugiarsi nel sottosuolo sotto una tempesta di ferro e di fuoco. Le gallerie e i camminamenti sotterranei, che si prolungavano spesso per decine di chilometri, collegando fra loro i diversi villaggi, i «rifugi personali» costruiti dagli abitanti del Vietnam del Nord per difendersi dagli attacchi aerei, e altri espedienti ingegnosi di questo genere, hanno svolto una funzione importante in un tipo di guerra in cui le forze combattenti erano strettamente unite al resto della popolazione e la popolazione stessa aderiva strettamente al terreno per proteggersi dalla potenza imperialistica dominatrice dell'aria. L'analogia dei luoghi, delle situazioni e delle immagini getta una luce sinistra sulla continuità della politica americana in Asia e sul carattere imperialistico della guerra condotta dagli Stati Uniti in Estremo Oriente. (App. 21-22).
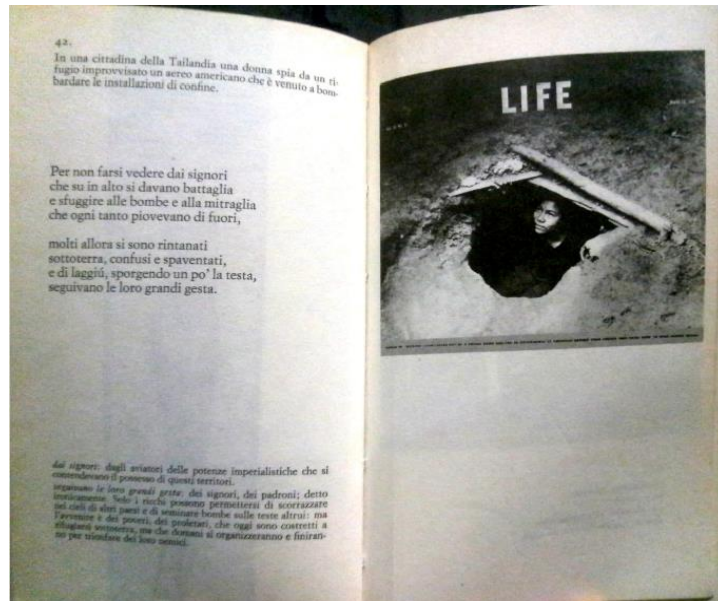
Fig. 6. Brecht 1975, 42.

È una presenza ingombrante quella dell'immaginario vietnamita, che risulta lampante fin dalla copertina. Qui l'immagine raffigurante i soldati tedeschi che ritornano da Stalingrado (mutuata dal fotoepigramma 61), che era stata adottata anche dall'edizione del 1972, viene sostituita da un'altra fotografia, quella del fotoepigramma 46, in cui un soldato americano prende in braccio, per portarlo al riparo, un bambino orientale: una foto tra le più espressive del libro, e anche tra le più ferocemente ironiche (fig. 7).
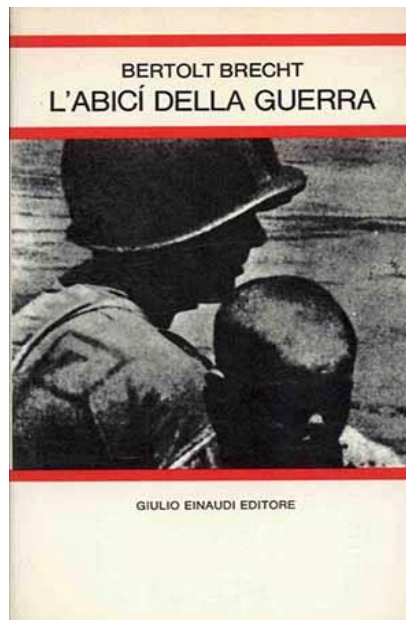
Fig. 8. Brecht 1975, copertina.

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L'elemento più vistoso dell'operazione è l'aggiunta, ai sessantanove del testo originale, di un fotoepigramma ad opera dei curatori, inserito tra le *Note per lo studio* per rendere "più esplicito e più evidente il carattere di adattamento e di rifacimento" (XXXV). Così il libro che iniziava e si concludeva con una foto di Hitler perde la sua circolarità e si apre al presente. La foto inserita raffigura Hiroshima il 6 agosto 1945 (fig. 9). La poesia avverte che se un terrore si è concluso, "la catena dei delitti/ unisce gli sconfitti e i vincitori" (38).
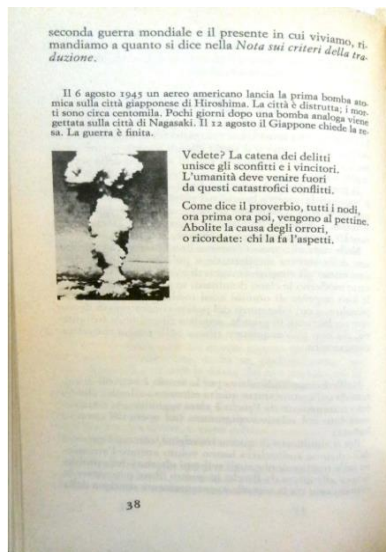
Fig. 9. Brecht 1975, 38.

Come già accennato, questa *Abicí della guerra* è frutto di un'operazione che diviene editoriale solo in un secondo momento. Essa è, innanzitutto, un esperimento di didattica audiovisiva per scuole ma non solo[4] (fig. 10).

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[4]Sono riuscito a rinvenire il filmato all'archivio Armando Ceste e a visionarlo, grazie al prezioso lavoro di Vittorio Sclaverani, che ringrazio.

Fig. 10. Brecht 1973a: copertina opuscolo.

Da un punto di vista sociologico, è un'operazione che mostra la forte permeabilità tra istituzioni culturali e gruppi di base, osmosi caratteristica di quella fase storica, che apriva ampi margini di manovra a una stretta connessione sentimentale, rendendo possibili collaborazioni come questa, tra il più prestigioso editore italiano, l'intellettuale che ha portato la Scuola di Francoforte in Italia e un collettivo protagonista della scena cinematografica underground torinese. Il progetto si radica in un contesto culturale ben preciso, che ho cercato di ricostruire grazie a una conversazione con il Prof. Gianfranco Torri, che ha collaborato attivamente all'*Abicí* e che ringrazio. La nascita del Collettivo Cinema Militante è legata al dibattito che porta alla scissione della rivista *Ombre rosse* intorno al 1968. La sua attività si basa su una riflessione critica e su una prassi cinematografica che si prefigurano oltre la macchina sistemica e l'istituzione del cinema alto, ufficiale, per sondare e sperimentare invece tutte le potenzialità del cinema come mezzo espressivo capace di creare narrazioni orizzontali, ancorate a un punto di vista di classe, e in cui la scarsità di mezzi possa essere trasformata in una risorsa di creatività e di ricerca. Vengono così realizzati dal CCM di Torino una serie di produzioni dal basso, come *Lotte alla Rhodiatoce* (1968-1969), realizzato collettivamente da studenti e da operai della fabbrica, *Mirafiori '73*, durante le occupazioni della Fiat e, soprattutto, *La fabbrica aperta* (1970-1971), risultato del montaggio di riprese effettuate da un operaio, Franco Platania, durante un suo viaggio in Cina per documentare le condizioni di lavoro nella Repubblica popolare (cfr. Ceste, Della Casa, Manuele, Torri 1984). È interessante osservare come Brecht, pur essendo un autore della grande letteratura, si presti a essere incluso in operazioni di questo tipo.

Il progetto audiovisivo dell'*Abicí* del CCM risulta interessante anche considerando il suo aspetto intermediale, che sviluppa il carattere drammatico-dialettico dell'operazione brechtiana, implicito nella dimensione testuale (e quindi

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visuale) dell'edizione originale. In realtà, lo stesso Brecht pensava per questa opera già così intrinsecamente performativa a un adattamento teatrale, che prevedesse in perfetto stile epico anche musica e letture, ma non riuscirà a portare a termine il progetto in vita e, in modi differenti, una versione con musica sarà realizzata da Hanns Eisler dopo la morte del poeta (Eisler 1966; cfr. Pistiak 2005). Tuttavia, a quanto risulta dalle fonti (cfr. Brecht 1975, V), non sembra che i curatori italiani fossero a conoscenza dell'esperimento; inoltre, l'inserimento della musica "epica" di Eisler pone tutta una serie di questioni critiche ed è frutto di riflessioni di natura fondamentalmente diversa da quelle poste in gioco da Solmi e dal CCM nella loro operazione, che è concepita come una proiezione di diapositive su cui due attori recitano le poesie brechtiane nella traduzione di Solmi e le didascalie non originali.

Da un punto di vista estetico, il filmato è molto vicino ai film del cinema di base, realizzati con scarsità di attrezzature e sorretti da espedienti espressivi di tipo registico. Si sottolineano soprattutto diversificati movimenti di macchina sulla fotografia che danno dinamicità all'immagine in dialogo con le voci, con uno schema simile a quello dei documentari del regista Michele Gandin.

Nella fruizione audiovisiva non si può cogliere in un colpo d'occhio la fotografia e il testo, ma la visione della foto avviene contemporaneamente all'ascolto in un tempo definito e in un'operazione irreversibile. L'effetto è totalmente diverso. Si perde lo straniamento che riporta ai minimi termini i fattori storici alla base della scrittura nella catastrofe, l'immaginario dell'epigramma come emblema della barbarie e della classicità, in dialettica con la stretta attualità della fotografia. Si perde e non può che perdersi. Per un lettore e spettatore degli anni '70 le foto dell'*Abicí della guerra* sono immagini di repertorio. Così all'estetica del cinema di base si intreccia quella del documentario, grazie anche a due voci fuori campo che alternandosi introducono e commentano le immagini storiche. Ma anche qui ci troviamo di fronte ad un documentario straniato, che vive di una dialettica interna propria, di cui un elemento fondamentale è rappresentato dalle soluzioni traduttive del testo, allo scopo di renderlo compatibile con la recitazione orale e la comprensione immediata, in mancanza della possibilità di rilettura.

Come riportato nelle *Note sui criteri della traduzione* (Brecht 1975, XXXV) "La traduzione è stato un lavoro collettivo", ma la "responsabilità delle scelte adottate" è di Solmi.

Si tratta di una traduzione che, oltre le scelte del singolo traduttore, ha a che fare con il dialogo tra gruppi sociali e fasi storiche diverse: potremmo definirla una traduzione "rifacimento", non solo per esplicita dichiarazione di Solmi, ma anche nel senso stretto che questa definizione riveste della teorizzazione fortiniana. Si tratta, infatti, di una traduzione che, citando Fortini (Fortini 2003a, 837), "diventa un discorso sulla eredità e sulla funzione letteraria medesima" e che per questo "non è separabile da una verifica dei linguaggi [...] e delle funzioni ideologiche nascoste nella cosiddetta letteratura".

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Su suggerimento di Cesare Cases, Solmi raddoppia i versi dell'originale e recupera l'uso delle rime. Ne vengono fuori così otto endecasillabi, quasi sempre in rima baciata, in alcuni casi in rima alternata e in rari casi incrociata. Le rime sono quasi sempre da filastrocca, semplici e martellanti, risolte molto spesso con participi o participi aggettivati (cfr. 1, 2, 3, 7, 12, 33, 42, 46, 48, 52, 56, 57, 58, 60, 65, 67) o comunque in -ato, -ati (cfr. 24, 25, 26, 27), ma anche con il verbo alla fine del verso (3, 21, 43, 47, 48, 63). Il linguaggio è notevolmente abbassato, con espressioni come "è una pacchia" (35), "si prendono a cazzotti" (37) o "cornuto e mazziato" (67) fino al turpiloquio di "figli di mignotta" (16); vi è poi un frequentissimo uso di espressioni idiomatiche: "piazza pulita" (9), "che gli venga un accidente" (10), "fargli festa" (13), "siamo freschi" (11), "cuore della notte" (21), "perché e percome" (22), "cambio i connotati" (26), "correte dietro" (28), "rallegra il cuore" (31), "promette mari e monti" e "causa persa" (35), "fare presto" (36), "senza scampo" (43), "tratto il dado" (53), "dio ne scampi" (54), "l'ha spuntata" (56), "ci ha portato fuori strada" (58), "trattateli come si deve" (61), "ridotto in questo stato" (65), "mettere i piedi sulla testa" (66), "parole vengono dal cuore" e "mettere a soqquadro" (68), "andato a fondo" (69). Così anche nell'epigramma aggiunto: "tutti i nodi […] vengono al pettine" e "chi la fa l'aspetti" (app. 38). Molti anche i riferimenti alla cultura italiana, come il dantesco e quasi proverbiale "come altrui piacque" (7), "cosa nostra" (38) e il riferimento all'ipotesto *Se questo è un uomo* di Primo Levi (66), altro titolo pubblicato anche nella stessa collana "Letture per la scuola media".

Il risultato è un testo dal ritmo serrato da epica popolare, che unisce alla oralità vera e propria delle voci il senso di oralità della voce collettiva del cantastorie, con un possibile rimando anche al cantautorato tipico dell'Italia degli anni '60 e '70. D'altra parte si potrebbe anche supporre, dato il suo contesto scolastico, che sia anche un modo di straniare gli ottonari rimati da filastrocca per bambini. D'altronde a suggerire questa soluzione metrico-ritmica è, come si accennava prima, Cesare Cases, il quale è avvezzo a comporre epigrammi di questo tipo che l'amico Fortini, non senza mordace ironia, definiva "ottonari rimati alla 'Corriere dei piccoli'" (Cases 2000, 71; cfr. anche Cases 1980, 63, e il Carteggio Cases-Fortini 1955-1993). Com'è noto la prima pagina della rivista era molto spesso dedicata a un racconto che aveva la stessa struttura: quattro distici in rima baciata.

Il rimando del testo alla dimensione non adulta potrebbe anche essere avvalorato dalla sua fortissima dimensione di didattica scolastica. Non è un caso se l'introduzione dall'*Abicí della guerra* sarà raccolta da Solmi, decenni dopo, nella sua *Autobiografia documentaria* (Solmi 2007), nella sezione "La contestazione nella scuola". Solmi concepisce la traduzione e la proiezione con il Collettivo Cinema Militante mentre lavora nella scuola media serale a Mirafiori, nel periodo che lui stesso ricorda così:

Dal punto di vista pedagogico, e anche dal punto di vista umano, è stata forse l'esperienza più interessante e più convincente di tutta la mia vita lavorativa. Per la prima volta avevo l'impressione di essere veramente utile, e cioè di poter dare ai miei allievi […] qualcosa che,

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in quelle circostanze, essi avrebbero potuto difficilmente ricevere da altri. Avevo molto tempo a disposizione, ma lo passavo quasi interamente nella preparazione di materiali […]. Molti di quei materiali, riletti oggi a distanza, mi sembrano quanto di meglio mi sia riuscito di fare nel corso della mia vita. (Solmi 2007, 797)

Questo ricordo positivo e la missione educatrice si saldano anche in una lettera, inedita, che Solmi spedisce a Luca Lenzini il 3 ottobre 2003, in cui afferma che *Abicí* rappresenta per lui:

certamente una delle cose che mi compiaccio maggiormente di aver fatto, anche se il merito della cosa dovrebbe essere ripartito equamente fra tutti i compagni che ne hanno preso parte, nelle lunghe letture e discussioni che hanno avuto luogo a casa mia nel lontano 1974, per cui l'impresa è stata effettivamente un'opera collettiva, che ha contribuito a darle quel tono corale che era già presente nel testo brechtiano. (Solmi 2003)

Questa lettera è particolarmente importante perché qui Solmi chiede a Lenzini, nel caso si facesse una nuova edizione della sua traduzione, di inserire un ulteriore fotoepigramma scritto in occasione del cinquantenario della morte di Dante Di Nanni[5].

Se fossi qui fra noi, Dante Di Nanni,
non avresti compiuto i settantanni.
Sei caduto, diritto come un fuso,
dopo avere mostrato il pugno chiuso.

Se la tua mente vinse la paura
del vuoto sottostante, fu perché
la forza che ti spinse oltre di te
era una lotta, e non un'avventura. (*ibid.*)

Anche qui, unita alla comprensione della Storia, c'è una viva l'attenzione per la giovinezza e anche qui il contesto è scolastico – nella lettera si parla di una partecipazione con la classe alla celebrazione. L'elemento didattico risulta poi molto forte, quasi a costituire un metodo di conoscenza della Storia che può essere recuperato oltre Brecht.

Questi aspetti non devono sembrare avulsi dall'intento brechtiano e una forzatura nella sua recezione; lo stesso Brecht è molto attento alla questione giovanile e scolastica. Per esempio, nelle *Poesie di Svendborg*, nella sessione successiva a *Deutsche Kriegsfibel* sono inseriti i *Kinderlieder*; inoltre ammonisce l'amico Benjamin, durante i loro colloqui, di non dimenticare che la lotta per un'estetica e una sensibilità diverse debba partire dall'educazione dei ragazzi e dalla trasformazione del loro immaginario (Benjamin 1973, 233) e, ritornato in Germania, scrive come inno nazionale del nuovo Stato una *Kinderhymne* da far cantare ai bambini. straniando dal loro punto di vista l'idea di patria e di futuro

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[5]Ringrazio Raffaella Solmi e Luca Lenzini per avermi dato la possibilità di leggere e citare questa importante testimonianza, custodita a Siena nell'Archivio del Centro Studi Franco Fortini.

(Brecht 1988-2000, XII, 294). Anche nella *Kriegsfibel* ritroviamo argomenti importanti in questo senso; un esempio tra tutti è il fotoepigramma 63, realizzato attraverso un montaggio di foto di guerra raffiguranti bambini mutilati. Sulla quarta di copertina è inoltre presente un fotoepigramma eloquente (fig. 12): esso viene presentato come estratto da un libro ancora in corso d'opera, intitolato *Friedensfibel* , che in realtà non vedrà mai la luce. Il fotoepigramma non è stato tradotto in italiano e non è presente in nessuna delle edizioni italiane in commercio. La fotografia raffigura degli studenti tra i banchi di una scuola della DDR. L'epigramma recita:

> Vergeßt nicht: mancher euresgleichen stritt
> Daß ihr hier sitzen könnt und nicht mehr sie.
> Und nun vergabt euch nicht und kämpfet mit
> Und lernt das Lernen und verlernt es nie!
>
> Non dimenticate: dei vostri pari hanno obiettato
> che voi possiate sedere qui, e non più loro ormai.
> E adesso non svendetevi e insieme lottate
> E imparate a imparare e non disimparatelo mai! (tr. mia).
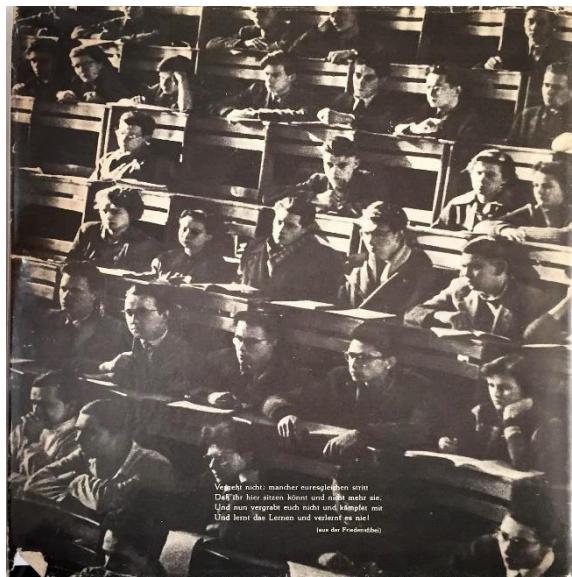
Fig. 12. Brecht 1955, quarta di copertina.

"Imparate a imparare". Ed ecco, che in una prospettiva storica così mutata e inattuale, un'insospettabile e per alcuni versi deprecabile DDR ha ancora qualcosa da dirci, a noi vittime e carnefici di un sapere sempre più reificato e mercificato, in cui le soglie del visibile, ovvero i rapporti reali tra gli uomini, rimangono nell'ombra, sepolte nel rumore di fondo di una società dello spettacolo e delle immagini. Oltre il tempo ci parla ancora, ci mostra una didattica rinnovata, vera e veramente democratica: non l'osservazione dell'arte, ma l'arte dell'osservazione.

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SOPHIE MAYR

THE MANY FACES OF SYLVIA PLATH
Photographs in Literary Biographies

ABSTRACT: Biography—unlike fiction—is a referential genre (Lejeune 1994, 39-40), it constantly refers to a kind of truth or reality that lies outside the textual level. Photographs in biographies function as powerful referring devices, because, as Roland Barthes (1980) put it, the essence of the photograph is "ça-a-été" (120). Regardless of this evidential character, photographs do not usually stand for themselves in biographies. They need description and textual explanation and are, thus, reduced to a merely illustrative function. This paper analyses photographs in four biographies on Sylvia Plath, who is the subject of more than 20 different literary portraits. It shows that there is a strong emphasis on Plath's private life on the one hand, and a lack of Plath's craft and public life on the other. By using Marita Sturken's (1999) concept of "cultural memory" (178), this article argues that a strict differentiation between public and private cannot help us read and understand the photographs in Plath's biographies.

KEYWORDS: Sylvia Plath, Literary Biography, Comparative Biography, Confessional Poetry, Cultural Memory.

Photographs appear very frequently in literary biographies. If photos of the biographical subject are available, then some of them are usually depicted. A photo portrait on the cover of the book usually functions as a distinctive feature of the literary genre of biography (Schmid 2009, 439) and emphasises the special relationship between biography and portrait in general. "To paint someone's portrait" is a common metaphor for writing a biography. For Caitríona Ní Dhuíll (2009) this rhetorical trope points at the impossibility of life writing per se by shifting the narrative from the textual level into the field of the fine arts (191). Both, biography and portrait, claim to show the 'real' subject by uniting the surface and the inner life (Fleckner 2016, 3-4). Besides the photograph on the cover of the biography, the images can usually be found on insets in the middle of the book, printed on special paper. This is a very common practice in the genre of biography, and it entails that the photo does not adjoin the text it should illustrate. The main reason for this is usually money. Having the photos precisely where they should be either implicates the expense of printing all pages on appropriate photo paper, or the reproduction of images of poor quality (Ellis 1992, 155-156). But if having photos in biographies is expensive, why is it such a ubiquitous phenomenon?

Biography—unlike fiction—is a referential genre (Lejeune 1994, 39-40), it is constantly referring to a kind of truth or reality that lies outside the textual level. Photographs in biographies function as powerful referring devices, because as Roland Barthes (1980) put it, the essence of the photograph is "ça-a-été" (120). The photographs seem to have the ability to prove the existence of the depicted

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and function as "pieces of reality" (Banita 2007, 45) which allegedly makes them more credible than a long and elaborate biographical narrative. Susan Sontag (2003) wrote in *Regarding the Pain of Others*: "A photograph is supposed not to evoke but to show. That is why photographs, unlike handmade images, can count as evidence" (47). Here lies the main role of images in biographies but there are other functions as well. Paula Backscheider (1999) notes that photographs can "highlight themes that might be overlooked [and] suggest additional facets of the subject's life" (155). Images can also illustrate, emphasise and explain the narrative (Schmid 2009, 440). In literary biographies, they can be used for showing and explaining the working routine of the writer by depicting, for example, facsimiles, writing desks, or the author at work. They can give an insight into individual creative processes, but also into literary scenes of certain decades.

For this paper I have analysed the photographs in four biographies on Sylvia Plath. There are more than twenty different biographies that claim to tell her life's story, published between 1976 and today. I tried to cover this long period and I chose my case studies accordingly. Edward Butscher's *Sylvia Plath: Method and Madness* was the first biography on Plath, published in 1976.

One of the most recently published books on Plath is Andrew Wilson's *Mad Girl's Love Song: Sylvia Plath and Life Before Ted* from 2013, the year that marked the 50th anniversary of her death. This book is what Michael Benton (2011) calls a "capsule biography" (71), it focusses on a limited period in her life. *Rough Magic: Sylvia Plath* written by Paul Alexander is from 1991 and Anne Stevenson's *Bitter Fame: A Life of Sylvia Plath* was published in 1989. The latter is the only biography so far that was authorized by the Sylvia Plath Estate, then under the auspices of Olwyn Hughes, Ted Hughes' sister.

All of these four biographies include photographs on insets in the middle of the book, accompanied by short descriptions. There are also biographies that include the pictures directly in the text, for example Diane Middlebrook's *Her Husband: Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath. A Marriage*, but for this article I chose to concentrate on the more commonly used form.

When I began researching for this paper, my first task was to count the images and to arrange them in groups: There are altogether 97 photographs in the four biographies (cover-photos not included). Only 49 of them show Sylvia Plath, either alone or in company, 27 depict friends, schoolmates or companions. There are two photos of Otto Plath, her father and one of Aurelia Schober-Plath, her mother. One shows the author's husband Ted Hughes with their daughter, Frieda. The other seventeen photos do not feature a person, but depict different places connected to Sylvia Plath. Two of the pictures show her grave, two are images of British landscapes and thirteen of the photographs depict houses which Plath inhabited in England and the US. None of the four biographies feature images that show Plath practicing her craft. There is not a single photography that depicts Plath sitting at her desk, holding a pen or typing. Instead, there are plenty that show her in her free-time as a girl or young woman or as a married mother of two as an adult. Andrew Wilson's capsule biography focusses on Plath's life before she married

Ted Hughes and became pregnant, so the fourteen images show Sylvia Plath as a young child and a radiant blonde in a swimsuit at the beach. The other three biographies include plenty of domestic and family pictures. *Method and Madness* by Edward Butscher contains fifteen photographs, ten of which show Plath, either alone, with Hughes, or with at least one of her children. Anne Stevenson's *Bitter Fame* contains 22 photos, seven of which show Plath (two with her children, one with Hughes). And finally, Alexander's *Rough Magic* that includes 36 photographs, 18 of which depict Plath—none with the children, three with her husband.

What could be the possible explanation for this over-emphasizing of places on the one hand and of Plath's family and private life on the other? It is not possible to answer this question without bearing in mind the assigned functions of the pictures and their modes to accomplish this task. It basically comes down to the question: How should we read these pictures?

Houses, Biographies and Sylvia Plath

Almost thirteen percent of the photographs in the biographies of Alexander, Butscher, Stevenson and Wilson depict houses. According to Alison Booth (2016), "houses […] hold the power of elegy to evoke memories of the dead. Houses represent families and heritage, comforts and pleasures, as well as gendered perils" (13). The places we live in have a deep impact on our physical and psychological well-being. In her landmark biography on Virginia Woolf, Hermione Lee (1997), devotes an entire chapter to the houses that were inhabited by Woolf. She describes, for example, the deep impact of Talland House:[1] "Talland House became, in Virginia Woolf's imagination and in the mind of her readers, something more than just a large square building near the sea in Cornwall. It is where she sites, for the whole of her life, the idea of happiness" (22). Lee also shows how Hyde Park Gate, the home of the Stephens family in London, generated the exact opposite feelings.

Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath, like most writers, wrote at home, so there is a connection between the literary product and its production site. Although houses do carry biographical meaning, plain photographs that depict houses do not. Images of houses in literary biographies—like all the other images printed—need description and textual explanation (Boehm 2010, 19) to guide the reader's understanding and to provoke emotions. To demonstrate the interaction between image and text it is necessary to analyse photographs that occur frequently in biographies on Sylvia Plath by comparing the different captions. One such photo is for example a picture of the house on 23 Fitzroy Road in London where she committed suicide. It is very fruitful to use Richard Holmes' (2004) method of "Comparative Biography" (16) to show the arbitrariness of these photo-text-

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[1] The house in St. Ives, Cornwall, where Virginia Stephen and her family spend her summers as a child.

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combinations. "Comparative Biography" as described by Holmes in his paper "The Proper Study" is a device to analyse different biographies about the same person, which all claim to tell the truth (7-18). Paula Backscheider (2016) uses this method to analyse the "versioning" (276) of biographical subjects by revealing the inherent focus of the narrative that "can be a consequence of writing a thematic biography [or] the deliberate act of the biographer" (276).

Andrew Wilson's (2013) *Mad Girl's Love Song* creates an image of Plath as a young, ambitious but unstable woman. His caption of Plath's high school graduation picture obviously follows this version: "When Sylvia heard that she had been accepted by Smith College she was thrilled. 'I went about the house for days in a sort of trance', she said." The informal use of Plath's first name Sylvia and the unidentified quote can easily be associated with a typical teenage girl. By way of contrast, Anne Stevenson's Plath is a jealous, irritating woman whose fits of rage drive her husband away from her.[2] Whether these narratives are deliberately employed by the biographers or not can't be discussed in this paper, but it is necessary to emphasize the variety of Sylvia Plath's versions in her biographies.

Anne Stevenson's *Bitter Fame* and Paul Alexander's *Rough Magic* both feature a photography of Plath's last address. It shows a typical British residence with two entrances and white window frames. The general condition of the building indicates an upper-class neighbourhood. Alexander's (1991) caption goes: "23 Fitzroy Road in London, formerly Yeats's house. Sylvia hoped that living there would make her work blessed." Anne Stevenson (1989) writes: "The house at 23 Fitzroy Road where Sylvia Plath's life ended." What we can see very clearly in this example is how different the descriptions are. Alexander uses only Plath's first name Sylvia, he emphasises the literary influence that Yeats had on her life. He uses the word "hope", although the beholder is fully aware of the tragedy that happened in this house. Here lies another difference between biography and fiction. Readers of biographies always have at least some kind of knowledge about the subject before the reading (Schäfer 2012, 274). One could almost say that Alexander's description is somehow cynical, especially because the photo that is next to the one of Yeats' house is one of Sylvia Plath's grave. Stevenson chooses another narrative: The picture of 23 Fitzroy road is the last one that is printed in the inset. The story that is told literally ends here.

Private Life, Biographies and Sylvia Plath

One possible explanation for the above-mentioned over-emphasising of Plath's family and private life is that there aren't any or not enough pictures of Plath practicing her craft. Anita Helle wrote two papers about Plath and her photographs that are somewhat contradictory. In "'The Photographic Chamber of the Eye':

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[2] It is interesting that although Stevenson seems almost hostile towards Plath, the images in *Bitter Fame* include two facsimiles. It is therefore the only biography of the four that I analyzed that draws attention to her working process through the depicted images.

Plath, Photography and the Post-Confessional Muse" (2011) she states that, in contrast to some other writers of the 1950s and 60s, there is only a limited amount of photographs of Sylvia Plath. "Photographs in primary collections number in the dozens rather than hundreds. There is no synoptic archival image bank; many photographs of Plath herself are duplicated across various collections; copies appearing in biographies often repeat, often without attribution or dating, so they tend to float free from interpretive contexts" (32). By way of contrast, in her 2007 article Helle elaborates on the photographs that Plath and Hughes took of each other whilst writing, sketching or typing during their travels. (189) Some of the pictures in the four biographies that show Plath and Hughes are official writers' portraits, even though they almost seem like private snapshots of the spouses; one example being the famous photograph of Rollie McKenna.

Another possible explanation could be Plath's association with "confessional poetry", a poetic movement in the USA that was well-known for using personal experiences as sources of the poems (Asotic 2015, 58). Although she never considered herself a confessional poet, she entertained relations with some of the movement's most prominent members like Anne Sexton or Robert Lowell.

There is also a gender-related possibility. Pictures that show the biographical subject with babies or little children seldomly occur in men's biographies. In *Reflections on Biography*, Paula Backscheider (1999) points out the importance of motherhood in women's biographies. She writes: "Mothering somehow always becomes a measure of womanhood and female success" (147). Indeed, the four biographies constantly refer to Plath's mothering, whereas biographies on childless women writers emphasise the lack of family. Both types try to establish a connection between having or not having children and the creative process. Anne Stevenson (1989) describes Plath's state of mind after the birth of her daughter Frieda: "She was certain the birth would inspire new and better poems once she had her strength back" (191). Linda Wagner-Martin (1994) argues similarly in *Telling Women's Lives* when she observes that women in biographies are usually defined by the roles they take, the mother, the daughter, the sister, the concubine…" (21-22). Sylvia Plath is portrayed as a writing mother of two and a writing wife, but she is not perceived as just a writer. Even her poems are analysed through the lens of female roles. Butscher (2003) interprets "Daddy" as a poem by the actual daughter and wife Sylvia Plath directed to Otto Plath and Ted Hughes. "Betrayal was an inevitable repetition of Otto's abandonment: 'The black telephone's of at the root.' But she no longer accepts either Otto's or Ted's treachery so easily" (338).

Scott Donaldson (2015) argues in *The Impossible Craft: Literary Biography* that emphasising the private life is something that is inherent to literary biographies in general. So his argument is not gender-related but concentrates on the biographer's need to tell a story. Biographers need to write about the work of the portrayed subject and plain summaries or complex literary criticism brings the narrative to a halt. To avoid this, they try to connect life and work as much as possible (56-57).

Conclusion

One photography that frequently occurs in biographies on Sylvia Plath shows the writer and her husband, Ted Hughes, on their honeymoon in Paris in 1956. The picture is in black and white and the quality of the reproduction is rather poor. Plath and Hughes stand in front of a house, his arm lying on her shoulder, both smiling. We find it in Wilson's *Mad Girl's Love Song* as well as in *Rough Magic* by Paul Alexander and in some other biographies that are not discussed in this paper. Originally taken as a private snapshot by Sylvia Plath's brother Warren, it has turned into one of the most well-known pictures of the famous couple Plath/Hughes. Nevertheless, it is used in the biographies to illustrate her private and family life. Just like this picture blurs the boundaries between private and public spaces by crossing them back and forth, the argument of this ar0ticle is that a strict differentiation between public and private cannot help us reading and understanding the photographs in Plath's biographies. In accordance with Mieke Bal and Marita Sturken, I plead for a simultaneity of public and private. For Bal (2004), photography, as a ubiquitous phenomenon, makes a strict differentiation between public and private obsolete. In her paper "Light Writing. Portraiture in a Post-Traumatic Age" she examines the examples of private snapshots that reappear in art exhibitions or school books and therefore oscillate the spheres (1-19). Sturken (1999) differentiates three kinds of memory in her article "The Image as Memorial: Personal Photographs in Cultural Memory": the personal memory, the cultural memory and history. She defines personal memory as "memories that remain solely within personal and familial contexts" and history as "a form of sanctioned narratives of the past" (178). For Sturken, cultural memory is "imbued with cultural meaning" but doesn't follow history's modes of narrative and discourse (178). She emphasizes the role of (family) photographs in shaping those kinds of memories:

> As technologies of memory, photographs play a primary role in the traffic between personal memory, cultural memory, and history. When personal memories are shared and exchanged in contexts distinct from history making, they form a kind of collective memory, either as interventions into or resistance to official history. Cultural objects, photographs among them, often move from personal memory to cultural memory to history and back. (178-179).

The picture of Plath and Hughes on their honeymoon is an example of a cultural object that embodies cultural memory. A former private snapshot of two newly-weds turns from personal memory into cultural memory. As a cultural object it is therefore used in the biographies as evidence for the privacy and intimacy between the happy couple, oscillating between the public and private sphere. This evidential function is not the only one. As mentioned before, readers of biographies always have at least little knowledge about the portrayed subject before the reading. So we expect readers of biographies on Sylvia Plath to be aware of her terrible death. Marianne Hirsch (2002), drawing on Barthes, sees the photograph as an object that connects present and absent: "The referent haunts the picture like a ghost: it is a

revenant, a return of the lost and dead other" (5). Mieke Bal (2004) shares this opinion when she writes about the "memorial power" (4) of photographs. If we look at the before-mentioned photo that was taken for Plath's high school graduation we see a beautiful, radiant and seemingly self-confident girl, but the picture simultaneously carries the cultural myth of the suicidal poet and creator of works like *Ariel*. The biographer's role therefore lies in referring to this meaning beyond the surface by giving the photograph its caption. By doing this he or she can guide the picture's reading according to the version of Sylvia Plath that he or she creates throughout the biography.

The function of photographs in literary biographies remains somehow unclear. They have evidential character and they "offer a set of semiotic codes that suture the verbal with the textual to ensure the authenticity of the content." (Nadel 2014, 66) Regardless of this fact, they usually do not stand for themselves but are accompanied by textual ekphrases, that clarify, explain and interpret (Boehm 2010, 19), and are, thus, reduced to an illustrative function.

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PERCORSI • BORDERS OF THE VISIBLE
S. MAZZUCCHELLI • La realtà, la scena
e la tragedia

SILVIA MAZZUCCHELLI

LA REALTÀ, LA SCENA E LA TRAGEDIA
Lo sguardo di Antigone nei romanzi e nelle fotografie di Carla Cerati

ABSTRACT: The intervention examines the relationship between word and photography in the work of the writer and photographer Carla Cerati (1926-2016). If with photography Carla Cerati tried to explore the world, in her autobiographical novels, she penetrates into the world of the bourgeois family, criticising rules and limits. My intervention focuses on the relationship between the scene and reality through the tragic figure of Antigone represented by the Living Theatre and photographed by Cerati. In her work it becomes a model and hermeneutical instrument from which her photographs and novels draw inspiration.

KEYWORDS: Scene, Antigone, Tragedy, Death.

Fotografare e scrivere

La fotografa e scrittrice Carla Tironi nasce a Bergamo nel 1926.[1] Verso la fine della guerra prepara l'esame d'ammissione all'Accademia di Brera per diventare scultrice e lo supera con successo. Condizionata dalla famiglia, giovanissima, nel 1947 si sposa con Roberto Cerati, direttore commerciale dell'Einaudi, braccio destro di Giulio, rinunciando ad una carriera artistica anche a causa della nascita di due figli. Agli inizi degli anni Cinquanta si trasferisce con la famiglia a Milano e qualcosa inizia a cambiare. Il matrimonio le appare come una gabbia da cui fuggire e la fotografia costituirà lo strumento con cui emanciparsi dalla propria condizione. "Il problema base è che la donna vive chiusa in casa e non ha alcun contatto con l'esterno, arriva ad una totale repressione culturale, ad un disinteresse, un'apatia, si sente come a San Vittore dove si sta dentro a quattro pareti e non si sa niente di quello che succede fuori. Ad un certo punto è questione di sopravvivenza, tu capisci che muori, che non senti le cose, non hai più niente da dire e allora te ne vai. Molli tutto e non pigli neanche la valigia", racconta in un'intervista nel marzo del 1977 a Etta Lisa Basaldella (2018). Emblematiche sono a questo proposito due sue opere: *Professione fotografa* del 1974 in cui ritrae la fotografa Paola Mattioli, esposta alla manifestazione Sicof '77 e *Percorso, Racconto in dieci stazioni della vita di una donna*, del 1977, proposta all'Expoarte di Bari nel 1980.

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[1] Questo articolo riprende e sviluppa alcuni temi già affrontati in un precedente articolo: Mazzucchelli 2015, 151-162.

Suo padre, che la osserva mentre fotografa i figli, le fa notare che le sue sono foto belle, ma fatte con macchine scadenti, una Senphlex, ricorda la Cerati, che per questo decide di sceglierne una tra quelle che appartenevano al padre: una Rollei,[2] prima di passare più tardi alla Nikon. La sua opera fotografica, con uno sguardo decisamente proiettato all'esterno, si è condensata in un puntuale resoconto di alcuni dei mutamenti che hanno segnato la società, soprattutto italiana, nel corso della seconda metà del secolo scorso. Tra questi l'esperienza sconvolgente e indimenticabile del fotografare i malati dei manicomi, con Gianni Berengo Gardin, poi confluita nel celebre volume *Morire di classe* (1969)[3] e, all'opposto, l'eccentricità e l'opulenza delle classi protagoniste del boom economico, anticipazione della "Milano da bere", raffigurati come maschere deformate in *Mondo Cocktail* (1974). E poi i foyer della Scala, i mutamenti della città e le sue ferite nel ciclo intitolato *Milano Metamorfosi* (duecentodiciassette fotografie divise in capitoli come un romanzo), le lotte studentesche, i funerali di Giangiacomo Feltrinelli e degli studenti uccisi negli anni Settanta, il processo Calabresi-Lotta Continua, il mondo della scuola, quello delle balere degli immigrati nella vecchia Milano. E ancora i ritratti di intellettuali come Eugenio Montale, Elio Vittorini, Italo Calvino, Umberto Eco, senza trascurare il corpo femminile con il libro *Forma di donna* (1978). Nel 1987-1988, con la danzatrice Valeria Magli, realizza una serie di foto a colori sotto il titolo di *Forma Movimento Colore. Nudo Danza.* Sin qui nella fotografia. Ma Carla Cerati è anche una scrittrice. E se con la fotografia "uscire dalla gabbia" ha voluto dire espandere le possibilità della visione, nei romanzi, al contrario, il suo occhio penetra nel mondo domestico della famiglia borghese. La scrittura è per lei rifiuto e ribellione nei confronti del suo mondo, un dovere insieme radicale ed esistenziale che la spinge a cercare la propria identità. Esordisce nel 1973 con il romanzo *Un amore fraterno* ed in seguito continua a scrivere con sempre maggiore intensità: quasi mille pagine di interrogativi e invettive dedicate al matrimonio che si dispiegano in una trilogia di romanzi: *Un matrimonio perfetto* (1975), *La condizione sentimentale* (1977) e *Il sogno della bambina. (Uno e l'altro)* del 1983, in seguito ristampati nel 2005 in un unico cofanetto dal titolo: *Una donna del nostro tempo*. Prosegue con *La cattiva figlia* (1990)[4] dedicato al rapporto tra madre e figlia, *La perdita di Diego* (1992)[5] in cui rievoca la tragica vicenda del suicidio del suo giovane assistente. Scrive inoltre altri sette romanzi sino a giungere all'ultimo dedicato alla morte del figlio che si intitola *L'eredità* (2012) ed un altro testo inedito in possesso degli eredi e non ancora disponibile alla lettura.

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[2] In Chiti e Covi 2013, 20.
[3] Basaglia 1998. Sulla storia del libro si può fare riferimento a Foot 2015, 19-35.
[4] Sull'analisi del romanzo si possono leggere: Gavioli 1996; Bellesia 1994, 215-223.
[5] Cfr. Alù 2017, 106-119.

Un duplice movimento: il dramma e la scena

Carla Cerati inizia a fotografare negli anni Sessanta. I soggetti sono i suoi figli, gli amici, i famigliari, scene di vita ordinaria. In un'intervista alla fotografa Giovanna Gammarota (2013) racconta: "Ho cominciato a fotografare perché mi era sempre piaciuto, è stata una sostituzione del disegno. Allora fotografavo i miei bambini man mano che crescevano e poi ho detto: perché devo stare chiusa in casa? Ci sarà la vita fuori. E quindi ho cominciato a uscire con la macchina fotografica e da lì è nato tutto". Carla Cerati cerca qualcosa che spezzi la continuità ordinaria della sua vita, vorrebbe evadere dal reticolo di banalità e di sostanziale conformismo in cui si trova immersa e, insieme, sente l'urgenza di assumere di fronte al reale un'assoluta libertà. "In quel periodo Milano sembrava una città pacifica dove non succedeva un granché. […] E poi mi son detta: il dramma è più fotogenico della banalità, dove posso trovare il dramma? A teatro" (*ibid*.). Forse perché a teatro l'azione coincide con il segno, l'immagine è attiva e la scena diviene il luogo elettivo dove dare corpo al desiderio di rappresentare la vita? Oppure si sta semplicemente rendendo conto che "non è solo il teatro che, come la peste visionaria di Antonin Artaud, vuole abbandonare i palcoscenici per invadere la città e i suoi spazi, riattivare il corpo sociale e le varie soggettività che lo compongono. In parallelo sono la società e le arti che usano il teatro, o meglio le forme di rappresentazione di sé, e se ne appropriano" (Ponte di Pino 2007, 46).

La risposta giunge a distanza di alcuni anni. Nell'estate del 1973 accade un fatto, imprevedibile, che stravolge la sua quotidianità e appaga il suo bisogno di "dramma". Stavolta non avviene su un palcoscenico ma sotto casa. È domenica mattina, Carla Cerati sta prendendo il sole. Un tonfo strano attira la sua attenzione. Si precipita fuori con la macchina fotografica. Il dramma irrompe nell'ordinario, la scena sembra quella di un delitto: una donna si è buttata dal quinto piano. È un'immagine spiazzante che produce un brusco scivolamento, uno scarto fra immaginario e realtà. "Sono uscita e mi sono trovata lì il cadavere con tutto questo sangue scuro. […] Sembrava molto piccola di statura perché in realtà s'era fracassata tutte le ossa perché cadendo aveva picchiato sulla cancellata di alluminio e l'aveva piegata, e quindi s'era rotta tutto internamente" (Gammarota 2013), ricorda in un'intervista rilasciata a pochi anni dalla morte. Quella cosa mi ha messo in crisi, perché ho detto: o io faccio questa foto o mi metto a fotografare solo biciclette o bottiglie, […] se io non faccio questa fotografia non devo fare il reportage" (*ibid*.). È la scoperta di uno stato d'animo, di un atteggiamento esistenziale. Dietro quella foto c'erano insieme il noto e l'ignoto. L'ignoto, perché nel vuoto cominciava l'inacessibilità che per lei costituiva la vita fuori di casa, sconosciuta, forse temuta e tanto desiderata. Il noto, perché finalmente quella stessa vita, sino ad allora estranea, diventava un elemento della sua esistenza. La morte e la scena si erano dunque incontrate nei confini di un fotogramma. Senza quel punto oscuro, senza quel corpo aggrovigliato e privo di forma, gli avvenimenti passati e futuri non avrebbero

alcun senso. Oltre la curiosità, la morte diventa un esercizio dell'attenzione e, per questo, un esorcismo della morte stessa. Fotografare la morte dimostra paradossalmente che è possibile fotografare la vita. Nel 1991 Carla Cerati ne è pienamente consapevole. A distanza di molti anni è pervenuta anche ad un'elaborazione teorica, come suggerisce lo stesso titolo, *Scena e fuori scena* (Cerati 1991), di una mostra realizzata insieme a Francesco Gallo. "Le connessioni possono arrivare a distanza di anni" (Cerati 1991, 101), scrive, e a proposito del suicidio afferma: "Decisi che l'autocensura avrei potuto esercitarla in un secondo tempo: prima di ogni altro ragionamento stava il fatto che ero lì come testimone partecipe di una tragedia" (ivi, 100). Partecipare alla tragedia vuol dire fotografare la realtà che la circonda, essere parte del movimento politico con le lotte, le stragi, la radicalizzazione quotidiana dello scontro e cercare di renderne partecipi gli altri. O vi è molto altro? Tutto comunque inizia a teatro.

A teatro

Carla Cerati inizia la sua carriera come fotografa di scena. "Ho cominciato a fotografare in teatro. Fotografavo durante le prove e di questo primo lavoro, che era un lavoro di Oreste del Buono con regia di Franco Enriquez, ho fatto vedere i provini a Enriquez. A lui sono piaciute le foto, me le ha ordinate: 'portami le copie per domani che le do ai giornali'. Io non sapevo neanche stampare, sviluppare, niente e quindi ho portato a sviluppare e stampare le fotografie e poi le ho consegnate. Ho continuato così" (Gammarota 2013). Questo il suo esordio. Nel 1960 fissa su pellicola *Aspettando Godot* di Tullio Pendoli, successivamente fotografa il ballerino Antonio Gades, conosciuto nel 1969 a Milano in occasione di uno spettacolo alla Scala, di cui diviene amica e che fotografa ogni volta che ne ha la possibilità "sulla scena e fuori scena". Nel 1980 documenta a Firenze la *pièce Wielopole Wielopole* di Tadeusz Kantor e, nello stesso anno, una performance del gruppo *Bread and Puppet* di Peter Schumann, nell'ambito del Festival del teatro in piazza di Sant'Arcangelo di Romagna. E poi fotografa il Living Theatre, sorto nel 1947 a New York dall'incontro fra l'allieva di Piscator, Judith Malina, attrice e regista, e Julian Beck, pittore, attore e scenografo. Sono immagini sorprendenti, in equilibrio tra intensità emotiva e fredda lucidità, scatti che fissano i volti degli attori e le vibrazioni dei loro corpi: dapprima l'*Antigone* nel 1967 al Teatro Durini di Milano, poi le figurazioni allucinate del *Frankenstein* nel 1968 a Modena, e nello stesso anno le fotografie di *Paradise Now*, scattate nell'ambito del Festival del teatro di Avignone, appena due mesi dopo il Maggio francese. Quest'ultimo lavoro, incluso da Franco Quadri in suo famoso saggio del 1970, rappresenta un momento fondamentale nella storia del Living (e del teatro contemporaneo): la presa di coscienza di ciò che il gruppo

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andava esplorando sin dai primi anni, ovvero "la gioia delle barriere infrante, e quindi il Paradiso a portata di mano" (Quadri 1970, 8).

Ma è l'Antigone ad affascinare in maniera particolare Carla Cerati. La versione che lei fotografa nel 1967 scaturisce dallo studio che Judith Malina e Julian Beck fanno dell'album fotografico e delle note dell'*Antigone* sofoclea tradotta da Hölderlin, rivisitata in chiave politica da Bertolt Brecht nel 1948.

Gli elementi epico-narrativi del copione predisposto da Brecht sono conservati, ma come ha dichiarato Judith Malina: "il nostro spettacolo avrebbe lasciato stupefatto Brecht che di certo non l'avrebbe approvato. Si trattava di una produzione artaudiana di un testo brechtiano" realizzata attraverso "azioni fisiche" che esprimono "i contenuti e le dinamiche dei personaggi" (Alonge e Perrelli 2012, 380). La scena è spoglia, non ci sono effetti di luce o costumi particolari e la colonna sonora è ricavata dalle voci quanto dai corpi degli attori. Ma soprattutto è importante la rinuncia quasi totale all'elemento dialogico a favore del visivo, del gestuale, del sonoro, e il tentativo di coinvolgere, se pur parzialmente, il pubblico.

Nel 1980 li fotografa nuovamente a Sant'Arcangelo, per il Festival del teatro in piazza, in una nuova versione dell'Antigone. "Mi interessava vedere in che cosa era cambiata, poiché dell'edizione precedente avevo fatto un'analisi sui singoli dettagli, colpita dalla perfezione della loro gestualità" (Cerati 1991, 100). Nel gennaio del 1974, con la presentazione di Franco Quadri, Carla Cerati espone ottanta fotografie di scena dell'Antigone alla galleria Primopiano di Torino sotto il titolo *Antigone del Living. 1971.* Nel 1983 organizza un'altra mostra. Stavolta il titolo è *Antigone: analisi della gestualità del Living Theatre*. Si tiene alla Fondazione Corrente di Milano il 29 novembre 1983. Ma non è tutto. In seguito riprende le immagini del Living e realizza otto fotografie che denomina *Elaborazioni sull'Antigone.* Si tratta, evidentemente, di un esperimento portato avanti in diverse fasi: nel 1972 osservando le foto di gruppo del finale dell'Antigone rimane colpita dalla molteplicità delle espressioni dei volti e delle mani, in seguito ne isola alcuni particolari ampliando la drammaticità del dettaglio. Nel 1983 ingrandisce nuovamente le fotografie e sperimenta diversi viraggi, ottenendo "ingrandimenti sgranati che paiono sindoni di anime torturate", scrive l'amico Uliano Lucas (2007, 5), quasi per esprimere la necessità di rendere presente ciò che in altre epoche era stato percepito come retaggio del passato o come minaccia del futuro. La loro visione produce ciò che Horst Bredekamp definisce una "sensazione fortissima", data dal fatto che "mentre la lingua parlata è propria dell'uomo, le immagini gli vengono incontro sotto il segno di una corporeità aliena" (2010, 10). E qui risiede il loro fascino. Ma qual è dunque il senso di questo continuo ritorno ad Antigone?

Lo sguardo di Antigone

Antigone, la giovane figlia di Edipo che disobbedisce alle leggi del tiranno Creonte-Julian Beck e decide di seppellire il fratello Polinice, è interpretata da Judith Malina. Nelle immagini di Carla Cerati l'espressione del volto è intensa, le guance sono segnate da righe di lacrime scure, gli occhi neri appaiono pesantemente truccati, in contrasto con il pallore del volto. Tiene la mano vicina alla bocca aperta, come a proteggersi dal suo tragico destino. Lo sguardo è sconvolto ma allo stesso tempo lucido e tenace ed oppone la fragilità al dispotismo del potere; sembra incarnare, come scrive George Steiner (2011 [1984]), una femminilità esclusa, "soggetta per millenni agli oltraggi e alla condiscendenza del maschio", che ora è pronta a scagliarsi contro "le convenzioni della morte che le guerre, il capitalismo e il "principio di realtà" dominati dal maschio incarnano" (ivi, 171).

Ma chi è davvero Antigone? "Io credo che Antigone sia dentro tutti noi quando rifiutiamo di fare ciò in cui non crediamo, quando diciamo no, anche quando la legge minaccia di punirci", afferma Judith Malina nel 2013 (in Marino 2013). E ancora: quanto l'Antigone "ricorrente nei nostri anni ci parla dell'Antigone sofoclea e quando invece di noi?", quanto "di quel secolare spessore addensato fra gli anni di Sofocle e noi, non sia uno specchio assieme deformante e significante?", si chiede Rossana Rossanda (1987, 22) nella sua rilettura della tragedia alla luce dei conflitti sociali e dei profondi cambiamenti che riguardano le donne negli anni Settanta.

Antigone è un insieme di doppi: la persona e lo Stato, il diritto e la giustizia, l'amore e la morte. Sono questi i dilemmi che ne caratterizzano il destino. Ma un ben moderno destino, scrive Rossanda, se è vero che Antigone è definita dal Coro "*autónomos*, come colei che da sola si dà la sua legge" (Rossanda 1987, 16), al massimo della "coscienza di una solitudine a nessuno imputabile se non a sé" (ivi, 19).

"*Ōmós* è il suo carattere, dirà ancora di Antigone il Coro […] letteralmente al di là dell'umano, un'ostinazione inflessibile", incrollabile sino all'estrema conseguenza. Per questo, anche prese le dovute distanze, conclude la Rossanda (1987, 33), "ci scopriamo come Antigone nelle sue ultime ore. Come lei non crediamo alla sacralità dei potenti […], come lei siamo determinati ad affermare, in solitudine, l'io, anche se il suo io non ha molto a che fare col nostro. Ci uniscono il principio d'autonomia e di disobbedienza". Il volto di Antigone non è dunque solo un'apparizione istantanea, ma diviene una sorta di motore narrativo. La gestualità del suo corpo e la fermezza imperiosa del suo volto rappresentano l'irruzione del tragico nello sguardo di Carla Cerati tanto nella fotografia quanto nella scrittura. "La tragedia serve a dare corpo, a conferire una presenza visibile alle eterne considerazioni metafisiche, etiche e psicologiche sulla natura del libero arbitrio, sull'esistenza di altre menti e di altre persone, sulle convenzioni del contratto e della trasgressione tra l'individuo e le sanzioni trascendenti e sociali", scrive George Steiner (2011 [1984], 116). La tragedia può far slittare la

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risposta dall'ideale "conoscenza di sé" a quella dell'"essere se stessi". E così, come per Antigone, accade a Carla Cerati: il suo sguardo è disobbediente e ostinato perché autonomo.

"Per me fotografare ha significato la conquista della libertà e anche la possibilità di trovare risposte a domande semplici e fondamentali: chi sono e come vivono gli altri? Lavorano? E se sì, dove lavorano? Quali sono i mestieri, le professioni e i luoghi in cui le svolgono? Come trascorrono il tempo libero?" (Cerati in Mussini 2007, 161), racconta la fotografa. Un bisogno di indipendenza e "autonomia" che giunge direttamente alle sue immagini nelle quali riesce a creare uno spazio sospeso, un istante ideale, dove far vivere i soggetti che fotografa in una dimensione di libertà illimitata, quasi come se volesse scomparire, per lasciare la possibilità al soggetto raffigurato di manifestare interamente la sua presenza, di esprimersi appunto in totale libertà. L'amica Maria Livia Serini lo rammenta nell'introduzione a *Mondo Cocktail*: "Ricordo il primo incontro con Luchino Visconti nel novembre del '66 all'anteprima della 'Monaca di Monza' di Giovanni Testori. […] Luchino era più insofferente del solito. Una sola cosa gli andò giusta. 'Brava', mi disse, 'stavolta non mi hai portato un fotografo. Mi hai portato Ariele'. E davvero come l'Ariele della *Tempesta* Carla si muove sulla scena del suo lavoro: minuta, sottile, quasi senza peso […] una creatura che vola e non incombe, che c'è e non c'è perché si mimetizza subito, […] stimolante col suo riserbo. E nella Nikon una mitragliatrice".[6] Sin qui nelle immagini. Ma il passo verso la scrittura è brevissimo: Antigone è onnipresente.

Dalla fotografia alla scrittura: *Un amore fraterno*

L'opera letteraria di Carla Cerati converge tutta verso l'autobiografia e convive con l'attività di fotografa. Ha spesso affermato che la fotografia e la scrittura sono due attività nettamente separate. "Per me immagine e parola sono due linguaggi narrativi sostitutivi uno dell'altro e che malvolentieri considero integrativi", rivela in un'intervista a Diego Mormorio nel febbraio del 1983. E lo ribadisce nel 2013: "Le due cose sono successe assieme e non si sono mai mescolate. Per me la fotografia è servita a raccontare il presente, mentre la narrativa mi serviva a raccontare il passato […]. Le due cose sono partite quando ho tentato di liberarmi dal matrimonio, questa gabbia in cui ero stata rinchiusa per tanti anni" (Gammarota 2013). Ma vi è un punto in cui le due attività convergono: si tratta del suo romanzo d'esordio intitolato *Un amore fraterno* del 1973. Nelle pagine del romanzo l'autrice rievoca l'infanzia e le avventure dell'adolescenza condivise con il fratello maggiore morto prematuramente, a cui era legata da sentimenti di affetto e complicità. Essa descrive un momento della vita, che corrisponde a una condizione sognata, in cui contrappone la positività

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[6] Maria Livia Serini in Cerati 1974, 4-5.

morale del "primitivo" alla corruzione della civiltà e all'ipocrisia dei rapporti fra gli adulti. "Rifiuto con violenza la rassegnazione, il conforto; rifiuto di unirmi a loro limitandomi a piangere la tua morte. Perché in essa ho intravisto una verità che riguarda il nostro passato. Io rivoglio il passato, io rivoglio l'infanzia, la nostra infanzia. Perché so che il seme e l'origine di ogni cosa resta là", scrive la Cerati (1973, 29). E l'eco della vicenda di Antigone che seppellisce il fratello Polinice sembra risuonare anche fra queste pagine: un soave e brevissimo momento di autonomia e libertà - l'amore fraterno - diviene archetipo di un rapporto sottratto alle imposizioni delle gerarchie. Non si tratta solo di vicinanza alla morte. Questa presenza ossessiva si trasforma in qualcosa che si può collegare a ciò cui fa riferimento Friedrich Hölderlin nella sua traduzione dell'Antigone di Sofocle e nelle note del 1804. Si tratta dell'aggettivo "impensabile" con cui egli traduce il verso 249, ossia, come ricorda Sotera Fornaro, l'inizio della risposta della guardia a Creonte nel resoconto della prima sepoltura. Il "greco dice 'non lo so' (ouk'oida), Hölderlin traduce «impensabile»: *Undenklich* (Hölderlin 1988, 215), letteralmente 'non pensato', che sfugge cioè all'esperienza umana" (Fornaro 2017, 8). Antigone dunque si delinea come una figura che agisce nell'impensabile. Ed anche nel romanzo di Carla Cerati l'impensabile corrisponde all'irruzione del tragico nell'ordine stabilito, qualcosa che "sconvolge il paesaggio e l'ordine del *nomos*, della legge", come scrive la Fornaro, e consente di pensare ad una nuova maniera di intendere l'agire politico, che nella comunità, "si misura con l'amore e non con la netta distinzione di Creonte tra 'amico' e 'nemico'" (ivi, 9). Ecco allora che l'"amore fraterno" possiede la leggerezza dei ricordi d'infanzia, sospesa tra un tempo lieto ma perduto e un tempo nuovo, che la spinge a compiere una spietata analisi della sua condizione, a far luce sulle motivazioni che hanno condotto le protagoniste dei suoi romanzi (e lei stessa) a vivere in un modo che rifiutano con forza, ma da cui non riescono del tutto a fuggire. L'obiettivo allora si sposta: da un idilliaco momento di autonomia e libertà, "l'amore fraterno", si inoltra nell'analisi spietata di ciò che definisce la peggior prigione in cui abbia vissuto: il matrimonio borghese e la vita fra le mura domestiche. Gli altri quattordici romanzi si limitano a cercare disperatamente, come Antigone, la chimera di una relazione al di fuori delle gerarchie, che non riuscirà a riprodurre se non con il figlio Federico, deceduto in un incidente, e con il suo assistente morto suicida, trasformando il rapporto madre-figlio in un rapporto fratello-sorella, come lei stessa racconta nel romanzo. Un sentimento che fa dell'immediatezza d'amore e dell'affetto incondizionato la regola delle relazioni umane e, insieme, un tentativo di ritornare a quello che è per lei la sola verità dell'essere. Così, nel suo romanzo *Un matrimonio perfetto*, si legge la disperata rivendicazione della pagina finale, in cui si consuma la disgregazione della cultura borghese, resa ancora più lucida dal fatto che non esiste lieto fine, ma solo, per dirla con Antigone, la certezza della propria irriducibile soggettività: "per anni ho sentito parole agitarsi dentro di me […]: ubbidienza, sacrificio, gratitudine, lavoro, onestà, castità, maldicenza, verginità, educazione […] mentre io sempre pensavo

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a una parola sola, importante: amore. Amore materno, amore filiale, amore spirituale, amore casto, amore legittimo, amore carnale, amore sbagliato, amore malato" (Cerati 2005, 353). E infine, come la giovane figlia di Edipo, conclude: "Ora questa montagna di parole si è condensata ed è esplosa: non sarò mai più la stessa, ma voglio essere me stessa" (ivi, 354).

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SPENCER MEEKS

AFFECTIVE IMAGES
The Transformative Power of Photography in Siri Hustvedt's The Blindfold

ABSTRACT: Siri Hustvedt's *The Blindfold* is a novel in which photography, or to be more specific, *a* photograph, seems to have the power to shape, obfuscate, and frame narrative. In what is primarily a close reading of the book, this paper will highlight the ways in which a photographic portrait alienates, emulates, and finally embodies its subject, the protagonist Iris Vegan. In maintaining a focused textual analysis, this paper is ultimately able to excavate the photograph's role in the novel, with particular regard to narrative, temporarily, and subjectivity. Central to my argument is that the photographic portrait becomes a character it its own right. An antagonist and copy of Iris, which, through its photographic properties, seems to supersede Iris's sociality, health, and reality. Following the close reading, the paper concludes in a more reflexive tone as it asks and answers what *The Blindfold*'s affective portrait could mean for our own contemporary moment of proliferate and instant photographic social media, dubious provenance, and "fake" news.

KEYWORDS: Photograph, Novel, Narrative, Image, Fake News.

The Blindfold was published in 1992. It arrived in tandem with the beginning of the final decade of a century obsessed with 'disposable' popular and celebrity culture (Henderson 1992, 54), and the entrenchment of neoliberal politics. This combination of disposability, and the neoliberal need to be flexible, to be constantly open to adaptation, is central to understanding the problem/solution *The Blindfold* posits in its examination of the relationship between text and image.[1] The problems, alienation, and uncanniness Iris feels in relationship to photography in this 1992 novel has found a new currency in our own contemporary society. The novel explores the ways in which image can become untethered from narrative provenance and vice versa—which, if was a problem in the early nineties, has become problematically normalised in today's age of "fake news" as discussed below.

The Blindfold is the retrospective first-person narrative of Iris Vegan (told from eight years in the future), detailing the period when she was an English Literature PhD student at Columbia University in New York City. The narrative spans approximately three years and is structured in four anachronistic sections that temporally bleed and interweave with each other. In the first section, Iris recounts

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[1] See also Jennifer Egan's *Look at Me* (2001) for a similar exploration of these themes in fictional narrative.

her work for Mr. Morning, in which her job was to describe objects that belonged to a dead girl into a tape recorder. The second section explores the effects of the photograph. The third section recounts her hospitalisation for chronic headaches, and the final section describes Iris's affair with her tutor and her transformation into her cross-dressing pseudonym, Klaus—named after a character in a German story she was translating at the time. The second section is the primary focus of this paper. As a brief synopsis, she goes with her boyfriend Steven to visit his photographer friend George. He takes her photograph, as well as a candid shot of an anonymous woman having a seizure on the street below. Later when Iris sees the photograph for the first time, she is unable to recognise herself in, or as, it. The photograph is then exhibited next to the shot of the woman who is mid-seizure, is later stolen, and is mysteriously proliferated throughout Manhattan. The paper focusses on these key scenes and considers how they affect the novel's narrative and characterisation.

The scene in which Iris gets her photograph taken progresses from excitement to abjection. Initially, she finds the experience enticing and describes the act of being photographed in a rhythmic and sexually dithyrambic way. Indeed, Alise Jameson goes as far as suggesting that this intentional act of allowing herself to be photographed "lend[s] power to Iris" (Jameson 2010, 426). However, as soon as the shoot ends Iris's reaction becomes more abject as she explains, "I recoiled from him. The intense pleasure I had felt only seconds before was gone" (Hustvedt 1993, 55). Here, at what is essentially the conception and birth of the photograph, its soon-to-be antagonistic role already emerges inasmuch as it appears to sap pleasure from Iris. In other words, the climactic act of exposure leaves Iris feeling as if a part of herself had become imposed onto film. The energy she expends becomes a part of the photograph and she recoils at the end because the dualistic relationship between Iris and the photograph that commands the narrative has begun.

What is more, when Iris first sees the developed picture she is unable to recognise herself. She sates, "The person in the picture seemed to bear no resemblance to me […] I had the awful impression that the parts of me that weren't in the photo were really absent" (Hustvedt 1993, 62). This compounds the theory that the initial act of photography "took" something from Iris. By feeling that the parts of her body excluded by the framing of the photograph are "really absent," Iris's concrete ideas of subjectivity and personhood begin to be erased. She feels like she is absent relative to the potent presence of the photograph. Indeed, the de-familiarity and uncanny response Iris has in (not)seeing herself in the photograph further establishes the recurring dualism the novel considers, between the interplay of photography and personal narrative. The fact that Iris logically knows that it is a photograph of her, and yet cannot recognise it as such, is a destabilising instance of uncanniness in the literal sense of it being (un)"homely" (Freud 2003, 126), for it is usually the property and ownership of our individual body that we can, at least, rely upon. This is exemplary of the "political unconscious" (Jameson 2002

[1981]). Iris's inability to recognise the photo—to recognise herself—is testament to the problems she faces in a disposable and neoliberal world. She cannot afford food, works multiple jobs, and constantly adapts to the point of exhaustion. In short, whatever self-narrative she maintains cannot attach to this affective image of her.

This affective duality only intensifies as the photograph mysteriously circulates around Manhattan. Caught somewhere between Richard Dawkins and today's internet, the photograph proliferates something like a "meme" (Dawkins 2006, 189-201) as it begins to infect Iris's lifeworld. First, when she visits her boyfriend and sees the photograph outside of George's possession, she explains, "I was struck by a fantasy of its proliferation—my image multiplied into the thousands, scattered like so much litter into the streets" (Hustvedt 1993, 66). This fantasy of her photograph scattering throughout New York is reminiscent of bright and multifarious images in places such as Times Square, which are simultaneously omnipresent and anonymous. Yet, this fantasy becomes realised later in the narrative as the photograph increasingly becomes a dominant character in its own right. This situation, in which a seemingly inanimate object becomes imbued with a form of affective power, is foreshadowed in the first section of the book. For, the objects that Mr Morning asks Iris to describe "weren't dead, not in the usual way we think of objects as lifeless. They seemed charged with a kind of power" (Hustvedt 1993, 13). The photograph comes to imbue this same potent dynamism. Iris notes that "Everywhere I go, the stupid thing seems to have been there before me, it's like I'm chasing it" (Hustvedt 1993, 74). Here, the photograph begins to inhabit the same geography as Iris, but is crucially always a step ahead of her.

Thus, because it is seemingly everywhere, and ahead in time, the photo—much like the scene in which it is produced—continues to have the effect of leeching from Iris's identity and life. For instance, when Iris is in the library, a stranger approaches her and recognises her not just *from* the photograph, but almost *as* the photograph itself, or rather, a version or poor imitation of the photograph. The stranger asks, "You're Iris […] aren't you?" to which Iris replies, "No […] Another person entirely" (Hustvedt 1993, 75). This, in other words, marks the moment in which Iris has relinquished her identity over to the photograph. She now only has claim to the identity "Iris Vegan" relative to the presence and existence of the photograph; in effect, she *has* become a copy of the photograph. With the relationship from original to reproduction now seemingly inversed, it can be argued that after this exchange, Iris no longer holds ownership or copyright to her identity.

To this extent, the affective power of Iris's photograph is the inverse of Dorian Gray's own portrait (Wilde 2003). Where his picture is famously hidden from society and takes the psychological (and aesthetic) brunt of his actions, in *The Blindfold* it is Iris who is forced to retreat from sociality as her picture multiplies around the city. It must be noted, however, that Iris finds a certain placidity in this exchange, explaining that "the ease at which I had sidestepped my identity alarmed

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me. I had done it before. A few months later I would do it again, but that's another story" (Hustvedt 1993, 76).[2] Thus, even if she finds herself losing ownership and control over her identity, it is not necessarily an altogether mournful experience, but an opportunity to escape the very real pressures she is under (economic, academic etc.), as is further explored later in the novel in her adoption of her alter-ego, Klaus. Indeed, this 'ease', and later Klaus, offer the symbolic solution Jameson describes. Despite losing her identity, she gains a form of resistive peace, but only intermittently.

Compounding the dualism and alienation already established by the increasingly agential photograph, George decides to exhibit the photograph as part of a series. That an art dealer approached George is crucial to realising that the photograph becomes symbolically imbued with a new economic form of power and prestige. In other words, the reduction of Iris's sense and ownership of her personal identity is rendered here only in monetary terms; she, by way of her photographic proxy (which now claims the right of ownership to "Iris Vegan") is commodified. Iris's response to learning about the exhibition is pivotal in understanding the affective control the photograph has had, and is having, on her. She tells him "I don't know where I am anymore […] You robbed me" (Hustvedt 1993, 78). This highlights, in bare terms, the effect the photograph has had on her subjectivity. However, even in this protestation Iris realises the shallow and hollow meaning of her speech, realising that all she is able to pinpoint is some obscure "amorphous truth" (Hustvedt 1993, 78). This amorphous quality, this shapelessness to her words and lack of boundary to her identity is, as will be discussed in detail below, similarly a fundamental nature and power of the photograph in the novel.

Soon after its exhibition the photograph is stolen from the gallery. Initially, George wrongly assumes Iris has stolen the photograph as a means to reclaim her sense of self. However, during this exchange, Iris recollects that the photographs in George's series were each paired with another. Instinctively, she realises that her picture had been paired with the candid photograph she saw George take of the woman having a seizure. In doing so, in pairing them in this fashion, Iris's loss of agency at the hand of the photograph (and, of course, the photographer) has become physical and biological. In short, through this photographic juxtaposition, Iris mirrors a woman whose entire agency is suspended, however temporarily, as she has a seizure. George tries to pacify Iris by explaining that the pairings are "studies in counterpoint" (Hustvedt 1993, 86). Yet, this only acts to heighten the sense in which their similarity is absolute, "counterpoint" being the musical term for harmonically interdependent voices.

For instance, when Iris's boyfriend Stephen sees the woman having the seizure he remarks that he thought she "was going to come apart" (Hustvedt 1993, 49).

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[2] I would like to thank Anke Pinkert for her helpful question during the conference in which she highlighted the importance of the word 'ease'.

This echoes what Iris sees in her own photograph. She notes that "A long piece of hair was swept across my right cheek and part of my mouth, slicing my face in two" (Hustvedt 1993, 62). Thus, not only is there an aesthetic resemblance, but the mutual "breaking" and "slicing" in both Iris's portrait and the image of the anonymous woman, resembles the anachronistic, confused, and fractured narrative of the novel itself. With this in mind, when Iris says "I don't know where I am anymore" it is because of the photograph's power to slice and fracture her narrative into amorphous pieces, like the anonymous woman "coming apart," or Iris's face "slicing in two."

As mentioned, not only is the novel composed of four anachronistic sections, but also, it is Iris's own retrospectively detailed account. In other words, she herself has chosen to frame the narrative anachronistically and into these amorphous fragments. If it is true that the dominant power of the photograph—able to claim the identity "Iris Vegan"—through its proliferation and exhibition as mentioned above—fractures and breaks Iris's sense of narrative self, then that Iris still retrospectively frames the narrative anachronistically highlights how potent the photograph's power remains even eight years after the fact. Thus, even with the clarity of hindsight, the photograph continues to obfuscate Iris's ability to establish linear narratives.[3] This ability of the photograph to fracture and displace narrative in the novel is most clearly seen in the "black holes" that appear in Iris's vision, most notably the one which forms when she is scrutinising the photograph. This is how Iris describes it:

> The image was changing. With more curiosity than alarm, I noticed a small black hole in the face. […] The hole grew, eating away the left eye and nose, and then the dread came, cold and absolute, a terror so profound it created a kind of paralysis. The hole was devouring the entire image […] It was bonded to my hands, a part of my limbs, and then I was blind (Hustvedt 1993, 67).

Firstly, the word "paralysis" here is key inasmuch as it continues the novel's concern with dualism. As mentioned above, the photograph of Iris is exhibited in counterpoint to the woman having a seizure and note here that this association continues as Iris holds the photograph. The "paralysis" caused by holding the photograph is similar to the loss of agency caused by the seizure; where the seizure renders the woman unable to control her movements, holding the photograph renders Iris unable to move at all. Moreover, this paralysis was caused by "dread" and "terror," which reflects the abject recoil Iris suffers when the photograph was initially taken by George. Everything seems to come full circle as both Iris and the photographic antagonist become locked in a temporal paralysis, each seemingly vying for the control and identity of "Iris Vegan". Secondly, notice how the photograph through the motion of the black hole is able to break free from the

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[3] For a fuller account of the warped narrative in *The Blindfold* please see Christian Knirsch's detailed analysis (Knirsch 2010).

boundaries of its framing. Susan Sontag notes that the "photographic image, even to the extent that it is a trace […] cannot be simply a transparency of something that happened […] to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude" (Sontag 2004, 41). Sontag explains that every photograph is a result of that which it has excluded, and certainly, in *The Blindfold* the photograph seems to act in such a way as to recapture that which was purposely excluded, that which was purposely framed.

Further, as the photograph's black hole pushes beyond the limits of its frame it seems to sap agency from Iris. The hole begins in the face of the photograph and then grows onto Iris's own bodily hands and then limbs, eventually devouring her entire body (as with a spatial black hole) and rendering her blind. The visceral nature of this attack on subjectivity surely dispels a mere symbolic reading of the photograph or the black hole's effects. Indeed, that it manages to render Iris "blind" not only references the title of the novel—thus highlighting its importance—but temporarily completes Iris's loss of identity; in this instance of blindness, the photograph breaks from its form as object-to-be-viewed into antagonist-that-can-see in a post-modern and gothic moment of possession.

Of course, much of this can be read as a psychoanalytic metaphor. For example, that the imitative copy (the photograph) is able to "take ownership" of Iris's identity could be symbolic of Iris's loss of control, ill health, poverty, and academic stress. However, to reduce the photograph only to a metaphor somewhat misses the point. As we have discussed, the photograph's potency continues to haunt and influence Iris's ability to self-narrativise even eight years after the fact; what is more, this is not the only instance that Iris sees the black hole. The black holes are *literal* to Iris at the point of perception and the effects they have are visceral, and like their cosmological equivalents, have the ability to manipulate time.

We can see this, as mentioned, through the fact that much later in the novel, and despite no further mention of the photograph, the black hole reappears once again. Iris explains, "It didn't last long, but I stopped talking and clutched my chair. That hole wasn't the first and it wouldn't be the last, but staring into the black emptiness, I believed it was real" (Hustvedt 1993, 178). This echoes the library scene quoted above in which Iris sidesteps her identity; where Iris makes clear that it is not the first or last time she will sidestep her identity (because of the dualistic dominance of the photograph), it corresponds that it is not the first or last time that she will see the black holes. This narrative repetition has the effect of cementing the link between Iris, her subjectivity, and the photograph. The black hole of the photograph is thus an exercise in temporal plasticity, as the photograph's attack on Iris's subjectivity haunts not only through the border of its framing, or through the borders of narrative, but because of the fact that it is a retrospectively detailed account, through the borders of time. In short, the black holes represent the moment in which the photograph fully emerges as Iris's antagonist. On the one hand, it colonises Iris's identity completely, but in doing so, it—like with the

"ease" of Iris's ability to sidestep herself—her own identity—offers an escape, a rabbit hole through which to roll the dice. This, at least through the narrative order Iris constructs, is an escape through reclusive drag.

This final section of this close reading considers Iris's retreat into her alter ego Klaus. The name Klaus is taken from a German story she is translating for her tutor, with whom she is having an affair. Iris explains that she adopts the fashion of Klaus (a man's suit) out of the fear of being sexually assaulted, finding that men take less notice of her when she exists as Klaus. However, the warped narrative of the novel proffers a second rationale behind the adoption of Klaus, and it is this tacit reason which again highlights the affective power of the photograph in framing the narrative of the novel, and indeed, in regards to the act of reading the novel itself. That is to say that because of the narrative framing, it appears as if the proliferation and exhibition of the photograph in some ways *cause* Iris's retreat into the anonymity of Klaus (as explored above in the effects of the black hole). Klaus only emerges in the final section of the novel, so from a readerly perspective it is after our knowledge of the photograph (which occurs in the second section of the novel). However, (after a careful archaeology) in actuality it transpires that the Klaus scenes pre-date the drama of the photograph altogether, and we only read the inverse because of the anachronistic (and reparative) way the narrative has been framed by Iris.

In other words, Iris (writing from the present) has intentionally framed the narrative to seem as if the photograph causes her retreat into Klaus. This again bolsters the long-lasting potency of the photograph's affective hold over Iris, as if she has had to consciously mis-order her narrative in order to provide Klaus as a coping mechanism to "deal" with the ways in which the photograph is still affecting her eight years later. It is in this instance of conscious re-ordering that the stakes of the novel become greater than the sum of its narrative parts. If we understand that the photograph has been imbued with a form of antagonistic subjectivity in its own right, which is able to outpace Iris and even subsume her identity, and if we realise that a radical restructuring of the narrative fragments is necessary to "deal" with this photographic power, then the photographic image is not only an affective and inveigling device in the novel, but one that manipulates the reader as well. In *The Blindfold*, we too are fooled by the powerful currency of the photograph. Here the novel has proven to be an incredibly prescient cultural artefact.

As argued, the photograph in the novel does not act like a regular visual archive; rather than a static signifying object, it is best thought of as an affective character in its own right, anthropomorphised and always a step-ahead of Iris. It is able, with the help of black holes, to move through space-time regardless of form, reality, or chronology. The photograph is depicted as being much more than an illusion of power—it is no mere *trompe l'œil*—given it has a form of stolen agency. It is also dynamic, and attempts to reclaim that which was initially excluded from its framing. To this extent, the photograph is indicative of the novel's postmodern

style—it outright refuses to adhere to its lineage (as a visual archive) and it thoroughly questions the surety of surfaces. For instance, is the photograph actually Iris? Does it exist at all? Are the black holes "real", and does this matter? How is it being proliferated? Such narrative uncertainty hinges on the productive agonism that arises when text and image are so thoroughly intertwined. This uncertain archival quality is even foregrounded in the first section of the novel, when Mr Morning rubbishes photography in favour of the spoken word; "'Photographs!' He spat out the word. 'I'm talking about true recollection—seeing the face'" (Hustvedt 1993, 29). Note here again the relevance of the black hole, which emerges from—and subsequently conceals—the face in the photograph of Iris.

At times the novel makes for uncomfortable reading, but reading this deceptive text/image relationship is crucial to understating the crux of the novel: it forces us consider our own ontology, specifically asking us how we live when we cannot trust neither text nor image. Not only does *The Blindfold* call the legitimacy and integrity of the photographic image into question, but also, because of both the warped narrative and the fact that the photographs are only ever constructed through words, the written text itself. Ultimately, we are left unsure about the very texture of the novel: what is the truth? What is the lie?

Above, the paper argues that the black holes must be read as real and not as metaphors. This is necessary in order to understand, ironically, their contemporary significance: photographic portraits today are always affective, and are each, like the Marquise de Merteuil from *Dangerous Liaisons* a "virtuoso of deceit" (*Dangerous Liaisons* 1988, film). To this extent, the affective power of the photograph of Iris is not limited to the boundaries of its own narrative, but leaps towards us as a postmodern parable, a warning of the affective power photographs have to disturb profoundly our understanding of reality and subjectivity. This is increasingly pertinent now given the fact that photographs are seldom on paper, but are rather instantaneously digital. The capacity for photographs to become, not only affective antagonists in our lives, but complete "virtuosos of deceit", reaches a new cultural purchase in the age of Instagram, filters, and internet circulation. Though to a great extent it is true that today's images becomes yesterday's news before the day is even out, this is only in eyes of the viewer. As with Iris, the effects to the subject of a particular photograph can continually haunt. After all, they can be proliferated and doctored at a rate Iris would scarcely be able to comprehend.

It seems clear that in an age where most people are photographers (the iPhone is only little over a decade old), where many people often circulate their own images, what is crucially lost is narrative. Iris shows us how damaging and alluring a free-floating image can be, especially without a corresponding narrative. However, as I mentioned above, this interplay of image, narrative, and subjectivity goes beyond the personal. The political unconscious of the text resonates today more than ever. However, whilst on a personal level the Instagram age of photography is problematic in terms of securing and anchoring one's own sense of

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identity, on a larger scale we can see that it is the text/narrative that deceives today. If we are increasingly unable to align what we see today with what we are told—the symbiotic combination of text and image has never been more crucial; *The Blindfold* is an example of the affective and jarring dislocation that can occur when images run free of any narrative provenance. As George Elliot writes in *Middlemarch*—whose protagonist Dorothea Brooke is the subject of Iris's own research—'It is a narrow mind which cannot look at a subject from various points of view' (Eliot 1994, 66). This is certainly true. Indeed, in *The Blindfold* affective power came from a pseudo-Iris, a fake Iris in the form of an antagonistic photograph. Today, however, we have a different political and cultural antagonist in the form of "fake news", a narrative character deployed with abandon to speak a false narrative over truth or to conceal and façade opposition. This is the moral of Iris's story: text and image are crucial—*they* are the "studies in counterpoint"—but for each to maintain their integrity it is down to us to be vigilant, questioning readers and viewers of all narratives.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

This paper has argued that in *The Blindfold*, the affective presence of a photograph of the protagonist, Iris, shapes, frames, and fractures the very texture of its narrative. Through a close reading of the photograph in the novel, it has maintained that we must read the photograph as an antagonist in its own right, capable of profoundly affecting the subjectivity and reality of its subject through multiplication, proliferation, and through "stolen" agency. This paper is not a piece of theoretical work, but an aesthetic springboard upon which to inspire further research into the interaction between the photograph and the novel. The need for such research is only increasingly pressing; Iris's duplicitous, deceptive, and affective self-narrative and photograph begin to teach us how to grapple and comprehend many of the problems in contemporary culture and society, where the question of real and fake news/image/story entertains, threatens, and deceives in great numbers.

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JIN YOUNG HWANG

LA CROISÉE DES REGARDS ENTRE LITTÉRATURE ET PHOTOGRAPHIE
Han Kang et Cha Mihye

ABSTRACT: Photography has been, form the mid nineteenth century to the present, a technological revolution providing numerous considerations through literature in western civilization. But what could be said about that relationship between photography and literature in an eastern civilization, especially in South Korea? We will take a closer look at a writer, Han Kang, and visual artist, Cha Mihye, who among many explore memory and history, from the traditional era to modernity. Their distinct works forge a vital reminiscence to explore a fast mutating country by decoding some major milestones. Works of Han Kang and Cha Mihye had once been juxtaposed in an editorial and exhibition project combination, offering a way to show the particular relationship between writing and Image-Making for a better understanding of some cultural issues for Korea. Linking a tumultuous past to a rushing present time, their sensitive and intimate experiences enlighten the complex and fragile but necessary recollection of a torn nation.

KEYWORDS: Memory, Vanishing Point, Cha Mihye, Han Kang, Korea

Depuis l'invention de la photographie, artistes et gens de lettres n'ont cessé au cours du XIXe siècle de s'enthousiasmer ou de critiquer cette technologie révolutionnaire dans les domaines des arts et de l'écrit et plus généralement dans un rapport de la société à l'image. Mais si la photographie a suscité tout autant de curiosité et d'intérêt de part son aspect novateur ce n'était que le début d'une histoire encore en écriture de nos jours. Susan Sontag, par exemple, en appuie ainsi l'importance en rappelant une phrase de Mallarmé : « le plus cohérent des esthètes du XIXe siècle, déclarait que tout dans l'univers existe pour aboutir à un livre. Aujourd'hui, tout existe pour aboutir à une photographie » (Sontag 1993, 30).

D'un versant à l'autre, l'ambiguïté ou la complexité des deux genres ne cessent de croître à notre époque. Une exposition sur le thème *photo-littérature* (Fondation Jan Michalski 2016), montée par Jean-Pierre Montier et Marta Caraion a d'ailleurs désigné ce champ de réflexion comme matière à penser. Le terme « photolittérature », défini dans *Soleil noir, photographie & littérature* (Edwards 2008), est devenu un domaine d'étude à part entière, tout au moins dans l'Europe de la photographie naissante.

Mais qu'en est-il de cette relation dans un autre contexte, dans un autre pays comme la Corée du sud qui cherche à intégrer activement la scène artistique

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mondiale contemporaine (Yi 2008, 333-343). À ce dessein, nous proposerons comme sujet d'étude l'œuvre croisée des artistes coréennes Han Kang[1] et Cha Mihye.[2] C'est avec la publication de l'ouvrage *Hin, The Elegy of Whiteness* (2016) que nous aborderons cette relation complexe entre image, en l'occurrence image photographique, photogramme, et texte, à travers le cas particulier de coopération entre l'écrivaine Han Kang et l'artiste Cha Mihye.

Susan Sontag décrit dans son ouvrage *Sur la photographie* que « la photographie est un art élégiaque, un art crépusculaire » (Sontag 1993, 29). La fonction photographique de *memento mori* croise *La Chambre claire* de Roland Barthes (1980) à notre époque. Cet aspect incontournable de l'image photographique est présent dans le livre du *Hin*. Cet étonnant récit autobiographique de Han Kang a paru en 2016 en coréen puis fut traduit en anglais en 2017. Sa méditation intériorisée sur le « hin », le blanc en coréen est un hommage à défunte sa sœur. La notion de « hin », tisse cette relation particulière entre la place du texte et le rôle de la photographie. Ce roman autobiographique, développé par l'auteure Han Kang depuis 2014, est un récit autour de sa sœur aînée, construit en 65 entrées, titré en coréen 흰 (*Hin*),[3] sous-titré en anglais *The Elegy of Whiteness* (pratique éditoriale plutôt commune en Corée de nos jours) et dans lequel figure des images photographiques et des photogrammes de l'artiste Cha Mihye.

Le développement de la thématique du « hin » par cette auteure et cette artiste s'est fait dans le temps, en plusieurs étapes. Han Kang a publié en mai 2016 le roman *Hin* avec les œuvres de Cha Mihye ; en juin 2016 le catalogue des deux artistes lors d'une exposition *Vanishing.point* organisé par la commissaire Kim Jeonghea. Et en novembre 2017, *The White Book*[4] vient d'être publié avec les photos des performances de Han Kang seulement.

Déjà, dans son ouvrage précédent, 소년이 온다 (sonyeoni onda)[5] en coréen, *Human Acts* en anglais, *Celui qui revient* en français, l'auteure Han Kang procède à une montée en puissance du « hin »[6] avec l'histoire du massacre de la ville de

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[1] Couronnée du Man Booker Prize en 2016 avec son livre, *La Végétarienne*. Han Kang est la fille de l'écrivain, Han Sung-won, auteur de *Aje aje baraaje* publié en 1985 et adapté au cinéma par le réalisateur Im Kwon-taek en 1989 sous le nom en Occident de *Come, Come, Come Upward*.

[2] Artiste, diplômée des Beaux-Arts de Paris en 2010, puis rentrée en Corée afin de développer sa pratique personnelle. Elle a participé à de nombreuses expositions et résidences, y compris au Seoul Museum of Art NANJI Residency et a reçu le prix du SeMA Emerging Artists de Seoul Museum of Art.

[3] Han, Kang. 흰 (*Hin*) : *The Elegy of Whiteness* (Nanda, 2016) ; pour la suite de notre texte, cet ouvrage sera mentionné avec sa traduction romanisée *Hin*.

[4] Le site internet du livre : www.hankangwhitebook.com.

[5] Un garçon (re)vient : notre traduction en français.

[6] « Hin » : nom commun désignant la couleur blanche en coréen.

Gwangju.[7] Le « hin », c'est-à-dire le blanc, y apparait à travers une bougie blanche, une pommade, des morceaux de gaze pour soigner les blessures, ou encore des linceuls. Déjà, le blanc y prend une place particulière, en opposition au rouge du sang. Après l'écriture de ce roman sur un fait historique important en Corée, basé sur des archives et des témoignages, Han Kang dans son nouveau roman puise cette fois dans sa propre histoire intime.

C'est dans un podcast du Munhakdongne de mai 2014, d'entretiens avec des auteurs de littérature contemporaine menés par le critique et animateur de ce programme Shin Hyungchul que l'histoire de sa sœur est ainsi revenue à Han Kang, mais elle ne pouvait pas en parler clairement à l'époque. La question clef a été :« avez-vous vécu une expérience qui approche un sentiment de tristesse ? » (Shin 2014). Han Kang commença alors à composer une nouvelle histoire, un nouveau roman centré sur le thème du « hin ».

En Occident, on a pu observer dernièrement des œuvres ayant aussi comme source et comme ressource, la mémoire, le manque et un sentiment diffus de mélancolie lié à la perte, au vide laissé par un frère ou une sœur. On peut ainsi penser, par exemple, aux ouvrages *Un secret* de Philippe Grimbert publié en 2004, à *L'Autre fille* d'Annie Ernaux publié en 2011, ou encore au dernier film d'Éric Caravaca, *Carré 35*. Dans ce rapprochement au sentiment de peine, un autre écrivain, Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio, adepte du pays du matin calme au sujet duquel il a déjà trouvé matière à ses romans, souligne l'importance du mot « han », intraduisible en français, comme une notion essentiel ancrée dans la culture et la littérature coréenne d'après-guerre. En tenter une traduction par le seul remplacement avec un substitut comme « chagrin, désolation, affliction, lamentation, regret » ou encore « ressentiment, rancœur » (Dong-a 2012) risque d'en réduire la signification. Ces différentes terminologies seraient plutôt les différentes facettes ou prismes de ce vibrant sentiment profondément enraciné dans l'âme du peuple coréen selon certains. En effet pour les dernières générations cette fibre émotive devient discutable alors que d'autres enjeux de société émergent. Ainsi lors de la rencontre en 2007 à l'Université Ewha, de J.M.G. Le Clézio (Doo 2016) et de Han Kang cette dernière niera être de la génération du « han » au fil de leur conversation. C'est donc peut-être une volonté de ne pas souhaiter tant rentrer dans un courant daté de la littérature coréenne autant que d'éviter un regard exotisant de la part d'un étranger que de revendiquer une œuvre n'ayant pas de rapport avec le « han ». Ce qui va dans le sens de J.M.G. Le Clézio lorsque le prix Nobel critique virulemment l'attitude des occidentaux colonialistes qui collectionnent des objets que l'on dénomme aujourd'hui « Arts Premiers », notamment le pillage par André Malraux des statues khmers par exemple (Le Clézio 2015, 6'53"-7'25"). Il nous sensibilise à l'importance de l'influence de

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[7] Soulèvement des étudiants et des civils de la ville de Gwangju contre la dictature militaire de Chun Doo-Hwan au 18 mai 1980, réprimé dans le sang, devenu un symbole de la démocratisation en Corée du Sud.

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l'Orient, notamment avec le livre chinois *Mozi* qui révèle l'existence de la *camera obscura* dès le VIe siècle avant J.-C. (*ivi*, 42'20"- 44'50").

Cha Mihye, quant à elle, explore le « hin » à travers une dimension qui va nous intéresser ici lors de la découverte d'un endroit atypique, un ancien cinéma : le « Bada » – terme qui signifie la mer en coréen. Cette salle de cinéma, pourtant située en plein Séoul, ferme en 2010, et reste depuis inactive, plongée dans l'oubli. Cha Mihye nous raconte cette rencontre fortuite avec ce lieu et monsieur Kim, le gérant et unique gardien de cet ancien immeuble construit en 1969, dans une vidéo : *Gazing at Kim*. Puis un autre travail dont la trace sera aussi un enregistrement vidéo, *People who disappeared, the world that didn't or vice versa*, propose l'exploration des lieux avec des performeurs. Dans son exposition personnelle *Full, Empty, Floating* à la Cake Gallery en 2015, elle déploie cette rencontre avec l'espace conjointement avec une performance dans ce même cinéma. Ce flottement, entre ce vide et ce plein, nous emmène dans un univers entre deux, translucide et diaphane. Le « hin », comme dit Cha Mihye dans son œuvre *The First Morning*, est ce « blanc lumineux qui devient une forme » (Ruahart 2016, 2). Le blanc, là aussi, devient un élément clé.

La rencontre entre le texte et l'image, entre Han Kang et Cha Mihye, s'est faite via Kim Jeonghea, commissaire d'exposition indépendante. Han Kang, cherchant des images pour son livre *Hin*, va ainsi faire coexister les deux travaux artistiques avec une première version de l'ouvrage *Hin*. Nous précisons pour ce *Hin*, qu'il vient de la forme adjective « hida » signifiant « couleur ou lueur de la neige », ou encore « reflet d'une lumière mélangée de toutes les couleurs sur la neige » (Dong-a, 2012). Le terme « réverbération » en français peut nous en donner une assez bonne approche.

Mais, que signifie ce « hin » plus précisément dans la langue coréenne ? Han Kang nous explique les deux formes adjectives du blanc en coréen, le « hin » et « hayata » (Dong-a, 2012). Tandis que le « hayata », ou le « hayang »[8] signifie une « lumière blanche et pure » qu'elle nous décrit « comme la barbe à papa blanche coréenne, le « hin » fait référence à une question fondamentale de la vie et la mort avec une tonalité de tristesse, de froideur ou d'être transi de peur » (Shin 2016). Elle nous décrit le blanc dans ce même entretien : « le blanc est représenté depuis la couverture blanche de la naissance jusqu'au linceul comme un papillon blanc vivant devient le papillon mort, transparent. C'est une couleur à la fois transparente mais aussi triste et froide » (*ibid*.).

L'ouvrage *Hin* se compose de 65 entrées en trois parties, il nous livre, d'après son auteure, un roman qui évoque l'histoire de sa sœur ainée, un nouveau-né qui n'a vécu que deux heures. Mais n'est-ce vraiment qu'un roman ? Ce livre ne tiendrait-il pas tout autant de l'autobiographie ou encore de l'essai ? De surcroît, mêlant écrit et photographie, cet ouvrage ne dévoile-t-il pas sa vraie nature à travers son sous-titre, avec le terme « Élégie », plutôt que par sa dénomination de roman ?

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[8] Forme nominative du « hayata ».

Quant à la photographie, son rôle rituel, à la fois nourri par le lien ambigu avec la mort et aussi par son action de mise à mort est bien expliqué dans *La photographie et l'(auto)biographie*, un livre pédagogique de Sylvie Jopeck à travers « la mère de Marguerite Yourcenar,[…] saisie sur son lit de mort pour qu'elle puisse demeurer dans les mémoires » (Jopeck 2004, 95) ou encore « la mère et le père de Georges Perec » pour « figer les êtres à un moment donné et les transformer en fantômes » (*ibid.*).

La première partie, intitulée « je/moi », ouvre ce livre, *Hin*, avec une voix à la première personne, celle de l'auteure, et énumère une liste des blancs en faisant appel à ses souvenirs d'enfance liés à sa grande sœur. Lors de l'entretien avec Shin Hyungchul, critique littéraire, Han Kang nous explique aussi l'importance de son séjour à Varsovie sur l'invitation de son éditrice polonaise après avoir écrit *Celui qui revient* en 2013. Le thème du « hin » s'est pleinement révélé pendant ce séjour. De même que des destins tragiques de la grande Histoire peuvent résonner en écho entre les deux pays, déjà le rapport se resserre entre texte et image. Le point de départ peut être la confusion entre le « hin », le blanc, et le vide, ce qui a disparu, une notion de 'point de fuite' à laquelle nous reviendrons plus tard. L'auteure visionne un documentaire sur la ville de Varsovie, et en voit une vue aérienne, qui se rapproche, et ce qu'elle perçoit de cette ville, détruite à 95% pendant la deuxième Guerre Mondiale, est de prime abord, une ville sous la neige. Mais vue de plus près la ville se révèle être en fait une « ville anéantie ». Cette première partie à la première personne tiendrait ainsi plus de l'autobiographie.

La deuxième partie se raconte à la troisième personne et tiendrait donc plutôt du fictionnel. L'auteure y donne sa voix et y prête son corps à sa grande sœur pour qu'elle voit, observe et sente, comme si sa sœur vivait à travers elle. Shin Hyungchul suggère que la forme de cette œuvre peut être qualifiée d'expérimentale. En effet, l'expérience que Han Kang a eu pendant l'écriture de *Hin*, était à la fois de prêter son existence à sa grande sœur mais aussi de ressentir sa présence éphémère comme un rayon de lumière blanche.

Dans la troisième partie, l'auteure revient à sa propre voix.

Dans cette très personnelle histoire de la blancheur, cette palette de blancs, une douzaine de photographies et de photogrammes sont insérées. La coexistence des deux produit un effet qui pousse à plus de curiosité. Car en effet, les images présentées ici ne donnent pas lieu à une illustration des textes. Qui en est l'auteur ? Pourquoi et comment ont-elles été choisies et placées ? Pourquoi avoir eu recours à des photographies ? Ne suffisait-il pas de présenter son récit autobiographique tel quel ?

Nous apprenons dans un entretien[9] que Han Kang est une grande amatrice d'art vivant, et, notamment de Pina Baush. Son intérêt pour les arts en général revient d'ailleurs régulièrement au cours de ses ouvrages. Dans son livre *Hin*, elle choisit une œuvre *in situ* d'une artiste coréenne contemporaine que l'on suppose être Kim

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[9] *Munhakdongne channel 1, Han Kang, Shin Hyungchul Munhak iyagi*, consulté le 16 février 2018, http://www.podbbang.com/ch/6570.

Juyeon afin d'évoquer la blancheur du sel, qui a aussi la possibilité de soigner ou de désinfecter nos plaies. Ainsi, la plasticienne Kim Juyeon dispose une montagne de sel dans une pièce sombre et positionne une chaise devant. Les visiteurs pouvaient s'assoir sur cette chaise et poser leurs pieds nus sur le monticule de sel. Cette œuvre intitulée *L'Effacement de la mémoire* (2013) nous invite à un moment méditatif.

Dans l'ouvrage *Hin*, l'entrée, intitulée « Sel », l'auteure rapporte à la troisième personne cette expérience indirecte, imaginée par le biais d'une photo de cette installation. Mais cela reste quelque chose d'intime à l'œuvre de Han Kang sans relation aux œuvres de Cha Mihye.
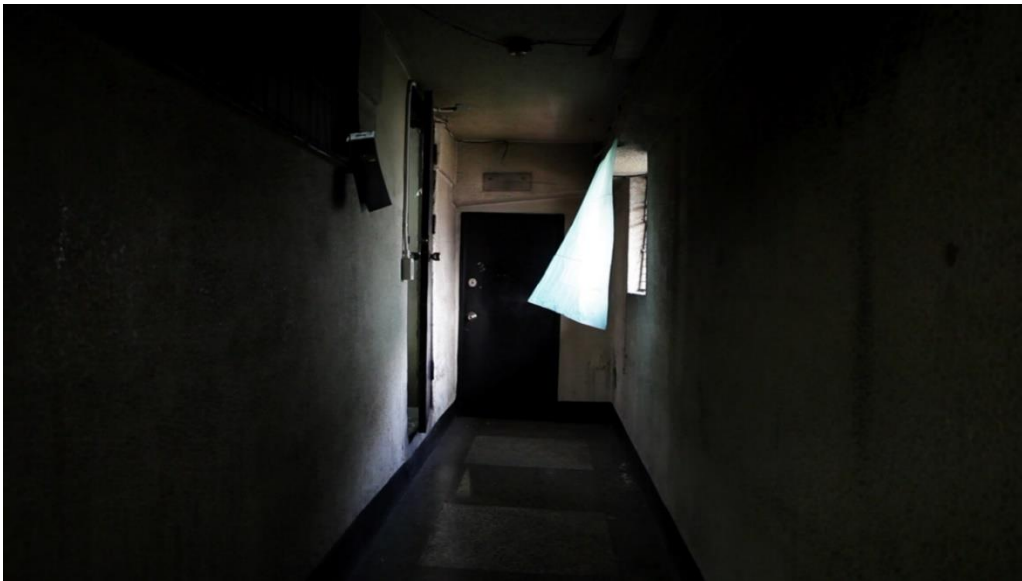
Fig. 1. Cha Mihye, *People who disappeared, the world that didn't, or vice versa*,
3 channel video installation, video still, 2015.

Dans cette relation particulière, une image nous semble différente, importante, comme une image clef. Elle peut expliquer la symbiose de cet ouvrage par un décalage perçu ici, une ouverture vers un 'point de fuite' tel que suggéré par Cha Mihye dans le titre choisi pour l'exposition conjointe avec Han Kang. En effet, l'image devient là un cadre dans un cadre. Il s'agit d'une image intitulée *People who disappeared, the world that didn't or vice versa*. C'est une saisie d'écran, un photogramme de la séquence vidéo montrant un couloir sombre qui mène notre regard vers ce qui semble être un rideau, flottant, de couleur blanchâtre et qui à la fois diffuse et filtre la lumière qui vient de l'extérieur par une fenêtre. En face de ce rideau, une porte entre ouverte provoque un courant d'air et imprime au rideau un mouvement de flottement. Cette porte est l'entrée de la salle de projection. Cette ouverture n'est-elle pas ainsi une invitation vers une autre fiction ? Un « appel d'air » vers une autre mémoire ? L'histoire de cet ancien cinéma Bada, enseveli par ou suspendu dans le temps ? À l'instar d'*Une visite aux monuments de Passaic,*

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New Jersey (1967) de Robert Smithson, les notions d'« entropie » et de « ruine à l'envers » se déploient alors dans ce lieu. « selon ce paradigme, la ruine n'est pas le produit d'une lente érosion ou d'une destruction brutale, mais procède d'un lieu d'où le temps s'est absenté […] ». En effet, avec Bada, « la mer (l'océan) flotte dans l'île »[10] et maintient cette absence du temps.

Fig. 2. Cha Mihye, *A Day That Could Not Have Existed,* performance, video still, 2015.

Pour l'artiste Cha Mihye, cet ancien cinéma Bada situé en plein cœur de la mégapole de Séoul devient un moyen, un *medium*, tel un vaisseau ou un passage, non seulement pour partir à la recherche d'un temps perdu mais aussi afin de créer un acte poïétique. Fermé depuis 2010, son exploration photographique et cinématographique est une quête de la mémoire et du temps. La rencontre inattendue avec Monsieur Kim, l'intendant de cet immeuble, donne lieu à un témoignage vivant. L'endroit même de la projection du film est inversement devenu le lieu du tournage du film de Cha Mihye. Son exploration aboutit à une exposition *Full, Empty, Floating* et à deux jours de performances intitulées *A day that could not have existed*. Cha Mihye a voulu faire monter le gardien des lieux, Monsieur Kim sur scène, « il devient une sorte de plan pour se rappeler les mémoires de ce lieu » (SeMA 2015, 14-15) comme le disait la critique d'art, Gu Nayeon. Il s'agissait d'un spectacle performatif de 60 minutes. Cha Mihye laissait aussi le temps (20 minutes) aux spectateurs pour qu'ils puissent eux-mêmes se promener, marcher et déambuler à loisir. Des images projetées sur l'écran débutaient cette performance, puis nous retrouvions des performeurs qui se mêlaient aux objets du Bada. Les ombres portées sur l'écran, tel l'histoire de la

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[10] Intitulé de l'article de Gu Nayeon 2014, 13.

fille de Dibutade comme des ombres chinoises, laissaient place aux performeurs qui descendaient de la scène et déambulaient parmi les spectateurs pour aller jusqu'à la salle de projection et y disparaissaient. L'artiste voulait effacer cette frontière entre le début et la fin, entre l'intérieur et l'extérieur de l'écran, entre la scène des acteurs et les sièges des spectateurs. Nous citons l'artiste qui explique son intention pour cette installation :

> J'ai voulu effacer les frontières entre le début et la fin de la performance, le dedans et le dehors de l'écran, la scène et la salle, les acteurs et les spectateurs. J'avais aussi conscience du potentiel des ombres projetées par les sources lumineuses. J'ai donc essayé d'obtenir sur l'écran des images qui semblent vaciller entre les dimensions du temps et de l'espace depuis des éclairages disposés sur la scène vers l'écran. Ces frontières ambiguës ne forment pas ainsi une seule épaisseur du temps mais des couches de temps qui s'entre-choquent continuellement selon le psychisme de chacun. J'ai pensé qu'il était important pour le public d'avoir le temps de visite nécessaire pour faire l'expérience de ce lieu afin d'en percevoir sa charge émotionnelle. (SeMA2015, 44-45).

Fig. 3. Cha Mihye, *Song for Zero person*, 2channel video, video still, 2013.

Si cette image, la mémoire du Bada, est une ouverture, un glissement possible vers un autre récit, elle constitue alors le point d'articulation entre la deuxième et la troisième partie de l'ouvrage *Hin*. Une autre œuvre de Cha Mihye, *Song for Zero Person* est alors le point charnière entre les première et deuxième parties, ainsi qu'avec la dernière partie de l'ouvrage. Cette œuvre opère une résonance entre lecteurs et spectateurs. Cha Mihye nous explique que ce travail intervient à partir de la réflexion sur la relation, sur les points de vue et le décalage des mémoires. L'artiste a préféré nommer cette série de photographies « zero person (a-personnel) » que « impersonnel », et c'est peut-être aussi une raison pour laquelle

Han Kang s'intéressa à cette série de photogrammes. Pour Cha Mihye, cette place vacante est une possibilité d'introduction a quelque chose qui est pour elle « innommable, indéfinissable ».[11] Le passage du poème *Les Foules* de Baudelaire cité par Gu Nayeon pour *A day that could not have existed*, dans le livret de l'exposition *Full, Empty, Floating*, évoque ce rôle du poète-acteur qui peut se glisser dans la peau des autres. Le gardien, Monsieur Kim, monté sur scène, commence à se rappeler sa propre mémoire liée au Bada, il part en laissant ses chaussures derrière lui. Une place vacante qui évoque le « hin » et lui prête un lieu. Si d'un côté, Han Kang est sortie d'une forme classique de récits et prête sa voix à sa sœur, de l'autre côté, Cha Mihye prête son art au Bada.

« Le poète jouit de cet incomparable privilège, qu'il peut à sa guise être lui-même et autrui. Comme ces âmes errantes qui cherchent un corps, il entre, quand il veut, dans le personnage de chacun. Pour lui seul, tout est vacant, et si de certaines places paraissent lui être fermées, c'est qu'à ses yeux elles ne valent pas la peine d'être visitées ».[12]

Si la mémoire du Bada est un autre récit dans le récit de *Hin* à la façon d'un surcadrage iconogaphique. Han Kang va aussi produire ses propres images avec quatre performances qu'elle réalise lors de l'inauguration de l'exposition conjointe des deux artistes intitulée *Vanishing.point*. Cette exposition inaugurait la parution du livre et présentait les derniers travaux, photographiques et vidéo, de Cha Mihye.

« L'idée du point de fuite est que c'est un point qui n'existe pas dans la réalité physique mais qui se perçoit dans la distance, une image, une convergence de deux lignes parallèles. Cette idée est également reflétée dans mon travail *Crossing and Distance* ».[13] nous explique Cha Mihye.

Cette notion régit et structure d'ailleurs le catalogue de l'exposition *Vanishing.point*. Nous citons la critique d'art Pahng Heajin : « Deux plans qui ne se rencontrent pas convergent pourtant vers le même point de fuite, un point de contact fictionnel, abstrait, qui se situe infiniment loin, mais quand ces deux plans se destinent à disparaître, le plan devient une ligne et la ligne devient un point. Un point uniquement atteint à travers sa disparition ».[14]

En effet, l'exposition *Vanishing.point* a finalement été le moment de séparation des deux phases artistiques, de même que Cha Mihye propose d'autres œuvres, *The First Morning*, *Benjamin's Woods*, *Counting the Instances*, *Crossing and Distance*, Han Kang proposera *la pierre, le sel, la glace, Béné-ot/For her, Marches, Scellé* ; quatre performances réalisées un mois et demi avant et filmées,

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[11] Lors de l'échange électronique avec Cha Mihye au 14 novembre 2017 ; Terme que Cha Mihye a utilisé pour expliquer sa série de *The Song for Zero Person*.
[12] C. Baudelaire, "Les Foules'', in Gu Nayeon 2015, 12-13.
[13] Cha Mihye, conversation du 14 novembre 2017.
[14] Ruahart 2016, 24, 28. Notre traduction en français, texte original version anglaise : « Two planes that do not meet in actuality converge into one at this vanishing point, a fictional point of contact that lies infinitely far off in the distance, but when two planes take extinction as their destination, the plane becomes a line, and the line becomes a point. A point only reached through disappearance ».

et qui seront projetées uniquement lors du vernissage. Le vrai point de fuite restera leur co-opération en amont lors de la publication du livre *Hin*.

Au cours de ce prolongement de co-existence, pour éviter le terme collaboration, à travers l'exposition *Vanishing.point*, les deux artistes se sont rencontrées en vue de leur propre développement artistique ou littéraire et cela a conduit à une exposition en parallèle qui ne sera pas un vrai croisement mais plutôt un rapprochement ultime, mais sans réelle rencontre, où l'intitulé *Vanishing.point*, « point de fuite », se révèle parfait. Comme disait Han Kang dans le catalogue de cette exposition, « pour traverser le « hin », il aura fallu passer par la mort de la parole », elle laisse de côté la parole et l'écriture pour représenter une gestuelle corporelle. Le 3 juin 2016 seulement, Han Kang montre donc ses performances lors du vernissage de l'exposition *Vanishing.point*. Han Kang en interdira toute autre diffusion ou reproduction et seul le catalogue fera jusqu'alors mention de ce travail plastique de l'écrivaine. En effet, Han Kang vient de publier une nouvelle version de son livre, novembre 2017 incluant les photographies ou les photogrammes de ses performances photographiées et filmées par un professionnel en remplaçant les images de l'artiste Cha Mihye et dont le titre est modifié, quoique proche, mais uniquement d'expression anglaise : *The White Book*[15] Dans *The White Book*, les images deviendront alors plus illustratives, de moindre qualité de reproduction, et se subordonneront au texte. On notera cependant une troublante proximité entre la couverture de ce livre et l'affiche de l'exposition *Full, Empty, Floating* (2015) de l'artiste Cha Mihye, jouant toutes deux avec la symbolique visuelle d'un écran blanc.

Fig. 4. Cha Mihye, *Full, Empty, Floating*, image for exhibition poster, Cake Gallery, 2015.

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[15] La traduction anglaise paru en novembre 2017 l'intitulé de « The White Book » au lieu de « The Elegy of Whiteness » qui était le sous-titre du 'hin', un titre qui était prévu pour la version anglaise.

Après leur croisement, les deux auteures vont donc continuer leurs trajectoires chacune vers leur propre horizon. Mais cette rencontre, et l'articulation des œuvres entre texte et image avec pour même thématique le « hin », a produit un espace de mémoire vital, un ouvrage nécessaire qui, même s'il a posé les limites de l'extime et de l'intime, avec la publication plus personnelle de *The White Book*, a souhaité rendre un hommage face à l'évanouissement, rendre une présence à l'absence. Ainsi, dans la même volonté de vie, c'est peut-être pour se rappeler l'aveuglement possible d'une course effrénée à l'hypermodernité d'un pays comme la Corée que ces artistes nous montrent l'éblouissement salutaire de la mémoire.

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OMBRE DI MEMORIA
Immagini e storie di migranti da Richard Mosse a Georges Perec

ABSTRACT: The following pages present the analysis of a crucial issue for the genre of the photo-text, that of migrations intended as stories of wandering and hope and respect to which the literary word and the photographic image are still questioning, especially for what concerns the opportunity and the modalities of narration and memory. Two cases distant in time and space seem to offer a reflection on the inexhaustible question, and above all on the way in which it can be tackled without falling back into the often sterile ground of documentary or memorial narration: *Incoming* (2017) by the photographer Richard Mosse and *Récits d'Ellis Island. Histoires d'errance et d'espoir* (1980), the work of Georges Perec and Robert Bober.

KEYWORDS: Photo-Text, G. Perec, R. Mosse, Photography, Memory, Migration.

Ci sono momenti nella storia in cui eventi bellici o catastrofici (molto spesso i due insieme) producono fenomeni talmente impensabili da negare quella umanità a cui, malgrado tutto, appartengono. È il caso, per esempio, di genocidi, di cataclismi climatici, di disastri sociali, economici o politici, insomma di tutti quegli avvenimenti che portano il genere umano, o una parte di esso, sull'orlo della distruzione. Quel che accade in questi casi diviene ancora più insostenibile allo sguardo umano quando responsabili di tali disgrazie siano gli uomini stessi. Si tratta di avvenimenti o fenomeni inaccettabili che tuttavia non possono essere taciuti, che devono essere testimoniati, in prima istanza perché è spesso questa l'unica strada attraverso cui le vittime di tali disastri possono riacquistare l'umanità di cui sono state spogliate, e in secondo luogo perché non vengano dimenticati e, quindi, ripetuti.

Questa necessaria testimonianza pone, però, più interrogativi di quanti non ne risolva, in primo luogo sulla sua stessa liceità, in secondo luogo sulla sua forma. Come parlare di ciò di cui non si può parlare? Come mostrare ciò che non si può immaginare? E ancora, che tipo di parola (narrativa o documentaristica) e di immagine (artistica o "automatica") possono fare testimonianza? In *Images malgré tout* (Immagini malgrado tutto, 2003), a proposito di alcune fotografie scattate dai detenuti del campo di concentramento di Auschwitz, Georges Didi-Huberman afferma che "in ogni produzione testimoniale, in ogni atto di memoria i due – linguaggio e immagine – sono assolutamente solidali e si soccorrono a vicenda: un'immagine sorge spesso là dove mancano le parole, e una parola sorge spesso là dove sembra mancare l'immaginazione" (Didi-Huberman 2003, 43).

È proprio da questa continua sfida e necessità reciproca di immagine e parola che è sorto, alla fine del XIX secolo, il genere ibrido del fototesto, un genere che si è trovato sin dalla sua nascita a dover colmare quello spazio di irrappresentabile

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lasciato dalla parola letteraria e dalla documentazione fotografica. Occupare questo spazio ambiguo non significa mai per i fototesti risolvere questioni o cancellare ambiguità mettendo in scena una rappresentazione coerente. Anzi, la combinazione di testo e fotografia (forse ancor di più di qualsiasi altro tipo di immagine) mette proprio in scena la crisi della rappresentazione, non soltanto acuendo lo scarto tra verbale e visuale, ma soprattutto quello tra "ciò che si vede e ciò che è esistito" (Cometa 2016, 73).

Un fenomeno che, oggi più che mai, appare cruciale per il genere fototestuale è quello delle migrazioni umane che nelle loro forme più diverse, dai viaggi della speranza agli incubi dell'esilio e della fuga, hanno interpellato la riflessione filosofica, artistica, letteraria, cinematografica. È proprio questo l'ambito nel quale si muovono due opere, molto distanti nel tempo e nello spazio, che si sono interrogate sulle modalità più appropriate ed efficaci per narrare e testimoniare le diverse sfaccettature che questi viaggi, nei loro diversi generi, possono assumere. Si tratta di *Incoming* del fotografo Richard Mosse (2017) e dei *Récits d'Ellis Island. Histoires d'errance et d'espoir*, l'opera di Georges Perec e Robert Bober (1980).

L'opera del fotografo irlandese è un'opera multimediale costituita da una video installazione e da un libro-catalogo che raccoglie le fotografie scattate da Mosse accompagnate da due testi, *Biopolitics and the Rights of Man*, di Giorgio Agamben, e *Transmigration of the Souls*, dello stesso Mosse. Attraverso queste opere, il fotografo ripercorre e cerca di documentare i viaggi intrapresi da rifugiati e migranti illegali attraverso due delle rotte più trafficate e pericolose verso l'Europa: la rotta balcanica e la rotta africana. Ciò che rende quest'opera particolare è, però, il mezzo attraverso cui è stata realizzata. Le fotografie che scorrono davanti ai nostri occhi, infatti, sono state scattate per mezzo di una macchina militare in grado di catturare le radiazioni termiche (per esempio quelle corporee) a grandissima distanza, capace di rilevare un corpo umano a più di 30 km. Le immagini che ne derivano sono strananti persino spettrali in una tonalità monocromatica che sembra spogliare le persone ritratte dei loro corpi e ridurle a mere immagini termiche, a semplici tracce.

Immagini di fantasmi, tracce di passaggi ormai lontani infestano[1] analogamente l'opera, ancora una volta multimediale, di Georges Perec e Robert Bober che nel

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[1] Tanto le immagini di Mosse quanto quelle di Perec/Bober presentano il carattere degli spettri. Da un lato i soggetti in esse rappresentate non appaiono come persone, come essenze, ma, appunto, come fantasmi, cioè come entità a metà tra il visibile e l'invisibile, tra la vita e la morte, tra la presenza e l'assenza, tra il vero e il falso. Dall'altro lato le immagini portano in sé queste stesse caratteristiche, oltre a quelle che sono loro più proprie di materialità e immaterialità. In più esse appaiono infestate da elementi indecidibili che però catturano il nostro sguardo, ci irretiscono per lasciarci nel dubbio di ciò che abbiamo realmente visto. Queste considerazioni derivano dallo *hauntological approach* proposto da Jaques Derrida in *Spettri di Marx* (2004) e per certi versi riconducibile a molti studi recenti sulle immagini proposti dalla *visual culture*. Per una proposta di applicazione dell'*hauntological approach* alle immagini della migrazione si veda C. Giubilaro (2019).

1979 realizzarono il film *Récits d'Ellis Island* e un libro per raccontare ciò che resta di quel centro di transito e, a volte, di detenzione ed espulsione da cui passarono tra il 1892 e il 1924 circa sedici milioni di migranti provenienti da diverse regioni d'Europa. Il fototesto – in cui le parole di Perec, le immagini di Bober e quelle di repertorio si articolano in maniera sempre diverse fino a far perdere le tracce delle due distinte autorialità – è diviso in tre parti: una prima parte "documentaria", intitolata *L'Île des larmes*; una seconda parte, intitolata *Description d'un chemin*, che narra – soprattutto attraverso la voce di Perec qui particolarmente coinvolto – l'intreccio problematico tra dispersione e identità; la terza, *Mémoires*, riporta le testimonianze dirette di coloro che passarono per quella piccola isola vicina (ma non troppo) alla Statua della Libertà.[2]

Al di là della comune riflessione sui fenomeni delle migrazioni, le due opere mettono in scena l'inesausta questione che sembra stare alla base di tutto il genere fototestuale, che anzi sembra aver provocato la necessità e quindi la nascita stessa del fototesto, e cioè la questione dell'attendibilità della documentazione, verbale o fotografica che sia; la necessità di inchiodare qualsiasi narrazione che pretenda di affermare una realtà o una rilevanza assoluta ai suoi caratteri di mediazione, artificiosità e costruzione.

Richard Mosse. L'immagine impossibile

Come descrivere al meglio, cioè in maniera più giusta e più corretta il dolore degli altri? È questa una delle annose domande che la parola pone alla fotografia e che viceversa la fotografia pone alla parola. Di certo l'immagine fotografica, portatrice allo stesso tempo di sincerità e artificiosità, è un buon mezzo per veicolare informazioni di drammi lontani che difficilmente potrebbero raggiungerci e colpirci con un efficace "effetto di reale". Una risposta è quella tentata per certi versi dal fotogiornalismo, ossia dalla documentazione contemporaneamente verbale e visuale, "registrata" da uno (o più testimoni) in maniera oggettiva. Proprio l'oggettività documentaria di questo genere di osservazione, però, è stata da subito messa in discussione, senza che ciò abbia comportato una rinuncia al valore estetico, ma anche etico e politico, delle narrazioni che fotografia e parola possono produrre.

Alcune delle prime indagini fotogiornalistiche, soprattutto quelle della tradizione statunitense, dimostrarono nella prima metà del secolo scorso l'incapacità dell'immagine fotografica di rendere da sola la complessità di scene, eventi o situazioni drammatiche. Non soltanto, opere come *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937), di Margaret Bourke-White e Erskin Caldwell, o *Let us Now Praise Famous Men*, di James Agee e Walker Evans (1941), posero una questione ancora più complessa: può davvero una documentazione oggettiva farsi testimonianza? È

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[2] Sulla storia di Ellis Island e sugli altri luoghi newyorkesi attraversati dai flussi migratori più o meno a partire dallo sbarco della Mayflower, si veda Green 2009, 40-47.

proprio per dare risposta a questa domanda che nasce il genere del fototesto[3] il quale, piuttosto che trovare una risposta complica ancora di più la domanda, almeno su due fronti: da un lato quello della soggettività dello sguardo che produce le immagini del dolore, uno sguardo per l'appunto personale, parziale, culturalmente, politicamente, persino economicamente connotato; dall'altro lato quello della separazione del soggetto portatore dello sguardo (e del mezzo attraverso cui si esercita lo sguardo)[4] dall'individuo ritratto, oggetto dello sguardo e della sofferenza che gli o le appartiene. Da una parte, quindi, c'è il soggetto dello sguardo, un soggetto lontano dal dolore che ha «il privilegio di essere o di rifiutare di essere, spettatore del dolore» (Sontag 2003, 104), dall'altro il soggetto del dolore e il soggetto dell'immagine, non sempre disinteressato alla rappresentazione della propria sofferenza (ivi, 106). Le domande che ne discendono sono tante: è lecito produrre immagini della sofferenza altrui? Trasformare in immagini soggetti che soffrono non è forse una forma di oggettificazione? E, quindi, è lecito guardare queste immagini? Esserne spettatori ci trasforma in qualche modo in *voyeur* di una forma particolare e particolarmente morbosa di pornografia? Esistono forse delle reazioni che possono rendere questa spettatorialità più o meno lecita? È lecito fare di queste immagini opere d'arte o devono rimanere meri documenti, immagini "grezze" in cui il valore estetico non possa distrarre l'osservatore dal dramma in questione?

Sono queste alcune delle domande a cui tenta di dare risposta l'intera opera di Richard Mosse da sempre impegnato a riprendere luoghi di guerra, di desolazione e sofferenza in modi che vanno al di là delle più diffuse modalità di reportage, sperimentando innanzitutto nuovi mezzi e nuove tecnologie e, soprattutto, mettendo la tragedia alla prova della bellezza. È forse questa la più grande provocazione di Mosse e la causa di molte delle più aspre critiche ad alcune delle sue opere, a partire da *Infra* la serie di fotografie realizzata in Congo, presentata per la prima volta a Londra nel 2011, e poi sotto forma di videoinstallazione alla Biennale di Venezia nel 2013, con il titolo di *Enclave*.[5]

Con *Infra* il fotografo – che già con *Nomads* e *Breach*, entrambi del 2009, aveva voluto sperimentare la capacità della macchina fotografica di provocare una reazione imprevista alle immagini di guerra, mostrando mere tracce piuttosto che facce[6] – realizza la prima delle sue opere che può tecnicamente farci vedere l'invisibile, di fatto la sua originaria ambizione. Così come avverrà poi in *Incoming*, Mosse utilizza un mezzo non convenzionale per la fotografia documentaristica: si tratta di una pellicola Kodak Aerchrome, una tecnologia originariamente progettata per scopi militari, messa per la prima volta alla prova

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[3] Sulle categorie del fototesto e su alcuni dei più illustri esempi del genere si veda Cometa-Coglitore 2016.

[4] Non è un caso che Susan Sontag (2003) ricolleghi l'uso della macchina fotografica a quello delle armi da sparo.

[5] Le opere di Richard Mosse sono consultabili sul sito www.richardmosse.com.

[6] Sul posizionamento dell'opera di Mosse tra arte contemporanea, fotogiornalismo, post-fotografia si veda Lange 2010.

durante la Seconda Guerra Mondiale, successivamente dall'esercito americano durante la guerra del Vietnam. La particolarità di questa pellicola sta nel far virare tutte le gradazioni del verde (derivanti dalla presenza di clorofilla) verso il rosso e il rosa acceso. Una tale manipolazione dell'immagine consentiva, soprattutto grazie alle riprese aeree, di far risaltare in mezzo alla vegetazione, non più verde ma rosa, ciò che non contiene clorofilla, per esempio gli uomini mimetizzati in quella vegetazione.

Ingannando la vista, dunque, questo tipo di fotografia ci permette di vedere ciò che il nostro occhio nudo o le nostre lenti "civili" non vedrebbero: i nemici, ma anche le vittime e i carnefici di una guerra infinita le cui immagini abbiamo già visto talmente tante volte da essere divenute ormai per noi invisibili. L'Aerchrome, pone davanti ai nostri occhi delle immagini perturbanti, stranianti, sconcertanti in primo luogo proprio a causa del colore che le contraddistingue. In una video intervista realizzata per Frieze Mosse spiega: "La gente è particolarmente offesa dal colore rosa, ma è solo un colore. Eppure, fino a che punto si può dire che una fotografia rosa sia più costruita di una fotografia in bianco e nero? Robert Capa usava il bianco e nero, ma noi non vediamo in bianco e nero. Eppure ci sembra più vicino alla verità. In sostanza, si tratta di utilizzare veramente le potenzialità dell'arte contemporanea, la capacità di rendere visibile ciò che è oltre il limite del linguaggio e di portarlo al limite etico del documentario".[7]

Il colore rosa, sembra dunque divenire il portatore di un senso morale, o immorale, persino politicamente scorretto. Nel suo saggio "On Colour Photography in an Extra-moral Sense", Jennifer Bajorek (2015) sottolinea come il colore rosa, nonostante non sia una scelta manipolativa del fotografo ma una resa meccanica, al di fuori di qualsiasi convenzione estetica, provochi negli osservatori di una scena, che è pur sempre una scena di guerra, una speciale ansia perché associato all'artificio, alla "gaiezza", persino ai trucchi della seduzione. È per questo che molte delle critiche mosse all'opera prendono di mira proprio la questione del colore, giudicando l'intera opera di Mosse come dei "*Tableaux vivants* terribilmente seduttivi" (Walling Blackburn-Huber, 2011), o come "Candy-colored infrared" che di fatto contraddicono l'estetica della fotografia politica tradizionale (Agustsson 2014), o ancora come una mescolanza di *Camp* e di sublime che possono essere modi di presa di distanza politica, rischiando di far trionfare lo stile sul contenuto (Azoulay 2010).

La questione non è ovviamente nuova e si inserisce nel dibattito sulla antinomia tra estetico e politico, tra artificio e realtà da sempre cruciale per il fotogiornalismo e per la fotografia documentaria. Già Susan Sontag aveva visto iscritta nella storia della fotografia una vera e propria lotta tra bellezza, retaggio delle sue origini nelle belle arti, e verità, retaggio delle sue origini nella scienza, oltreché nel senso più moralistico del dire la verità, retaggio della letteratura del diciannovesimo secolo e della più recente professione giornalistica. Libero dalle scelte dettate dalla

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[7] Intervista consultabile all'indirizzo http://www.richardmosse.com/projects/artist-statement#. Data di ultima consultazione 3 giugno 2019.

lentezza del mezzo pittorico, il fotografo può mettere in scena un nuovo modo di vedere che riconcilia il desiderio di verità sul mondo con la meraviglia che nel mondo è possibile trovare. Ma quando si tratta di riprendere scene di guerra quale verità e quale bellezza è lecito mostrare e, quindi, vedere? Se, infatti, appare lecito scorgere la bellezza in una scena di guerra dipinta, è molto più difficile accettare di vedere sotto la luce della bellezza fotografie di tragedie. Eppure, afferma Susan Sontag "un paesaggio di devastazione è pur sempre un paesaggio. C'è bellezza nelle rovine" (Sontag 2003, 74). In questi casi, tuttavia, appare più appropriato ricondurre queste fotografie alla categoria del surreale: "un affannoso eufemismo dietro il quale trovava riparo la screditata idea di bellezza" (*ibid.*). Insomma, sebbene sembri accettabile l'idea che la fotografia del disastro porti in sé il duplice carattere del documentario e dell'opera d'arte, sembra altresì che il secondo non debba mai avere la meglio sul primo, poiché lo scopo di questo genere di immagini deve essere quello di spingere lo spettatore a muoversi (o almeno a pensare di muoversi) contro gli eventi ripresi, e non a rimanere rapito dallo spettacolo mostrato.

La questione è indecidibile perché se è vero che alle immagini terrifiche ci si può assuefare o si può decidere di distogliere lo sguardo, è pur vero che le immagini spettacolari, mirabilmente composte, insomma belle – come quelle di Salgado, nel caso dell'analisi di Susan Sontag, o come quelle di Mosse, nel nostro caso – possono spingere a "credere che le sofferenze e le disgrazie rappresentate siano troppo grandi, ineluttabili, epiche perché si possa pensare di modificarne il corso con interventi politici mirati. Di fronte a un soggetto concepito su questa scala la compassione non può che vacillare e diventare astratta" (Sontag 2003, 77).

Proprio al centro di questa spinosa questione si pone Richard Mosse che ha costantemente messo alla prova il concetto stesso di fotografia documentaristica, superando i confini tra arte e reportage, mettendo in evidenza come questo genere sia intrinsecamente costituito di reale e di finzione, di testimonianza e artificio, contrariamente a quanto si è a lungo creduto e si crede ancora. Nel far ciò non si è mai nascosto, però, il violento legame che accomuna la macchina fotografica alle armi da fuoco e gli sguardi che, in entrambi i casi, passano attraverso il mirino. Una connessione già messa in evidenza dall'utilizzo di una macchina fotografica e di una pellicola militare nel caso di *Infra* e *Enclave*. Questa connessione si ripresenta ancora una volta in *Incoming*.

Come abbiamo già detto e come è evidente sin dall'immagine della copertina, il progetto è stato realizzato per mezzo di una macchina fotografica termica. Costruita in prima istanza per ragioni di sorveglianza può essere connessa a sistemi bellici per facilitare il puntamento degli obiettivi militari. *L'International Traffic in Arm Regulation* la riconosce infatti come arma a tutti gli effetti, per questo necessita di una specifica autorizzazione per essere trasportata. È un dispositivo molto pesante (23 kg) e molto sofisticato sia per fabbricazione (la lente, 26 cm di diametro, non è in vetro ma in germanio, lavorata in laboratorio, connessa a un sensore in tellururo di cadmio refrigerato a -323°), che per utilizzo, niente affatto intuitivo e controllato da computer.

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Questo freddissimo strumento degno della più futuristica *science fiction*, capace di riprendere 60 fotogrammi al secondo, non è in grado di inquadrare scene ad ampio raggio, ha un focus piuttosto ristretto e produce immagini monocromatiche. Immagini molto ravvicinate sebbene riprese a chilometri di distanza.

L'opera che viene fuori dall'uso sperimentale di questa macchina, in cui centinaia di foto sono seguite da un testo di Agamben, *Biopolitics and The Rights of Man* e da uno di Mosse, *Transmigration of the Souls*, ha tutte le caratteristiche dei fototesti classici soprattutto per tipo di oggetto e approccio: la possibilità o la capacità documentaria sia dell'immagine sia della parola, ma anche delle due insieme.

La testimonianza della scomparsa, in questo modo potremmo sintetizzare l'opera di Mosse. La scomparsa delle tracce di umanità dai corpi dei migranti, la scomparsa del *bios* a favore della *zoe,* la separazione tra nascita e nazione. Non a caso il testo di Agamben che chiude la raccolta fotografica, è proprio il testo ormai classico della riflessione sul nuovo uomo sacro, sul nuovo "morto vivente", il rifugiato che, spezzando la continuità tra uomo e cittadino fa apparire quella nuda vita che è poi il presupposto della biopolitica nello Stato-nazione moderno, l'uomo dei diritti, dice Hannah Arendt in *The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of the Man* (nono capitolo di *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1951), fuori dalla maschera del cittadino.

Ma soprattutto la scomparsa delle tracce delle singole storie che sono appartenute o che ancora appartengono agli individui che migrano, destinati alla perdita della loro memoria, nel duplice senso del genitivo (soggettivo o oggettivo). E la necessità che, invece, queste tracce vengano in qualche modo raccolte, ascoltate, salvate.

L'opera di Mosse si inserisce in quello che lui stesso definisce "documentario concettuale", in cui all'opera non è più il reporter, il cui obiettivo è quello di catturare le immediate circostanze di un evento e di mostrarlo nel modo più accurato possibile. Al contrario è l'artista che si trova "sul posto", pronto a girare la sua macchina e il suo sguardo da un'altra parte per concentrarsi sulle tracce lasciate dall'evento, creando nello spettatore la consapevolezza di una distanza tra il portatore dello sguardo (e della macchina fotografica) e ciò a cui sta assistendo, perché non è l'evento in sé quello che sta guardando, ma soltanto una delle possibili immagini mediate di quell'evento.[8]

Mosse problematizza la fotografia collegando la "falsità" del mezzo alle certezze dello sguardo umano, al tempo stesso dimostrando come essa possa rivelare ciò che rimane invisibile a questo sguardo e, quindi, privo di interesse. I suoi sforzi di rappresentare l'irrappresentabile possono forse riuscire a sfondare

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[8] Allo stesso filone "concettuale" di Mosse possono essere ricondotte, per fare soltanto alcuni esempi, le opere di Adam Broomberg e Oliver Chanarin, *The Day Nobody Died*, 2008; o di Steve McQueen, *Queen and Country*, 2006.

l'apatia spesso associata alle fotografie di vulnerabilità e miseria (Viveros-Faune 2012).

Da un punto di vista fototestuale possiamo ricondurre l'opera alla "forma atlante" (Cometa 2016). Le immagini si susseguono a centinaia senza alcuna intromissione della parola a cui sono riservate le due ultime ma fondamentali sezioni. Potremmo parlare di una forte retorica dello sguardo e del layout che quasi escludono il paratesto, se non fosse per i due capitoli in chiusura: il testo di Agamben che rappresenta qualcosa di più di un paratesto, e quello di Mosse, in qualche modo didascalia dell'intera raccolta o sua illustrazione che permette anche di ricostruire la logica narrativa che le ha disposte in sequenza, cioè il "far funzionare la tecnologia contro se stessa" (Mosse 2017). Una tecnologia biopolitica di disciplina e regolazione, che sì ci permette di vedere molto al di là dei nostri limiti sensoriali, ma per mostrarci cosa? Corpi invasi nella loro più profonda intimità inerme, denudati della loro umanità: sangue, saliva, sudore senza occhi, senza colore della pelle, senza nome. Spiati a chilometri di distanza senza alcuna via di scampo. E d'altra parte senza alcuna via di scampo sono questi popoli stretti, nelle zone riprese, tra gli attacchi dello Stato islamico, l'Esercito siriano libero, e la frontiera serrata della Turchia.

Far funzionare la tecnologia contro se stessa, dice Mosse, non significa cercare di riscattarla dai suoi sinistri scopi, ma entrare nella sua logica per rivelarla. Possiamo arrivare ad affermare che il soggetto di quest'opera, infatti, non siano tanto gli emigrati ma le armi che vengono usate contro di loro che ne fanno *homines sacri*. Queste stesse armi diventano il mezzo usato dal fotografo e contemporaneamente l'oggetto della sua ricerca. Entrare nella logica di questa arma, apprendere la sua grammatica, cominciare a parlare il suo nuovo linguaggio visuale, permette di ricostruire, appunto, una narrazione e una evoluzione dello sguardo lungo questo album. Così dall'effetto straniante di immagini che restituiscono un mondo sconosciuto, estraneo, per quanto dentro un immaginario per certi versi esteticamente interessante (Sontag 2003, 29-31), si passa a uno sguardo più ravvicinato e riconoscibile, con figure umane sebbene disumanizzate, in cui, come dicevamo, "la pelle umana è resa attraverso una patina disomogenea che dischiude un sistema intimo di circolazione sanguigna, sudore, saliva, e calore corporeo" (Mosse). La macchina viola i corpi che riprende, disumanizzando il soggetto, ritraendo le persone come fantasmi, spogliando l'individuo dal proprio volto e ritraendo l'umano come mera traccia biologica. Gli uomini, le donne, i bambini, i rifugiati, i migranti illegali, così come i volontari e i militari vengono "ritratti come organismi vulnerabili, corporalmente incandescenti, la nostra stessa mortalità è messa in primo piano" (Mosse).

Procedendo però lungo le pagine la disumanizzazione a poco a poco svanisce e lascia il posto a una nuova comprensione di quanto questo dispositivo sia capace di creare straordinari ritratti personali o di gruppo, drammatici o ordinari.

Durante le riprese, la troupe è stata testimone di eventi veramente storici: il bombardamento del campo profughi di Iqdah il 14 aprile 2016, il naufragio di un'imbarcazione con più di trecento rifugiati al largo di Lesbo, il 28 ottobre 2015,

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uno degli incendi nell'accampamento del Jungle di Calais. Ma un evento rimane, per Mosse, significativo e memorabile:

> Un vecchio migrante che scende giù da uno dei camion dei convogli di massa che si era fermato per una sosta… Era notte fonda, completamente buio, l'uomo era assolutamente ignaro della nostra presenza. Abbiamo registrato mentre urinava, poi si lavava le mani con una bottiglia d'acqua, e meticolosamente faceva le abluzioni rituali della sua fede islamica: lavava la faccia, gli occhi, le orecchie, le narici. Poi cominciava a pregare… Un notevole senso di rapimento emergeva sul suo volto stanco. Era completamente incontaminato dalla coscienza di sé, persino dalla consapevolezza di sé. Era come se stesse andando alla deriva davanti ai nostri occhi – come se tutta la sua battaglia mondana, la paura e il dolore che aveva sopportato durante questo viaggio terribile, cominciassero a dematerializzarsi, lasciandolo lì in un'estasi quasi mistica, fissando il vuoto verso di noi nell'oscurità totale, con un'emozione scritta sul volto che non avrei mai immaginato di vedere, e che non vedrò mai più.

Ancora una volta il fototesto non trova risposte nelle immagini né nelle parole, le une non possono rimandare alle altre ma non possono nemmeno negarle. Tutto ciò che si può mettere in scena è solo l'impronunciabile e l'inimmaginabile, ossia "il luogo in cui parole e immagini falliscono, in cui entrambe sono rifiutate, proibite in quanto oscenità che violano la legge del silenzio e dell'invisibilità, del mutismo e della cecità" (Mitchell 2017, 177).

"Comment décrire ? Comment raconter ? Comment regarder ?"

Se l'opera di Mosse ci mostra il modo in cui le macchine belliche, tanto quanto quelle documentaristiche, finiscono per trasformare persone in fantasmi, l'opera a quattro mani di Georges Perec e Robert Bober lavora esattamente al contrario. Nella loro messa in discussione della forma documentario l'autore e il regista costruiscono, infatti, un dispositivo che serve proprio a trasformare i fantasmi di Ellis Island in persone, ossia a restituire l'anonima storia di un luogo a centinaia di memorie individuali, partendo dai luoghi attraversati (dai migranti e dagli autori), attraversando le tracce fotografiche per arrivare alle memorie tramandate dai protagonisti ai loro discendenti.

I *Récits d'Ellis Island* possono essere ricondotti a *Incoming* per genere e oggetto, ma anche per la complessità di un progetto multimediale, video e fototestuale, e, ancora, per lo stile spettrale che caratterizza le immagini, d'archivio o originali e anche le narrazioni che le accompagnano. Ciò che accomuna le due opere è soprattutto l'interrogativo che sta alla base di queste ricerche, un interrogativo posto alla parola (narrativa e documentaria) e alle immagini (filmiche e fotografiche) circa la loro capacità di evocare il cammino compiuto da milioni di persone migranti (ma anche dai due autori) e di ritrovare le tracce della storia e delle storie. Le risposte a questo interrogativo, come vedremo, non sono mai definitive, piuttosto sono evanescenti e dubbiose, inscindibilmente legate ai punti di vista adottati. Le uniche testimonianze che si possono dare di un evento del

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genere sono quelle personali, in cui l'enunciazione è sempre esplicitata, in cui il documentario lascia posto ad un commento appunto personale e alla scrittura diaristica.

È per questo che l'autorialità tanto del film quanto del libro è plurale e condivisa tra Georges Perec e Robert Bober che, in effetti, hanno ideato, condiviso e realizzato l'intero progetto dei *Récits*. Si può dire, infatti, che il progetto cominci già subito dopo il 1975, anno in cui i due si conoscono e cominciano un sodalizio lungo e fecondo. La vita dello scrittore e quella del regista si incontrano immediatamente su un binario dal passato comune: entrambi, infatti, sono figli di ebrei polacchi emigrati in Francia; nello stesso modo avvertono la necessità di riscrivere la propria identità culturale – certo Perec con più urgenza e più difficoltà, avendo perduto i genitori e le tracce delle loro e della sua identità –; entrambi sono alla ricerca di una forma di scrittura autobiografica in cui la terza persona che è stata loro affibbiata nel "nuovo paese" lasci lentamente emergere la prima persona di una storia personale, finalmente libera dalla scure della Storia.

Questa autobiografia si svolge, com'è noto, lungo tutta l'opera di Perec attraverso il tema della mancanza e dell'assenza delle persone, dei racconti, delle relazioni, delle immagini. Ogni mancanza e ogni assenza lasciano, però, sempre delle tracce soprattutto nei luoghi che sono stati vissuti, conosciuti, almeno attraversati da chi è sparito per sempre o ha per sempre perduto la propria identità. Da qui la necessità o il bisogno, come affermano gli stessi autori, di raccontare il luogo *Ellis Island*, un luogo che mette in relazione il destino di Perec e di Bober con quello degli emigranti. Tutto intorno a questo luogo e all'opera che a suo modo lo racconta sta la nozione di storia, anzi di storie, di storie ormai leggendarie in cui, soprattutto a causa della perdita di milioni di memorie individuali, la verità dei fatti si è mescolata con la finzione dei racconti, senza per questo perdere di importanza nella formazione di una memoria tanto personale quanto collettiva.[9]

Al progetto vero e proprio Perec e Bober cominciano a lavorare nel 1977, quando il regista viene a conoscenza della riapertura di Ellis Island che il governo federale, dopo un annoso dibattito, ha deciso di non destinare a un parco di divertimenti né a un casinò, ma ad un museo, facendo seguito alla legge con cui nel 1965 il presidente Lyndon Johnson lo aveva proclamato monumento della storia nazionale degli Stati Uniti, equiparandolo per importanza alla Statua della Libertà. I due autori passeranno due anni a "conoscersi" e studiare il progetto prima di partire, nel 1979, per affrontare lo stesso cammino di quelle persone che, partendo dall'Europa, attraversando l'Atlantico, passando attraverso Ellis Island e la *Golden Door* venivano trasformati in nuovi cittadini americani. La metafora che viene fuori dai *Récits*, infatti, non è tanto quella del centro di detenzione o di concentramento,[10] ma quello della fabbrica di cittadini americani, soprattutto per

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[9] A proposito dell'articolazione del progetto intorno ai due sistemi di storicità e di memorializzazione si veda Méchoulan, 2005, 145-158.

[10] Perec stesso, anzi, rifiuta del tutto questa comparazione che giudica ingiustificata: i migranti che passavano per Ellis Island avevano scelto di mettersi in viaggio e, spesso, avevano preparato questo viaggio per anni. Sbarcati sulla piccola isola all'imbocco dell'Hudson il sentimento che

quanto riguarda il periodo che va dal 1892, anno di apertura, al 1924. L'apertura del centro di Ellis Island che sostituisce quello di Castle Garden, segna infatti, come ci racconta lo stesso Perec nel primo capitolo del libro:

> la fine di un'emigrazione quasi selvaggia e l'avvento di un'emigrazione ufficializzata, istituzionalizzata e, per così dire, industriale. Dal 1892 al 1924, quasi sedici milioni di persone passarono da Ellis Island, in una misura che va dai cinque ai dieci mila al giorno. La maggior parte non vi avrebbe soggiornato che per qualche ora; soltanto il due o il tre per cento sarebbero stati rifiutati. Insomma, Ellis Island non sarà altro che una fabbrica di americani, una fabbrica per trasformare degli emigrati in immigrati, una fabbrica all'americana rapida ed efficace come una macelleria di Chicago. (Perec-Bober 2007, 10).

Nel caso dei *Récits*, d'altra parte, la questione del luogo è molto più stringente e significativa di quanto non sia nel caso di *Incoming*. Se nell'opera di Mosse, infatti, i luoghi scompaiono nel buio dell'immagine fotografica, nel caso dei *Récits* sono i luoghi, soprattutto quelli abbandonati, che fanno riemergere le tracce delle vite che da là sono passate. La differenza è, ovviamente, necessaria: Mosse è testimone oculare della storia che sta accadendo sotto i suoi occhi; Perec e Bober, invece, cercano di ricostruire le storie individuali delle persone che sono passate da quel luogo in tempi diversi e lontani, e non possono che farlo attraverso quel luogo e la sua storia. Non si tratta, tuttavia, di produrre un documentario su un luogo simbolico e astratto, sul luogo della commemorazione, quello delle guide o dei turisti distratti. Esso diviene un luogo significativo proprio perché investito dalla memoria, dall'immaginazione che lo ricopre di un'aura simbolica: "I luoghi della memoria non sono quelli in cui ricordiamo, ma quelli in cui la memoria lavora: non la tradizione in sé, ma il suo laboratorio […] i luoghi della memoria stanno dietro i resti. La forma estrema in cui sussiste una coscienza commemorativa, in una storia che la interpella perché l'ignora" (Nora 1984, XXXIV).

Per quanto riguarda l'economia generale di quest'opera composita è necessario chiarire che il progetto iniziale prevedeva soltanto la realizzazione del film ma, nella fase finale del montaggio Georges Perec comincia a pensare anche a una sorta di supporto testuale all'opera che faccia da ancoraggio al film, che metta su carta le parole che Perec "recita", che aggiunga fotografie e documenti a quelli disponibili sulla pellicola, che ne riveli in qualche modo il dietro le quinte, come un diario o un giornale di bordo del viaggio dei due autori, ma anche una sorta di album familiare. L'idea del testo, originariamente di Perec ma poi condivisa con Bober, si chiarisce nella fase del montaggio, ma probabilmente, come dimostra anche l'analisi genetica dell'opera (de Bary 2009), sorge già in una fase precedente. Non è un caso infatti che la seconda scena del film mostri Georges Perec che sfoglia un "prototipo" pieno di fotografie, ritagli di giornali, documenti

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governava era quello della speranza, molto diverso dunque da quello dei campi di concentramento.

e appunti, soprattutto di Perec, che sarebbe poi diventato il libro pubblicato nel 1980.

Come ci racconta Perec attraverso la sua voce nel film e attraverso la sua scrittura nel libro, due domande hanno "guidato" questo progetto: la domanda che tutti a Parigi ponevano era "Di che si tratta?", la domanda che tutti ponevano a New York era "Perché?", non "Perché un film su Ellis Island?" ci chiarisce Perec, ma "Perché voi?". Proprio questa è la domanda centrale sia per Perec sia per Bober, ma soltanto le immagini potranno dare una possibile risposta in primo luogo a loro stessi. Non è soltanto il fatto che entrambi, come la maggior parte degli europei, avessero dei parenti emigrati in America. È anche, o forse soprattutto, il fatto che entrambi fossero figli di emigrati che avevano trovato (o non avevano trovato) in Francia la terra promessa che altri avevano trovato (o non avevano trovato) negli Stati Uniti. Che il cammino per Ellis Island non appartenesse esattamente a loro è, in fondo, poco importante, perché chi viene a visitare questo monumento alla memoria non è quasi mai chi è passato da lì, chi l'ha visto in funzione, ma i figli, o i nipoti o, oggi, i pronipoti. Sono quelli che vanno alla ricerca di una traccia, di un luogo fisico per quanto ormai spettrale attorno a cui ricostruire una "relazione che li unisca alla loro storia" (Perec-Bober 2007, 36). Una storia, per la verità milioni di storie, di questi e di altri cammini che deve essere ricostruita, ma in che modo? "Come descrivere? Come raccontare? Come guardare?" (ivi, 37). Potranno essere le statistiche ufficiali o gli aneddoti ripetuti all'infinito dalla guida del museo? O ancora gli oggetti rimasti in quel luogo come "rare vestigia"? Forse le fotografie "fissate una volta per tutte nell'evidenza ingannevole del bianco e nero" (*ibid.*)? Tutte queste "evidenze" potrebbero forse dare risposta a un documentario che volesse ricostruire la Storia di Ellis Island. Ma l'interesse di Perec e Bober non ha a che fare né con la Storia come contenuto né con il documentario come forma. Quello che i due artisti e amici voglio ricostruire è quell'"infraordinario" tanto caro a Perec che permette di ritrovare il quotidiano, ciò che normalmente non lascia tracce e che la Storia, con la S maiuscola, dimentica.

Non c'è questa volta una fotocamera termica a infrarossi, anche perché non c'è più alcun calore e alcun corpo da riprendere. Andare al di là del visibile è quindi inevitabile, ma come farlo? Non c'è che un'unica strada, quella della ricerca personale, l'unica che può opporsi al caos del reale e dei ricordi facendo da *contrainte* per una tra le tante narrazioni. Le storie di erranza, delle quali Perec e Bober cercano di ricostruire le testimonianze, sono costruite retrospettivamente, attraverso luoghi abbandonati o trasformati in museo, oggetti che sembrano ormai aver perso il loro significato e la loro voce originaria, che devono essere ancora interrogati, a cui bisogna ridare voce. Per riuscire a raccontare nel modo più corretto possibile, in un modo che non renda trasparenti i soggetti delle immagini e dei racconti, e nemmeno gli autori dell'opera, è necessaria una presa di distanza, tanto dal racconto quanto dalle immagini stesse.

È necessario che tutti questi corpi, dei migranti, degli autori, delle immagini stesse si facciano opachi. È a questo punto che interviene la fotografia, l'unica che può veramente dimostrare "quel che è stato" (Barthes), ma che "è stata" essa stessa

e che assume in quest'opera uno statuto molto particolare. Non si tratta infatti di un mezzo attraverso cui i due artisti testimoniano delle vicende che appartengono a quel luogo. Semmai essa diviene testimonianza dell'assenza, della mancanza delle persone da quel luogo. Le fotografie scelte da Perec e Bober non sono fotografie originali. Si tratta infatti delle fotografie scattate da Lewis Hine a partire dal 1904, che aggiungono una terza mediazione a quelle già esistenti della cinepresa di Bober e del testo di Perec. Le fotografie "storiche" ingrandite fino a raggiungere quasi le dimensioni naturali collocano di nuovo le persone che vi sono ritratte nei luoghi in cui "erano state" veramente:

> Il referente (la persona fotografata all'inizio del Ventesimo secolo) e l'oggetto (la fotografia) sono messi in scena, producendo così un effetto di contrasto tra il colore delle immagini filmate [e riprodotte nel libro] e il bianco e nero delle fotografie, la rovina di Ellis Island al momento delle riprese che si oppone all'impressione di conservazione e di buono stato del luogo che emana dalle fotografie producendo un'impressione di contemporaneità più vicino che il luogo stesso. (Tourner 2009).

Tourner individua quattro tipi di soggetti delle fotografie "messe in scena": foto di gruppo (migranti che arrivano a Ellis Island, nelle sale sovraffollate o gruppi familiari); fotografie di esami medici o "legali"; fotografie di persone sole (bambini, ragazzi, anziani) e fotografie di madri con i loro figli. Nel capitolo successivo, *Mémoires*, la fotografia muta ancora una volta status: adesso è divenuto mero oggetto, manipolabile, nel senso che viene tenuto in mano, che passa di mano in mano. L'infraordinario storico si mescola con quello della nuova testimonianza e le persone ritratte vengono riconosciute e nominate dai loro discendenti: "la filiazione e la memoria sono così assicurate. Non siamo più nel quadro della messa in scena delle anonime fotografie in *Traces*, ma nel racconto di un destino particolare, nella trasmissione di una storia individuale" (Tourner 2009).

Attraverso questo infraordinario esplicitamente mediato e ricostruito sarà possibile ridare voce ai pochi testimoni che sono ancora rimasti. Le tracce dell'umanità ormai svanite dall'architettura di Ellis Island, finalmente si ritrovano nell'ultimo capitolo del film e del libro. A ognuno dei testimoni degli ultimi sbarchi è ridato il volto, il nome, la voce. Ognuno può raccontare la propria storia, ricostruire i propri ricordi, descrivere la propria identità. L'ultima intervista è dedicata a Mme Adlerstein (arrivata all'età di 6 anni nel 1907), e a M. Zeldner, (arrivato all'età di 14 anni nel 1921), cugini, tra i più fortunati d'Ellis Island. Lei arrivata qualche anno prima ricorda di essere tornata sull'isola per andare a prendere lui e la madre che si ricongiungevano al padre arrivato molti anni prima, rabbino scappato prima dai nazisti che avevano occupato la città e poi dai bolscevichi. Appena sbarcato era stato ribattezzato Max (un nome piuttosto tedesco notava lui all'età di 14 anni) il suo vero nome era Mordehai. Cresciuto a Baltimora, laureato alla Columbia, continuati gli studi a Harvard, quando Perec lo incontra è direttore del dipartimento di lingue straniere in una scuola che forma professori di liceo. Ma nei suoi racconti lui proviene ancora dall'Europa.

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Le immagini presentate da Richard Mosse così come quelle presentate da Perec e Bober non hanno nessuna verità da presentare, ma nemmeno nessun simulacro del reale da sottoporre all'osservatore. Ciò che hanno da mostrare è semmai uno tra i tanti punti di vista attraverso cui immaginare ciò che non si vede, perché "per sapere occorre immaginare" (Didi-Huberman 2003, 15).

Non è la verità su Ellis Island o sulla rotta balcanica che i "lettori" potranno trovare tra queste pagine, semmai "momenti di verità […] momenti che sorgono inaspettatamente, come oasi nel deserto. Sono aneddoti che nella loro brevità dicono tutto" (Arendt 2004, 216).

Sono momenti infraordinari, i soli attraverso i quali si può ricostruire una memoria potenziale, un'autobiografia probabile. Quella di Georges Perec. Quella di Robert Bober. Quella dei milioni di migranti che non partono dall'Europa, ma in Europa arrivano.

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MARIA FESTA

BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS IN CARYL PHILLIPS'S, ANDREA LEVY'S AND TEJU COLE'S LITERARY TEXTS

ABSTRACT: It is possible to argue that literature, *per se*, embodies various frameworks of information. Moreover, every time authors blend them together in the narration, they eventually provide a text whose words also function as a stimulus to readers' imagination. Images, whether in the form of the mental pictures produced in our minds during the act of reading or of photographs, work in tandem to convey meaning and make intersections between literature and photography achievable. In this paper I will provide some evidence of the intersections between Anglophone postcolonial literature and photography. The postcard pinned up on the wall above Caryl Phillips's desk is the source of his play *The Shelter* (1984) that involves the subjects of that picture: a white woman and a black man. In Andrea Levy's novel *Small Island* (2004) and in its adapted television drama (2009) photographs give a material form to the memory of individuals' existence. In Teju Cole's novella *Every Day Is for the Thief* (2007) the unnamed narrator depicts his journey to Lagos—his place of birth—through the intermixing of words with black and white pictures.

KEYWORDS: "Writing with Light", Anglophone Postcolonial Literature, Photography, Caryl Phillips, Andrea Levy, Teju Cole.

Literary forms of narration may also function as sophisticated instruments for conveying and sharing knowledge. In addition, in these texts, the employed words may be a stimulus to readers' imagination. Images, whether in the form of the mental pictures produced in our minds during the act of reading or of photographs accompanying the text, work jointly with words to convey meaning and create fruitful intersections between literature and photography. Literature and photography exhibit some common key features: they fragment and freeze time; they portray and narrate reality; and, if we accept the description of photography as "writing with light", both are expressive and communicative textual forms. This peculiar written form—"writing with light"—may be employed discretely or in conjunction with words. In this paper I will provide some evidence of the intersection between Anglophone postcolonial literature and photography in the following literary texts: *The Shelter* a play by Caryl Phillips, *Small Island* a novel by Andrea Levy and *Every Day Is for the Thief* a novella by Teju Cole.

Postcolonial literature covers issues of displacement, identity, belonging, and otherness, and to postcolonial authors, literature becomes a tool for

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understanding the world they live in. In accordance with their personal writing style, in the above-mentioned works Phillips, Levy and Cole employ words and photographs as a means to support their reflections on their status of human beings as descendant of diasporic ethnic groups. Each text contains a photograph that triggers the narration or merges into it. Despite their diverse purposes, those photographs emphasise the authors' attempt to come to terms with the past.

To begin with Phillips, in his play *The Shelter* the photograph reveals the author's point of origin, not to mention the reflections arisen from the looking at the image. As a second example, in Levy's novel *Small Island* (and its television adaptation) one of the photographs depicted in the narration becomes a token of rejected offspring on the basis of skin complexion; moreover, photographs visible in the movie, a family photo album, progress into tokens of collective memory. As a third instance, in Cole's novella *Every Day Is for the Thief* the reference to a moment that could not be preserved in print film becomes a 'missing' photograph as if to underscore the unresolved relationship with the past.

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes states that photography faithfully preserves a moment eternally. Furthermore, photography "says: *that, there it is, lo!* but says nothing else; […] the Photograph is never anything but an antiphon of 'Look', 'See', 'Here it is'" (Barthes 1980, 4-5). In addition, to Barthes, a photograph "has something tautological […] it is as if the Photograph always carries its referent with itself" (1980, 5). Likewise, a literary text remains unmodified over the years, and like a photograph, a literary text has "something tautological", too. Barthes is also interested in literature, which he analyses through the lens of semiotics and:

> For Barthes […] this formal language is powerfully underwritten by conventions, approved vocabularies, standards of 'taste', ranges of reference, and so forth, which shape its acceptable 'readability' in any period. Therefore, to be 'Literature' […] writing needs to conform to prevailing standards of expression. […] To thrive, authors need to advertise their literariness; their work must display the signs of 'Literature' which prevail in their period. (Rylance 1994, 9-10).

In spite of the formal rules which characterise literature, according to Barthes's theory of "The Death of the Author" it is up to the reader to provide different interpretations and meanings to the text. Nonetheless, in regard to conferring a meaning to a work of art, we can look to modern theories on interpretation to help guide our search for meaning. For instance, in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, Susan Sontag asserts that

> Interpretation thus presupposes a discrepancy between the clear meaning of the text and the demands of (later) readers. […] The modern style of interpretation excavates, and as it excavates, destroys; it digs "behind" the text, to find a sub-text which is the true one. (Sontag 1982, 4).

Sontag argues that "the modern style of interpretation" replaces the spiritual

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importance of art with the emphasis on the intellect. She highlights that "interpretation" has become "the revenge of the intellect upon art" (Sontag 1982, 4). I am of the opinion that works of art have to be experienced on several levels even though they are a representation of reality, otherwise interpreting and enjoying a work of art as mere 'imitation' would turn the product of the fine arts into something that borders on mediocrity. The tautological feature assigned by Barthes can be applied to both literature and photography and the redundancy of the meaning may be easily avoided if we observe "the target"[1] of a photograph or read a literary text under a phenomenological perspective as suggested, for instance, by Edmund Gustav Albrecht Husserl in *Phänomenologie und Erkenntnistheorie*. Husserl proposes a method for understanding the lived world and for better understanding the individual's life. The individual has to investigate the experience lived through a reflexive approach (Husserl 2000, 161-167). Enzo Paci defines this method of personal reflexive self-examination process as self-education. In *Diario Fenomenologico*, he states that self-education becomes a means of understanding the real meaning of our existence and requires the intent and will to give up our judgement, our knowledge and what is already familiar in order to formulate a fresh judgment, to always see as if it were for the very first time (Paci 1961, 5).

Anglophone postcolonial writers rely on self-education and through the act of writing they aim to understand the world they live in. Caryl Phillips is one of those writers who better exemplifies this process of self-education. Phillips is a West-Indian-British prolific writer. His peculiar writing style is characterized by fragmentation. The technique of breaking his narrative into fragments can be associated with the photographer's art. As a matter of fact, a photographer breaks and interrupts the flow of time allocating that fragment of time to eternity. Similarly, Phillips breaks and interrupts the flow of narration providing to his readers fragmented stories. Although those fragments are scattered around the novel, as soon as readers are able to discover the common features that characterise each piece, in the end those fragments prove to be closely connected and provide a complex but distinctive written text.

The Shelter was published in 1984 and in the introduction Phillips informs readers about the struggle that preceded the writing of the play until the point he "tussled with the practical considerations of no longer being able to write" (Phillips 1984, 8). After weeks of striving for bringing forth his play:

> Then one evening I looked again to the postcard pinned up on the wall above my desk. I had bought it (in fact in six copies) the previous year whilst recovering from England in France. […] The postcard had immediately seized my eye, as would a garish street mural in Bath, for amongst the postcards of Van Gogh and Munch, Cézanne and Velázquez, the postcard was not simply exceptional in as much as it was a photograph, it also seemed to me to have its finger on the pulse of a difficult part of modern life, a part of life I wanted to know about.

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[1] In this paper I rely on Barthes's definitions: "the *Operator* is the Photographer. The *Spectator* is ourselves, […] And the person or the thing photographed is the target" (Barthes 1980, 9).

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(Phillips 1984, 9).

Phillips recognises the same status of work of art to different visual representations, and the vision of that postcard equally affects him like the vision of a "garish street mural." In addition, when he defines that image "exceptional", he establishes a private hierarchy where the photograph is ranked above artistic creations that are generally perceived and accepted as fine arts. Furthermore, the "antiphon of 'Look', 'See', 'Here it is'" functions as a magnet to Phillips's sensitivity who is attentive to rapid changes that characterise modern life and makes him sensitive and inquisitive to their consequences. In that postcard the "target" is:

> A white woman's face, probably that of a woman of thirty or thirty-five, who had probably just cried, or who would cry; and curled around her forehead, with just enough pressure to cause a line of folds in the skin above her eyes, were two black hands; obviously power and strength slept somewhere within them but at this moment they were infinitely gentle, describing with eight fingers that moment when a grip of iron weakens to a caress of love.
> It had taken me only a few Parisian seconds to decide that the next play I would write would be about this postcard and would involve just one black man and one white woman. (Phillips 1984, 9).

To Phillips, this photograph becomes a source of information that will be acquired and elaborated in an effort to self-education. Perhaps unintentional as there is no clear reference to phenomenology, the aim of self-education through photography emerges, for instance, in John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*: "it is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world" (Berger 1972, 7). Furthermore, "To look is an act of choice" (Berger 1972, 8) and Phillips singles out a detail—"two black hands"—and associates those "two black hands", that enfolds the woman's forehead, to the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized during and after the British Empire. In this play Phillips focuses on:

> the story of the black man and the white woman [that] in the Western world is bound together with the secure tape of a troubled history; and the relationship between the black man and the white woman has always provoked the greatest conflict, the most fear, the most loathing (Phillips 1984, 10).

"The relationship between the black man and the white woman" is a reference to what Frantz Fanon defines "this desire to be suddenly *white*" (author's emphasis) (Fanon 1952, 45). Fanon explores the issue of "identity created for the colonial subject by colonial racism" (Appiah 2008, IX). This imposed mental construct based upon the superiority of the white colonizer and the inferiority of the black colonized leads the subjugated individual to the rejection of "the fact of [their] own blackness" (Appiah 2008, IX). However, the black man may overcome his sense of inferiority if he is loved by the white woman, because "by loving me, she proves to me that I am worthy of a white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man" (Fanon 1952, 45).

In addition, that photograph affects Phillips so deeply that:

> For over a year I had sat with my picture of the woman's face and the man's hands. I wanted them to stare at me, not me at them (for I knew I was not brave enough to endure such a prolonged two-way encounter). (Phillips 1984, 10).

Like a print film that is provided with transparent negatives with the light and dark areas inverted to their respective complementary colours, two inverted situations can be detected so far: (a) power and strength are perceived in the black hands that enfold a white woman's forehead; (b) the "target" has to stare at the "*Spectator.*" Another reference to photography lies in the following statement:

> I looked at the postcard but this time it was like looking in a mirror and suddenly realizing that you look like your father. A hand grabbed me and held me, and an unseen voice told me that I would never be able to run from it for the postcard was a part of me and if I did not acknowledge it I would be haunted, for the card had both fed and been feeding off my life. And true enough, like looking into my father's face, I clearly saw in it, perhaps for the first time, something that had made me what I was. (Phillips 1984, 10).

Despite of the above-mentioned reverse situations, the key "target" is the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized that proves to be an enduring, unsolved issue. The image, that evokes "power", "strength" and "the greatest conflict", gives rise to an intense bond between the "*Spectator*" and the "target" to the extent to combine and form a single entity. Nonetheless, the postcard conveys another sense of connection, that is to say a family tie. Phillips also perceives a resemblance with his father, and this sort of epiphany detected in the sentence "It was like looking in a mirror" echoes one of Barthes's reflections on photography:

> But more insidious, more penetrating than likeness: the Photograph sometimes makes appear what we never see in real face (or in a face reflected in a mirror): a genetic feature, the fragment of oneself or of a relative which comes from some ancestor. […] Lineage reveals an identity stronger, more interesting than legal status. (Barthes 1980, 103-105).

The issue of the relationship between a white woman and a black man is also covered by British descendant of the Windrush generation Andrea Levy. Her novel *Small Island*, published in 2004 and its 2009 BBC television adaptation describe the post Second World War multicultural British society where the feeling of belonging to the 'Mother Country' gradually evolves into the feeling of longing. In the novel, the two female characters, Hortense and Queenie Bligh, have a photograph of Michael Roberts a Jamaican Royal Air Force (RAF) soldier. Both photographs are a token of a wished partner. Unbeknown to him, he is the bond that fastens Hortense's and Queenie's lives. This bond can be detected on the cover of the dvd of *Small Island*. In that image, the two women are the figures in the foreground, their respective husbands stand at their back and beyond the couples Michael Roberts's face manifests itself. The five

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characters are positioned to form a pyramid where Michael Roberts functions as its apex. Not to his knowledge, the Jamaican RAF soldier represents the point of origin of a babyboy. He is the result of the encounter between Queenie and Michael, or figuratively speaking, between the 'Mother Country' and its colonies.

Hortense is a Jamaican migrant and related to Michael. Queenie is a blond-haired British woman who supports herself during and after the war renting out rooms and Michael is one of her tenants. Queenie is charmed and aroused by the flirtatious Jamaican and spends a passionate night with him. The product of that encounter is a babyboy who is named after his biological father. The narration ends with Hortense and her husband leaving Queenie's house with the babyboy born out of wedlock and representing the product of miscegenation. This term, coined in the mid-19th century, conveys the notion of children being produced by parents who are of different races, especially when one partner is white.

In postcolonial studies the concepts of "race" and "ethnicity" play a core but questionable role. In his studies on postcolonialism, Robert Young states that the concept of "race" is intertwined with "sexuality and gender." Referring to Young's reflections, Shaul Bassi underscores the importance, for British colonizers, of maintaining diversities between "white" and "non-white" individuals (i.e. between the colonizer and the colonized). Moreover, sexual relationships between "white women and coloured man" were prohibited because of the woman's gift: her ability to give birth. In this sense "the woman is the guardian of purity"[2] and, a proper sexual behaviour becomes a means of preserving "purity." Likewise, Ania Loomba reminds us:

> The fear of cultural and racial pollution prompts the most hysterical dogmas about racial difference and sexual behaviours because it suggests the instability of 'race' as a category. Sexuality is thus a means for the maintenance or erosion of racial difference. (Loomba 1988, 159).

In *Small Island*, the infant Michael is the product of so-called 'inappropriate sexual behaviour', according to the colonial ideology of purity. Queenie wants to protect her child from prejudice. She is entirely guided by a selfless, protective maternal instinct and the proof lies in her asking Hortense and Gilbert—a Jamaican couple for her half-Jamaican son—to take care of her child:

> 'The tea—I must just help Bernard with the tea.' And I was gone. Although I didn't go into the kitchen. I went behind the door and watched her through the crack. She was doing all the right things with him. Swinging him gently in her arms on her lap, while Gilbert, looking down at him, carefully gave him his finger to chew. […] They looked so right with him. (Levy 2009, 517-518).

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[2] Bassi 2010, 111: "la donna è la guardiana della purezza" (translation mine). In this sentence, the noun "purity" is related to race and skin colour issues.

The episode quoted above testifies to Queenie's maternal instinct, furthermore a sort of relief can be inferred in the last sentence "they looked so right with him" which implies that to Queenie's eyes, her decision to give up her son is eventually right and appropriate. Queenie watches Hortense, the mother-to-be, the only suitable woman in that circumstance for the upbringing of Michael:

> The baby was as good as Mrs Bligh promised he would be. […] I found a bundle of money tied with soft pink wool and secured with a dainty bow. […] But then at the bottom of this bundle was a photograph. It was of Mrs. Bligh taken, sure, in a happier time. Head and shoulders, her eyes angled to the viewer, gazing out with a gentle smile. I had never thought to enquire about the father of Mrs Bligh's child. Who was he? Some fool-fool Jamaican with an eye for the shapely leg on a pretty white woman. (Levy 2009, 529).

Sontag emphasises the importance of photographs in relation to family ties. Family photo albums become tokens of collective memory. They trace back to the individual's point of origin, they grant identity and proof of the individual's past, present and future (Sontag 1979, 5-9). The BBC television adaptation pursues Sontag's statement. In the last scene, the audience watches the babyboy as a mature man who informs his daughter that: "We've been doing our genealogy thing again." Michael and his grandchildren are looking at his photo album that contains black and white photographs. The grandchildren are interested in their grandfather's past, they look at the photographs carefully without remaining in silence:

> The little girl: "is this the house they moved into?"
> Michael: "Mm-hm and a few years later, they bought it. And this is your great-grandmother. Hortense. The woman who raised me."
> The little boy: "Who's that?"
> Michael: "She's my mother."

At this announcement the camera zooms in the snapshot while Michael gently caresses the image of his biological mother, his point of origin.

The quest for the individual's point of origin characterises Anglophone postcolonial authors, especially those individuals who are descendants of diasporic ethnic groups and live in a country that does not adhere to the culture of their ancestors'. However, since their birth they are confronted with more than one culture. If on the one hand this may enrich the individual's personal knowledge, on the other hand it raises a constant feeling of not quite belonging. Teju Cole is an African-American writer and prolific photographer. The hyphen placed between two nationalities is already an indication of his unresolved issue of identity. The reflexive self-examination process characterises also Cole's artistic production. His first literary work, *Every Day Is for the Thief*, was published in 2007. The novella is structured around twenty-seven chapters that may be equal to twenty-seven short stories. Due to the independent reading this storyline allows, the narrative can be then compared to a photographic film where in each negative is visible/readable a new anecdote. Moreover, Cole

interrupts this potential photographic film nineteen times with cut-ins, specifically, black and white photographs that offer a view of Lagos and Nigeria. Furthermore, the "target" of each inserted photograph is not strictly connected with thoughts and reflections that are exposed and discussed in stories before and after it. In truth, this unconventional, intertwined narration simultaneously provides to Cole's readers a simultaneously double reading/interpretation.

Every Day Is for the Thief is the recount of the unnamed narrator's act of travelling to Lagos, his birth place where he visits his parents and family, maybe as an attempt to connect with his point of origin. The protagonist lives currently in New York. During his absence, Lagos, the place he defines as home, has gone through some changes that eventually bewilder him upon his return. However, the novella can be also considered as a journal. The narrating voice depicts his stay in details along with expressing the consequent feelings arisen out of that encounter and, to some extent, the photographs resemble a holiday photo album. The unnamed narrator's double perspective (African and American) on the understanding the world he lives in is also emphasised by his family: "Ehn, that was a long time ago. You're not quite as hardened now. Yes, you are street-smart, no one doubts it. But like it or not, America has softened you" (Cole 2014, 33). However, this encounter with his birth place exposes cultural differences that are emphasised by the unnamed narrator who realises that

> The Nigerian literacy rate is low […] I meet only a small number of readers, and those few read tabloids, romance novels by Mills & Boon, or tracts that promise "victorious living" according to certain spiritual principles. It is a hostile environment for the life of the mind. (Cole 2014, 42).

Some pages later in the novella/journal the unnamed narrator offers his perspective on "the Nigerian literacy rate" and to a certain degree he seems to justify the "hostile environment for the life of the mind":

> Writing is difficult, reading impossible. People are so exhausted after all the hassle of a normal Lagos day that, for the vast majority, mindless entertainment is preferable to any other kind. […] By day's end, the mind is worn, the body ragged. The best I can manage is to take a few photographs. For the rest of the month, I neither read nor write. (Cole 2014, 68).

The unnamed narrator adapts himself to the local practices, but his camera seems to be like an extension of himself that temporarily helps him to negotiate between his double cultural approach to life. An example of blending words with images emerges in the last frame/chapter of the novella. The narrator is in New York, his "body is still responding to the difference in time zone" (Cole 2014, 158), but his mind returns back to Lagos where he "alone wander[s] with no particular aim" (Cole 2014, 159). The roaming leads him to a carpentry consortium where "as far as [he] can see, is coffins. […] Only coffins" (Cole 2014, 160). The circumstance of the moment functions as a magnet for the narrator/photographer's eye:

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> I want to take the little camera out of my pocket and capture the scene. But I am afraid. Afraid that the carpenters, rapt in their meditative task, will look up at me; afraid that I will bind to film what is intended only for the memory, what is meant only for a sidelong glance followed by forgetting. (Cole 2014, 160-161).

On this occasion too, the camera is depicted as an extension of the narrator, the two forming a single entity. His instinct to register the moment is stronger than the negative feeling that those containers of corpses may convey. However, on second thoughts, his concern that the camera would intrude on the quiet concentration of the workers, and thus corrupt the moment he was hoping to capture, makes the narrator refrain from photographing. In spite of the fact that Cole is a compulsive photographer, in this case he provides a missing photo. The unnamed narrator's afterthought echoes Barthes's statement: "As if the (terrified) Photographer must exert himself to the utmost to keep the Photograph from becoming Death" (Barthes 1980, 14). To a descendant of the African diaspora, the negotiation with the past still is an unsettled issue. This is perceived in the unnamed narrator's employment of the word "coffin" that belongs to the semantic field of "death". As words and images may convey the same meaning, "coffin" can be visualised as a container that will be sealed and, to some extent, put aside; the frame that delimits the boundaries of an image can be also visualised as a container of the "target" whose existence terminates in the moment it is allocated to eternity. Nonetheless, the writer's refusal to let go of this fragment of time, to assign it to the category of lifeless artefact suggests an attempt to come to terms with the past.

For migrants and their offspring the encounter or collision between two ways of living and understanding the world is often fraught with confusion, disorientation and even conflict. They find themselves in what Homi K. Bhabha defines as the in-between space where the individual has to continuously negotiate to keep the balance between making up a new identity and the simultaneous sense of loss, between the feeling of not quite belonging to the new community, and at the same time the feeling of extraneousness and exclusion from the old one (Bhabha 2000, 138).

Piero Polidoro reminds us of one of Barthes' theories in regard to the possibility of inferring individual meanings from an image. Barthes's wide spectrum of interests embraces photography and literature and, as I have emphasised throughout this paper, both can be analysed on a visual level. Barthes identifies two different levels of inferring meanings. On the first level, the "*Spectator*", while watching/looking at an image, recognises the "target" as a familiar representation of 'objects of the world'. This identification is what Barthes calls "denotation." However, since this way of looking at an image, this identification of objects, is influenced by the "*Spectator's*" general cultural construct, there is another, second level of looking. On this second level, which Barthes describes as "connotation," the so-called 'objects of the world' may have a further meaning within a specific culture, a meaning that may be opaque to

others (Polidoro 2017, 30-31). The Anglophone postcolonial texts analysed in this paper corroborate Barthes's theory in relation to the level of "connotation." In Phillips's play, a postcard that portrays a white woman and a black man connotes the enduring, unsolved issue of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. In Levy's novel and BBC television adaptation, a snapshot of a white woman introduced at the end of the narration hints at the possibility of discovering a mixed-race man's family roots. In Cole's novella/journal, the missing photograph—the photograph that was not taken—connotes the issue of double identity and the consequent difficult negotiation with the past.

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EMANUELE CRESCIMANNO

IL VOLTO FOTOGRAFATO
Logiche di potere e strategie di resistenza

ABSTRACT: Mug shots' uses and practices—from Bertillon to Lombroso—show the photograph's power: face and its photographic image are a form of control for protecting the establishment. However political value and subversive force of photography lies in the dialectic between known and unknown that the image of the photographed face produces. Photographic portrait produces new, previously unknown relationships if it isn't only used for purposes of reproduction: so it is able to be in opposition to the established order and its imperatives that want to eliminate chaos and differences.

KEYWORDS: Portrait, Face, Mugshot, Aesthetics.

La fotografia, sin dalla sua origine, ha avuto uno stretto rapporto con il potere ed è stata uno strumento della narrazione del potere. Basti pensare all'annosa questione se essa sia una delle forme privilegiate di documentazione volta a rafforzare il valore della verità o, al contrario, sia uno tra gli strumenti più efficaci per la propaganda, e dunque per dare parvenza di realtà alla finzione. Il potere – nelle sue varie accezioni, da quello politico con le sue emanazioni a quello dei media e delle immagini – ha di conseguenza sempre guardato alla fotografia per i propri fini, primo fra tutti il suo stesso rafforzamento e dispiegamento con maggiore efficienza. Un luogo di verifica delle differenti strategie possibili è stato l'immagine del volto fotografato, i suoi usi e i suoi valori, anche al fine di comprendere che tipo di relazione intrattiene la fotografia con il reale. L'ordine costituito più volte si è fondato infatti su una originaria e certa pretesa di oggettività del volto rappresentato in fotografia e per suo tramite ha rafforzato le sue logiche di potere; eppure un'attenta analisi anche dello stesso *corpus* di immagini può portare a un interessante ribaltamento di prospettiva e narrare una storia di resistenza e di non omogeneità al potere stesso.

Infatti basta analizzare il ruolo di garante dell'ordine e del potere che nell'Ottocento la fotografia criminale, segnaletica e giudiziaria ha assunto, partendo dalla (errata) pretesa che sia possibile rappresentare il volto in maniera oggettiva in una immagine, per svelarne il ribaltamento: la valenza politica e la forza di sovversione della fotografia risiede nella dialettica tra noto e ignoto a cui il volto fotografato in maniera paradigmatica dà luogo. La fotografia del volto non è dunque pratica mimetica bensì costitutiva di realtà e anche di rivolta e opposizione all'ordine costituito e ai suoi imperativi che cercano di annientare caos e differenze.

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Gli usi e le pratiche che prendono le mosse da Alphonse Bertillon o Cesare Lombroso, per fare solo alcuni dei nomi possibili – in sintonia con la nascita ottocentesca della fotografia e il suo primo sviluppo – non sono altro che il riconoscimento di un potere della fotografia, forse della sua prima e fondamentale caratteristica di intrecciare in maniera inedita rispetto a ogni altra forma di rappresentazione il nesso tra realtà e immagine e le funzioni che da questa relazione discendono. L'analisi del volto e delle sue immagini è una pratica per ricondurre all'ordine e dunque esercitare una strategia di controllo che tuteli il potere costituito: tale azione diventa maggiormente efficace se esercitata per mezzo di uno strumento tecnico, dotato della certezza e della forza della scienza. La fotografia, celebrata innanzi tutto per il rapporto diretto con il reale, era dunque lo strumento perfetto per esercitare questo tipo di controllo e fondare una microfisica del potere.

Ma a ben guardare la fotografia si è sottratta a questo destino: il volto e la sua immagine con la loro mutevolezza scardinano queste certezze e danno la possibilità di raccontare un'altra storia. È la storia del ritratto fotografico come via privilegiata che il volto assume per raggiungere il senso e irridere il potere.

La fotografia tra illusione e verità

Per dimostrare come la fotografia ai suoi albori abbia intrecciato il suo rapporto con il reale come una diretta connessione e sovrapposizione con il modello rappresentato, oltre ai nomi già fatti, basterebbe per esempio ricordare la celeberrima invettiva di Charles Baudelaire nei *Salons* del 1859, solo vent'anni dopo l'invenzione della fotografia, come indice anche di un sentire comune e diffuso sul valore della fotografia come prova del reale. La fotografia è infatti nell'ottica del poeta francese "rifugio di tutti i pittori mancati, scarsamente dotati o troppo pigri per compiere i loro i studi" (1996 [1859], 1195) poiché essa produce immagini fedeli della realtà (tralasciando in questa sede, perché non immediatamente pertinente all'oggetto della mia analisi, la reale portata e fondatezza di una tale affermazione). Dunque la fotografia è, alla sua origine, innanzi tutto caratterizzata dall'immediata sovrapponibilità dell'immagine fotografica con il suo modello reale. Ma la constatazione che non richiede alcun sforzo creativo, e dunque non è arte, è sufficiente per provare che la fotografia è immagine fedele del reale? Come il potere si è insinuato in questa incertezza per tutelarsi e rafforzarsi?

Inoltre, a ben guardare, tutto l'Ottocento anche prima dell'invenzione della fotografia è percorso da tensioni volte a individuare un metodo efficace di catalogazione delle persone (criminali, deviati, malati in primo luogo); la fotografia diviene il mezzo naturale per questa esigenza: la scheda segnaletica, integrando testo e immagine, diviene ben presto il luogo principe con cui il potere cataloga, controlla, costruisce e rinforza il proprio edificio in nome di una

normalità (intendendo con questo termine una omogeneità al potere costituito) che tende a escludere chi non rientra entro questi parametri.

L'evoluzione della fotografia nell'Ottocento si intreccia in maniera intima con l'evoluzione scientifica e diviene spesso strumento necessario per il progresso scientifico stesso: da semplice testimone e fedele registratore della realtà, la fotografia diviene rapidamente produttrice di realtà, produttrice di nuove dimensioni del visibile che altrimenti rimarrebbero sconosciute. Nota John Berger (2014 [1982]) come

> positivismo, macchina fotografica e sociologia crebbero insieme. Ciò che ne agevolò la pratica fu la convinzione che i fatti osservabili, quantificabili, registrati da scienziati ed esperti, avrebbero un giorno offerto all'uomo una conoscenza così globale della natura e della società da rendergli possibile controllarle entrambe. La precisione avrebbe sostituito la metafisica, la pianificazione avrebbe risolto i conflitti sociali, la verità avrebbe preso il posto della soggettività, e quanto c'è di più oscuro e nascosto nell'animo umano sarebbe stato illuminato dalla conoscenza empirica. (96).

La fotografia diviene dunque immagine attendibile e vera, capace di cogliere anche quei dati e quei tratti che l'esperienza *reale* e diretta del volto non riesce a cogliere. Tuttavia è necessario evidenziare non una contrapposizione radicale tra arte e documento, tra illusione e verità. È più efficace concentrare l'attenzione sulla forza che il potere riconosce a un certo tipo di immagine e di conseguenza agli usi catalogatori di queste immagini criminali, segnaletiche e giudiziarie per porre la questione di che cosa provano, di che cosa sono prova. Lo scopo principale delle fotografie criminali, segnaletiche e giudiziarie e il loro principale uso si fonda sulla pretesa che queste rappresentazioni siano una prova, una traccia evidente, un indizio capace di svelare una verità, di manifestare senza ombra di dubbio la patologia, il crimine o l'anormalità del soggetto ritratto.

Una rigida contrapposizione tra un ipotetico e assoluto valore documentario della fotografia totalmente autonomo da un altrettanto ipotetico e assoluto valore estetico di essa si dovrebbe basare sull'immediata e certa relazione tra rappresentato e rappresentazione che fonda il primo e su di una differente articolazione di quella relazione che caratterizza l'altra. In base a questa opposizione sarebbe inoltre possibile affermare che la differenza tra queste tipologie di immagini risiede nell'utilità di tutte quelle che ricadono nella prima fattispecie e nella "non utilità" delle altre. Si dovrebbe inoltre immaginare una contrapposizione tra una logica della verità e una logica delle apparenze, a prescindere dagli usi e dalle intenzioni che hanno portato alla produzione di queste tipologie di immagini.

Questa strategia, oltre che inesatta, non conduce a utili risultati. La cifra che dunque accomuna tutte le fotografie sulle schede segnaletiche – siano esse in ambito medico, scientifico o giudiziario – è il bisogno di classificare e circoscrivere l'anormalità grazie alla potenza ordinatrice riconosciuta alla fotografia in base alla sua natura tecnica e scientifica. Essa diviene quindi una forma di controllo.

L'ambiguità della fotografia

In un sagace saggio intitolato programmaticamente *Apparenze. L'ambiguità della fotografia* John Berger coglie, sin dal titolo, una caratteristica peculiare dell'immagine fotografica – forse delle immagini tout court ma che la fotografia potenzia al massimo – affermando che, a differenza del disegno che fa qualcosa ("in un disegno una mela è *fatta* rotonda e sferica"), la fotografia accoglie: "in una foto, la rotondità e la luce e l'ombra della mela sono accolte come un dato di fatto" (91). Eppure questo accogliere non è una semplice passività, un adattamento dell'immagine alla realtà, bensì vi è una relazione ambigua tra rappresentazione e rappresentato: alla domanda se "le apparenze trasportate dalla macchina fotografica sono una costruzione, un artefatto culturale umano, oppure una traccia, simile all'impronta sulla sabbia, lasciata *naturalmente* da qualcosa che è passato?" il teorico inglese non può rispondere altrimenti che "la risposta è: tutte e due le cose" (90). Di conseguenza "le foto non traducono le apparenze. Le citano" (92).

Tutto ciò non significa però che la fotografia è necessariamente – direi ontologicamente – vera, bensì che essa può essere lo strumento più efficace per una strategia basata sulla menzogna e l'inganno poiché, esistendo un rapporto diretto con il soggetto fotografato – citato nell'immagine fotografica – si pretende che esso sia necessariamente vero. Infatti è necessario comprendere qual è la natura del soggetto fotografato: se esso è falso, menzognero, saturo di teorie inesatte, frutto di una costruzione culturale fraudolenta, il ricorso alla fotografia è una strategia del potere per conferire verità a questo falso, una volta che è fotografato: esso infatti "è fotografato proprio perché la macchina fotografica è in grado di conferire autenticità a qualsiasi insieme di apparenze, seppure false. La macchina fotografica non mente neanche quando è usata per citare una menzogna. Di conseguenza la menzogna *appare* più credibile" (93).

È dunque un'attribuzione *ex post* di un valore, di una verità fraudolenta che, non avendo in maniera autonoma la possibilità di essere tale, ricorre al mezzo fotografico per ottenerla. Ecco perché in quest'ottica una fotografia segnaletica pretende di affermare che un determinato soggetto è criminale, mentre un altro è malato e così via. Il ritratto fotografico, o meglio le fotografie del volto, sono un valido banco di prova per comprendere la situazione: la fotografia è infatti utilizzata per le nostre carte di identità e per infinite altre pratiche di controllo; ma prendiamo atto con Berger che essa non può, non deve, non ha come obiettivo quello di dire, di mostrare con tutta evidenza la verità. La domanda da porre è invece relativa al modo in cui "la fotografia possa o non possa conferire senso ai fatti" (95) e nello specifico la fotografia del volto.

Nel celebrare il centenario della fotografia Paul Valéry (1992 [1939]) svolge alcune interessantissime riflessioni per il tema in questione a partire dal rapporto tra letteratura e fotografia e, nello specifico, in relazione alle differenti modalità con cui esse affrontano il problema della descrizione. Sembrerebbe infatti che sull'argomento la bilancia penda irrimediabilmente a favore della fotografia, non lasciando ampi ambiti operativi alla letteratura. Come paragonare infatti dal punto

di vista della descrizione l'immagine di un passaporto con la descrizione al suo fianco: "Aprite un passaporto, e la questione è presto risolta: i connotati scritti non reggono al confronto con la testimonianza fotografica al fianco" (46). La fotografia ha nell'ottica del pensatore francese introdotto "nelle incerte regioni della conoscenza … una nuova inquietudine, una sorta di reattivo nuovo di cui indubbiamente non si sono ancora abbastanza considerati gli effetti" (49) e dunque imposto un dubbio su tutto ciò che non è documentato/documentabile per mezzo dell'occhio della macchina fotografica. L'immagine fotografica infatti agisce sia "*per difetto*" sia "*per eccesso*": "ci mostra ciò che non vedremmo se fossimo ugualmente sensibili a tutto quello che ci imprime la luce, e a nient'altro" (51).

Dunque se la fotografia fosse la semplice scrittura per mezzo della luce con cui il reale si rappresenta in una immagine, non resterebbe assolutamente spazio per una pratica che possa mettere al centro strategie differenti. Ma, si interroga ancora il pensatore francese, una riflessione filosofica sulla fotografia non può essere una utile strategia per comprendere cosa e come deve rispondere alle proprie logiche espressive la fotografia (del volto)?

La filosofia ha utilizzato da sempre la metafora della luce e i fenomeni ottici a essa connessa per rendere conto dei meccanismi della conoscenza: "Parliamo in senso figurato di chiarezza, di riflessione, di speculazione, di lucidità e di idee; disponiamo di tutta una retorica visiva ad uso del pensiero astratto. Cosa c'è di più naturale del paragonare ciò che scambiamo per semplicità della nostra coscienza, reciproco della varietà della nostra conoscenza, e come opposto ad essa, alla sorgente di luce che rivela l'infinita molteplicità delle cose visibili, pur unicamente formate da miriadi di immagini del sole?" (51). Non è questa la stessa descrizione di ciò che avviene in una camera oscura (oppure, con le dovute differenze, al processo di post-produzione rispetto allo scatto delle immagini digitali per mezzo di un programma di elaborazione delle immagini):

> a poco a poco, qua e là, qualche macchia appare, simile al balbettio di un essere che si risveglia. Questi frammenti si moltiplicano, si saldano, si completano; e non ci si può impedire di pensare davanti a questa formazione, dapprima discontinua, che procede a balzi e per elementi insignificanti, ma che converge verso una composizione riconoscibile, a molte sedimentazioni che osservano nella mente, a dei ricordi che si precisano, a delle certezze che improvvisamente si cristallizzano, alla produzione di certi versi privilegiati, che si stabiliscono, liberandosi brutalmente dal disordine del linguaggio interiore. (52).

Dunque, ancora una volta, l'immagine fotografica come una immagine produttiva di realtà e non semplicemente riproduttiva, così come nella composizione poetica si passa da un certo caos a un certo ordine: ovviamente ognuna delle due modalità con differenti logiche espressive. L'assoluta equivalenza tra fotografia e dimostrazione scientifica è stata dunque una pretesa che il potere ha cercato di imporre e a cui, per fortuna, la fotografia, ha avuto la capacità di sottrarsi.

Le apparenze e le ambiguità alle quali fa riferimento sin dal titolo Berger sono sin dalla sua nascita come disciplina filosofica oggetto privilegiato dell'estetica; le

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immagini rientrano in quella categoria e l'estetica le ha sempre considerate un oggetto di riferimento per la sua stessa comprensione teorica: ha compreso la loro ambiguità, ne ha fatto un elemento distintivo e non un limite teorico; si è espressa attraverso le immagini e ha espresso il senso delle immagini.

L'estetica ha dunque studiato le immagini fotografiche a partire dalla loro apparenza e dalla loro ambiguità, dai dati sensibili immediati che suscitano in prima istanza una reazione emotiva e, di conseguenza, inducono a una riflessione sul senso. Non ha riconosciuto una universalità, bensì, in determinate immagini capaci di conservare al contempo la loro singolarità, ha riconosciuto una tendenza all'universalità (utilizzando termini kantiani della terza critica si potrebbe dire che ha riconosciuto che possono essere *universalizzabili*). Ciò non significa che sono portatrici di una verità, bensì che, a partire dalla soggettività dell'esperienza di cui sono *citazione*, sono capaci di dire qualcosa sull'esperienza in genere, di non fermarsi dunque alla contingenza del fatto che citano, bensì di aspirare a una *validità universale*. Ancora Berger afferma a proposito della celebre fotografia di André Kertész, *Ragazzo dormiente* (Budapest, 25 maggio 1912): "Il suo compito [di Kertész] era di essere ricettivo fino a quel punto alla coerenza delle apparenze in quell'istante da quella posizione in quel luogo. Le corrispondenze, che emergono da questa coerenza, sono troppo estese e intrecciate perché le si possa enumerare in modo soddisfacente servendosi delle parole. (Non si possono fare fotografie con un dizionario)" (Berger 2014 [1982], 120-121). Le apparenze sensibili, estetiche direi, sono necessarie per suscitare idee poiché "la fotografia soddisfa in pieno un'aspettativa che è intrinseca al 'voler vedere'. La macchina fotografica completa il mezzo-linguaggio delle apparenze ed esprime un significato inequivocabile. Quando accade, ci ritroviamo di colpo a casa tra le apparenze, come siamo a casa nella nostra lingua materna" (125).

È dunque essenziale comprendere *quando accade* poiché non tutte le immagini sono capaci di essere espressive e dunque dare una casa, un luogo accogliente alle apparenze. Non si tratta quindi di pensare la fotografia in base al discrimine della verità e, di conseguenza, ipotizzarne usi come prova di questa verità, bensì di caratterizzarla attraverso le apparenze che, se ben espresse, divengono esemplari e capaci di significato al di là dell'immediato soggetto che è rappresentato, e dunque capaci di connettere particolare e universale senza tuttavia annichilire il primo in una astrazione.

Alcuni esempi chiariranno, faranno vedere questa capacità della fotografia di sottrarsi alle logiche del potere e a dispiegare di conseguenza tutte le sue capacità di opporsi, resistere, sbeffeggiare il potere.

JR: la smorfia dà forma al volto

Innanzi tutto è necessario comprendere quali sono le caratteristiche del volto e quali sono le modalità di rappresentazione peculiari del ritratto fotografico; solo

dopo aver chiarito ciò sarà possibile capire in quale maniera esso può essere una forma di resistenza al potere. Il volto si presenta apparentemente come un enigma di non semplice decifrazione: "Solo lo sguardo e la voce rendono vivo (in senso assolutamente letterale) un volto. Lo stesso vale per la mimica facciale nell'espressione del volto. Fare smorfie significa 'fare facce', esprimere un sentimento o 'rivolgersi a qualcuno anche senza proferire parola'" (Belting 2014, 9). Se la caratteristica primaria del volto è la motilità, il continuo divenire, è ovvio che per rendere conto di esso è necessaria la sua rappresentazione, in primo luogo quella fotografica. Tuttavia ricostruire la storia del volto è una vicenda differente da quella del ritratto: seppure spesso siano state intrecciate e sovrapposte è necessario evidenziarne anche l'autonomia al fine di evitare che la sovrapposizione faccia sparire le differenze. Inoltre la storia del volto è però anche una storia dei media poiché "nel contempo il volto è, per sua stessa natura, 'un medium di espressione, auto rappresentazione e comunicazione'" (12).

Se dunque il volto umano è quanto di più significante esiste e tale significanza è difficile da catturare, la riuscita di una immagine fotografica del volto deve risiedere nello scarto, nella non immediata coincidenza con il sé del soggetto ritratto. Riconoscendo come caratteristica principale del volto la motilità, per produrre il senso è necessario che l'immagine, fissa per sua natura, sia in grado di rendere tale qualità per esempio attraverso la smorfia che gioca su questa potenzialità espressiva. La smorfia diviene dunque il sovvertimento dell'ordine costituito e un'espressione che dà senso all'immagine fotografica, una strategia per rendere la motilità del volto per mezzo di una sua deformazione, in opposizione alle pose statiche e inespressive delle fotografie segnaletiche, mediche e giudiziarie.

Un esempio può chiarire questa interpretazione: da circa 15 anni il *photograffeur* JR incolla per le strade del mondo gigantografie per richiamare l'attenzione sulle disuguaglianze, i cliché sociali, le incongruenze che caratterizzano lo sviluppo senza regole degli ultimi anni. Dalle banlieu di Parigi alle favelas di Rio, attraverso le bidonville dell'Africa e il muro di separazione tra palestinesi ed ebrei in Cisgiordania, sino ai nuovi muri tra Messico e Stati Uniti, JR ritiene che le differenze e la diffidenza verso l'altro, verso colui che viene identificato come nemico, siano causate da pregiudizi e ignoranza. Allora ha ritratto i soggetti coinvolti in queste contrapposizioni per dimostrare che le differenze, se esistono, sono di natura culturali e sono alimentate da coloro che gestiscono il potere al fine di poter continuare a esercitarlo.

Dopo alcuni progetti sulla *banlieu* parigina ha dato vita nel 2007 al progetto *Face 2 Face* per dimostrare come la contrapposizione identitaria tra israeliani e palestinesi può essere superata mostrando loro il proprio stesso volto liberato dai pregiudizi e dalla maschera che il conflitto ha loro imposto. Di certo è vero che Israele e Palestina sono luoghi pieni di contraddizione, di forti contrasti e dunque che impongono l'assunzione di una maschera, l'obbligo di schierarsi e di prendere posizione l'uno contro l'altro: un attento intervento può però far cadere questa maschera e condurre questi popoli a mostrare la loro autentica immagine. Il

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progetto è consistito nel fotografare palestinesi e israeliani che fanno lo stesso mestiere, stampare delle gigantografie da incollare a coppie nei luoghi dove i soggetti ritratti vivono, sul muro di separazione che li divide: obiettivo era dunque di suscitare la riflessione nel vedere i ritratti e dunque ridimensionare le differenze.

La domanda di partenza del progetto coglie il centro del problema della convivenza tra israeliani e palestinesi: perché non possono vivere insieme? Eppure questi due popoli si assomigliano: "c'est évident, mais ils ne le voient pas. Nous devons les mettre face à face. Ils réaliseront" (JR & Marco, 2007, 12). Eppure *Face 2 Face* non vuole eliminare le differenze, bensì evidenziare che l'identità di ogni soggetto ritratto è frutto della relazione dialettica con l'immagine dell'altro, della reazione di riconoscersi nella connessione con il ritratto dell'altro piuttosto che solamente in quello proprio. In queste fotografie il soggetto fotografato è anche il primo fruitore dell'opera e completa il suo "lavoro" di modello soltanto con la fruizione della gigantografia e il riconoscimento della somiglianza con l'altro posto accanto al proprio ritratto. Solo allora dunque il progetto trova il suo compimento, nell'essere inserito nella quotidianità dei soggetti ritratti, nelle modificazioni, negli interventi che queste immagini affisse subiscono in maniera volontaria o per il semplice trascorrere del tempo.

Al di là della valenza politica di questa azione è bene soffermarsi sulla tecnica e la forma che JR ha utilizzato. Così come per i ragazzi della *banlieu* di Parigi, i soggetti ritratti fanno una smorfia, sbeffeggiano il cliché che vorrebbe irrigidirli e far loro indossare una maschera adatta e appropriata al proprio ruolo, che li incatena a una specifica posizione sociale; la smorfia invece li libera e li fa esprimere, dà senso alla singolarità del proprio volto ed elimina tutte quelle differenze che la società e il potere impone loro. Per ottenere questo obiettivo JR ha lavorato sul volto dei soggetti ritratti, sul ruolo del viso, delle mutevoli espressioni che esso assume, delle smorfie capaci di svelare la somiglianza di fondo che accomuna israeliani e palestinesi: la smorfia vuole modificare il viso, la sua forma "normale" ma in realtà serve a liberare della maschera sociale e politica che quei soggetti hanno assunto e che è diventata così naturale che essi non si rendono conto che è una sovrastruttura. Eppure non scompare la complessità dei differenti soggetti ritratti: "ils se ressemblent assez pour pouvoir se comprendre et sont suffisamment différents pour qu'un véritable dialogue puisse s'instaurer" (16). In questo breve spazio si inserisce il lavoro di JR, in questo contatto che, seppure ravvicinato, mantiene ancora una certa distanza. Il fotografo infatti realizza i suoi ritratti con un obiettivo con una focale di 28 mm: riduce così la distanza fisica tra fotografo e soggetto fotografato a pochi centimetri, concentra l'attenzione sul volto che riempie tutta l'inquadratura, fa sì che il solo volto sia in grado di far comprendere l'identità del soggetto ritratto nel suo complesso. La smorfia o l'espressione caricaturale che assumono i soggetti fotografati inoltre dà loro la possibilità di esprimersi, accentua le modalità espressive del viso così come la dimensione gigante dell'immagine ne aumenta la potenza espressiva e la quantità di dettagli utili a una più completa e complessa rappresentazione.

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Che il progetto abbia sortito i risultati sperati lo dimostra il fatto che, come racconta il resoconto che accompagna le immagini pubblicate in volume, gli stessi abitanti dei luoghi dove il progetto si è svolto più volte hanno incontrato difficoltà a distinguere l'immagine del palestinese da quella dell'israeliano, essi stessi si sono sorpresi di commettere numerosi errori di attribuzione; insomma la presunta contrapposizione di volti è divenuta un modo di conoscere se stessi, gli scatti hanno instaurato un dialogo altrimenti impossibile.

Le immagini di *Face 2 Face* sono dunque il necessario specchio perché israeliani e palestinesi possano raggiungere la visibilità, la propria stessa rappresentazione: se si assume la prospettiva evidenziata da John Szarkowski secondo la quale le potenzialità euristiche della fotografia oscillano tra lo *specchio* e la *finestra* è possibile comprendere a pieno la portata del progetto *Face 2 Face*. Il critico americano ritiene infatti che una tassonomia efficace della fotografia è riconducibile alla funzione di specchio, cioè di riflettere un autoritratto del fotografo, oppure alla funzione di finestra sulla realtà, quindi un modo di conoscere meglio il mondo; tali tendenze tuttavia non sono necessariamente contrapposte bensì evidenziano la ricerca dell'autobiografismo e dell'autoanalisi da un lato e quella comprensione delle trame che tessono il reale dall'altra (cfr. Szarkowski, 1978, 18 ss.: seppure la proposta sia relativa alla fotografia americana di metà Novecento, l'autore stesso riconosce una certa apertura del modello presentato che autorizza quindi a un utilizzo generalizzato). Le immagini di JR riescono infatti a essere al contempo specchio e finestra, autoanalisi che conduce alla comprensione e alla manifestazione di se stessi e descrizione di una realtà che ha intrinseche difficoltà a rappresentarsi.

Conclusioni

Il potere ha dunque utilizzato la fotografia segnaletica basandosi sulla forza di oggettivare il soggetto ritratto; tuttavia questa modalità priva il soggetto della propria specifica identità e, di conseguenza, lo fa divenire un tipo, una prova assolutamente certa di un determinato carattere: si impone un legame con il reale per mezzo della fotografia sino a far divenire verità qualcosa che non lo è. Inoltre, sfruttando sino in fondo e portando sino alle estreme conseguenze teoriche il principio della riproducibilità tecnica, la fotografia segnaletica nega e riduce ai minimi termini l'intervento *creativo* dell'autore fondando la propria autorità sulla rigida connessione tra realtà e verità: la fotografia segnaletica mette sotto gli occhi in maniera evidente un dato oggettivo che altrimenti, sottraendosi a questa logica di potere, sfuggirebbe. Infine essa sfrutta sino in fondo la semplicità, la facilità di utilizzo per essere organica al potere e supportare la strategia di normalizzazione di questo: la fotografia segnaletica diviene espressione dell'autorità del potere che inchioda il soggetto a una precisa identità, a un ruolo, a una parte del meccanismo del potere stesso.

Il ribaltamento di queste caratteristiche dà spazio alle logiche di resistenza dell'immagine fotografica del volto: si esalta la soggettività di colui che è ritratto, si pone l'attenzione sull'autore e sulla relazione tra questi e il soggetto ritratto (nel caso di JR riducendo al minimo la distanza tra i due). La smorfia è dunque il non arrendersi passivo ma un'attività che non vuole eliminare l'ambiguità *naturale* dell'immagine fotografica: se nell'ottica della fotografia segnaletica sul volto rappresentato nella fotografia si leggeva immediatamente la colpa, la degenerazione, il crimine, lo stesso volto, facendo leva sui suoi tratti mobili e superando di conseguenza l'immobilità della rappresentazione con una smorfia, dà libero sfogo alla sua irriducibilità alle logiche di dominio, liberando l'individualità.

La fotografia è così capace di non farsi imbrigliare dalla visione oggettiva e normalizzante su cui si fonda la microfisica del potere sino a rendere altamente significanti anche le fotografie segnaletiche, dissacrandole e resistendo alla loro logica e dunque facendo loro perdere ogni utilità e peculiarità.

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SILVIA VERDIANI

FRA LINGUA E IMMAGINI
Introduzione all'iconolinguistica

ABSTRACT: The digital dimension assumed by communication in recent years has made it possible to focus more clearly on the model of conglomerates of language and image, whose codes become complementary, producing an autonomous meaning. Internet, especially social media, in fact allow you to observe these conglomerates of language and image while speakers spontaneously create them. Focusing on the fact that the use of language can be non-declarative as well, we realise that linguistic utterances can do more than reflect a meaning, they are words designed to get things done. In the same way work conglomerates of language and image. In multimodal linguistics the meaning of a sentence seems to be given by the effect of different perceptions that are all simultaneously present in the utterance. In network communication this effect is achieved through the so-called *multimodal conglomerates* or *aural material.* With the advent of digital culture, they became the object of a specific field of study, and refer both to *image science* and in the German area to *Bildlinguistik* (which I translate here in Italian with the term *iconolinguistica*). Indeed patterns of "speech-acts", "illocutive acts", can be adapted to other codes. We can talk about *Bildakte,* "image acts", *Bildillokutionen,* "image illocutions" and try to transfer categories of linguistics to visual-linguistic communication, in a sort of image pragmatics. It was Søren Kjørup who first tried to develop a model of "pictorial speech act" that is analogous to a speech act. After him Horst Bredekamp conceptualised pictures as more than passive object. On the other hand, we need to develop a linguistic theory and vision that takes into account this expansion of the linguistic context, which is dominated by the presence of conglomerates of language and image, whose codes become complementary, producing an autonomous meaning.

KEYWORDS: Iconolinguistica, Image Science, Bildlinguistik, Bildakt, Multimodal Linguistics.

Negli ultimi decenni con l'avvento del web si è diffuso un nuovo modo di comunicare che si avvale con creatività di tutti i codici messi a disposizione dal mezzo di trasmissione, combinando diversi elementi espressivi con il linguaggio verbale. La comunicazione digitale ha preso una direzione che potremmo definire di ibridizzazione delle strategie espressive; sul piano diamesico assistiamo infatti alla sovrapposizione di sistemi iconici diversi, in una dimensione crossmediale che fa perno sulla dialogicità. I tratti tipici di questa nuova, complessa modalità di interazione si realizzano nella produzione di messaggi ibridi, cioè di conglomerati di lingua, immagini e altri codici non esclusivamente linguistici. Questo contributo prende spunto dal fatto che la decifrazione del senso degli enunciati verbali, presenti in buona parte della comunicazione digitale, non solo non può prescindere dalla presenza di elementi visuali e sonori in esso contenuti

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insieme alle parole, ma anzi ne risulta potenziato. Quando ci troviamo di fronte a interazioni di questo tipo spesso veniamo confrontati con quelli che Umberto Eco (1997) ha definito "messaggi metalinguistici" in cui il senso dell'immagine risulta polarizzato dalla presenza di un messaggio verbale. La massiccia presenza di messaggi ibridi nella comunicazione digitale ha condotto via via a una sempre più diffusa ibridizzazione delle strategie d'interazione: di qui l'importanza di giungere a una chiara formulazione teorica del fenomeno. L'effetto dei "conglomerati di lingua e immagine"[1] va colto proprio nel passaggio dalla lingua all'immagine, nella sinergia su cui questo tipo di comunicazione può contare. Gli ambiti di applicazione sono innumerevoli: il processo di lettura delle immagini è presente nella ricezione ma anche nella produzione artistica, in quella dei materiali pubblicitari e di propaganda politica, oltre e prima che nella comunicazione multimediale. I messaggi ibridi hanno infatti la capacità di sintetizzare concetti complessi ma anche di rimanere impressi nella memoria dei recipienti grazie al codice misto a cui fanno riferimento, alla loro natura sinestetica. Questa particolarità è funzionale alla comunicazione digitale, che è incentrata sull'aspetto fatico e ludico dell'interazione. La novità non consiste tanto nella scelta di una dimensione espressiva crossmediale – variamente attestata anche in passato - ma nella sua diffusione: essa è infatti al momento attuale la dimensione comunicativa normale per un numero sempre più ampio di utenti. Del resto, come evidenzia Federico Vercellone nella sua introduzione alla traduzione italiana del saggio di Horst Bredekamp *Immagini che ci guardano. Teoria dell'atto iconico"* "Da questo punto di vista non c'è niente di nuovo sotto il sole: le immagini digitali, gli approcci interattivi all'immagine non fanno che ravvivare oggi, grazie a nuovi media tecnologici, quanto era già da sempre, per così dire, nelle corde dell'immagine. Essi ravvivano cioè le virtualità performative dell'immagine, riproponendola come motivo centrale all'interno di una cultura. Questo revival ci rammenta che l'immagine è già da sempre dotata di uno statuto soggettivo (Vercellone 2015, XVII).

L'iconolinguistica

La particolare dimensione espressiva a cui facciamo riferimento, per la sua stessa natura, può essere analizzata secondo prospettive teoriche diverse: una di queste è quella proposta dall'"iconolinguistica". Nata in ambito tedesco nell'ultimo ventennio la *Bildlinguistik* o "iconolinguistica" è una disciplina giovane dell'ambito degli studi sul linguaggio che potremmo definire liminare, perché si colloca in prossimità di molte aree di ricerca al confine con il visuale e intende appunto ricucire la soglia fra studi di ambiti disparati - linguistico, letterario, visuale, musicale. È un campo di ricerca che si propone di descrivere

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[1] La locuzione è stata introdotta da Stöckl (2011, 30). Riguardo alle molte possibili formulazioni terminologiche cfr. Siever 2015, 10.

come avvenga la produzione, ma soprattutto la lettura dei messaggi ibridi che si avvalgono di immagini come portatrici di parte del loro significato. Partendo dal presupposto che le combinazioni di testo e immagini rappresentino oggi la normalità della dimensione comunicativa, Ulrich Schmitz (2003, 257), uno dei principali esponenti di quest'area di ricerca, evidenzia che la comprensione del messaggio non è possibile se non in questa relazione e introduce il termine *Konbild*,[2] ovvero il "contesto visuale".

Affrontare la relazione che si crea fra testo scritto e immagini secondo questa nuova prospettiva significa riflettere su forme di referenzialità diverse da quelle consuete, che si pongono nella dimensione dell'"intertestualità" (Hassler 1997) e della "transmedialità" (Ryan 2004). Nella comunicazione digitale infatti il testo scritto non è autonomo, ma ha il ruolo di attivare possibili percorsi inferenziali secondo una logica che fa perno proprio sull'immagine. Il messaggio verbale in combinazione con l'immagine emerge dunque con un ruolo particolare, un ruolo ancora in corso di definizione sul piano teorico, ma che è possibile collocare nella tradizione delle didascalie negli indovinelli grafici o *droodle* analizzati da Umberto Eco già nel 1997.

Nella riflessione estetica viene spesso evidenziata la portata dell'attività di "enunciazione", un'attività produttiva che coinvolge oltre all'autore anche il fruitore e la sua abilità ermeneutica di decifrare il senso dell'opera che gli sta di fronte. Si ricorre al piacere estetico per coinvolgere in un gioco ermeneutico chi osserva l'opera d'arte: in questo modo egli ne diventa a tutti gli effetti co-autore. Già nella seconda metà egli anni sessanta del novecento la Scuola di Costanza e in particolare Hans Robert Jauss e Wolfgang Iser (1991), con la loro riflessione sull'estetica della ricezione, hanno teorizzato un nuovo approccio all'opera d'arte, la cui novità consiste nel considerare la produzione artistica come un processo in fieri che non può fare a meno di confrontarsi con la variabile del suo osservatore. In questa prospettiva il linguaggio e l'immagine non vengono più considerati semplicemente come entità trasparenti, attraverso le quali può essere rappresentata e compresa la realtà, ma invece come un testo da interpretare, un problema da risolvere: ben lungi dall'essere una finestra sul mondo, essi richiedono invece di essere letti come un particolare tipo di linguaggio dotato di una sua autonomia. Il messaggio verbale nella combinazione con l'immagine emerge dunque con un ruolo particolare: come didascalia utile all'"ancoraggio" del senso nell'immagine (Eco 1997, 345).

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2 Cfr. Siever 2015, 14: "Text-Bild-Kombinationen sind heute der Regelfall; in solchen Kommunikaten, welche die beiden Modalitäten Bild und Sprache in sich vereinen, kann der Sinn der Worte nicht gänzlich oder womöglich auch gar nicht verstanden werden, wenn der Kontext, beziehungsweise wie Schmitz (2003, 257) es in diesem Fall nennt, *das Konbild,* fehlt".

Droodles

Umberto Eco cita a questo proposito il caso estremo del *droodle,* un termine inglese che richiama *doodle,* "scarabocchio", *drawing,* "disegno" e *riddle,* "indovinello". I *droodles,* detti anche "indovinelli grafici", si basano sulla pareidolia, la tendenza innata nell'uomo a trovare un significato per le forme grafiche ambigue. Un caso normalmente citato a titolo d'esempio è la foto di Marte scattata dalla sonda Viking 1, nel 1976, in cui un gioco d'ombre lasciava intuire una forte somiglianza con un volto umano del tutto casuale (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Foto originale del "volto su Marte" scattata dalla sonda Viking 1, 1976.

Uno dei primi indovinelli grafici documentati in ambito artistico risale all'epoca del tardo Manierismo, ed è stato attribuito ad Agostino Carracci (1577-1603) (Fig. 2). La soluzione dell'indovinello è legata alla capacità di rappresentazione visuale dello spettatore ed è indotta dal titolo: "Mendicante cieco dietro all'angolo di una strada".
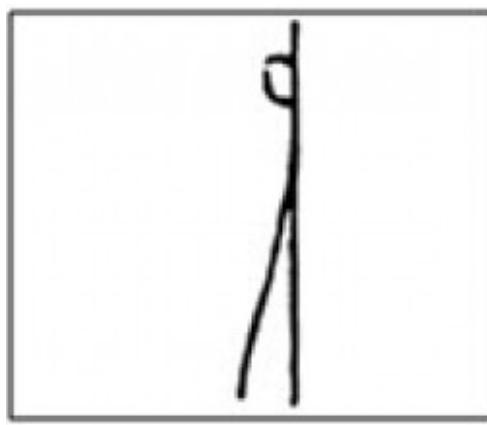

Fig. 2. «Mendicante cieco dietro all'angolo di una strada».

La rappresentazione dei *droodles* è molto semplice: un quadrato che contiene alcuni elementi grafici, apparentemente astratti, ma che attraverso la lettura della didascalia, nel caso che segue (Fig. 3): "Four elephants examine an orange or a dead point position by a billiard game" rivelano la loro natura figurativa prototipica.
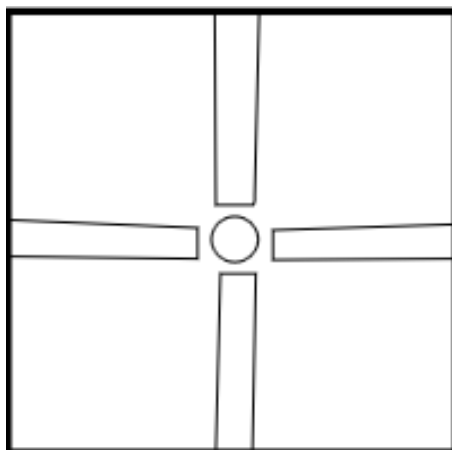
Fig. 3. "Four elephants examine an orange or a dead point position by a billiard game." (Wikipedia.en, *droodle sub voce*).

L'esempio di *droodle* citato da Umberto Eco nel suo saggio *Kant e l'ornitorinco* (1997, 344) è il seguente:
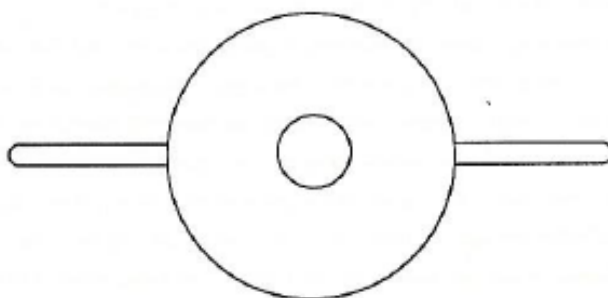
Fig. 4. "Messicano in bicicletta visto dall'alto" (Eco 1997, 345).

Con il *droodle* ci troviamo di fronte ad un caso in cui gli stimoli visivi raggiungono il massimo grado di astrazione. Il messaggio verbale, in questo caso "Messicano in bicicletta visto dall'alto" (Fig. 4), svolge infatti una fondamentale funzione denotativa, costituisce la soluzione, o come la definisce Umberto Eco "la chiave verbale", senza la quale non è possibile attribuire significato all'immagine.

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Quello che la percezione mi dà, nel caso del *droodle*, è assai poco per prendere una decisione interpretativa. Certamente percepisco due cerchi concentrici e due semi-ellissi fortemente appiattite. Ammettiamo pure che siamo istintivamente portati a individuare una sola ellissi appiattita, parzialmente occultata dal cerchio maggiore; tutta una tradizione psicologica è lì a confermarcelo, anche se non ce ne accorgessimo da soli, e questa è pur sempre una buona prova dell'inferenzialità della percezione. *Ma per decidere che quelle forme rappresentano un dato oggetto o una scena, debbo possedere o indovinare la chiave (in questo caso malauguratamente verbale). Dopo, posso adattare ciò che percepisco a ciò che so.* (Eco 1997, 345; corsivo mio).

Messa a fuoco di particolari

Il *droodle* citato da Umberto Eco (1997, 344) è un caso emblematico di "ancoraggio", un caso estremo in cui il testo verbale è indispensabile per riuscire a vedere correttamente il testo visivo: ha dunque una chiara funzione denotativa. Vi sono però anche casi in cui l'ancoraggio, realizzato attraverso l'elemento testuale del titolo, serve invece a mettere in evidenza un particolare poco visibile ma essenziale dell'immagine rappresentata che altrimenti rischierebbe di restare in secondo piano. Nel quadro di Pieter Bruegel de Oude *De Val van Icarus* (*Paesaggio con la caduta di Icaro*, 1558. Fig. 5), come suggerisce Polidoro (2016, 35), se non fosse per la precisa indicazione espressa dal titolo, nessuno noterebbe la presenza del protagonista che in realtà è un particolare dipinto in basso a destra nel quadro che può anche sfuggire. Il titolo induce invece lo spettatore a fare un preciso tipo di ricerca referenziale, per far poi convergere la sua attenzione su un punto preciso dell'immagine, proprio sul quel particolare che potrebbe sfuggire osservando distrattamente il quadro (Fig. 6).

Fig. 5. Pieter Bruegel de Oude (1526/1530-1569) *De Val van Icarus (Paesaggio con la caduta di Icaro)*, 1558, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels.[3]

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[3] Il quadro è considerato una copia dell'originale di Pieter Bruegel de Oude.

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Fig. 6. Pieter Bruegel de Oude (1526/1530–1569) *De Val van Icarus*, *(Paesaggio con la caduta di Icaro)*, 1558 (particolare).

A livello connotativo l'ancoraggio ha la funzione di selezionare le letture corrette, il percorso visivo che l'autore intende suggerire al lettore. Una didascalia come: *Paesaggio con la caduta di Icaro* determina una sostanziale riconnotazione dell'immagine, che altrimenti verrebbe letta come una comune veduta marina. Dunque in questo caso è il messaggio verbale a consentirci di selezionare il contesto corretto in cui collocare l'immagine, di individuare la direzione in cui volgere lo sguardo in cerca del soggetto nominato, che è stato deliberatamente dipinto in secondo piano, e di uscire in questo modo dall'ambiguità voluta dall'autore per l'opera nel suo insieme. È il titolo a spostare in primo piano un dettaglio altrimenti percepito come solo marginale.

Le motivazioni che ci spingono a scegliere la chiave di lettura di un'immagine non dipendono dunque in tutti i casi dall'oggetto in sé; a volte contano invece le "istruzioni" che "lungi dall'essere contenute in esso, stabiliscono piuttosto che cosa esso conterrà" (Brioschi 2013, XXVII), ciò che sappiamo della sua storia, della sua funzione, del contesto in cui si colloca, e in particolare conta il "titolo", inteso come indicazione ermeneutica esplicitata dall'autore. Come evidenzia Franco Brioschi, in quanto spettatori facciamo riferimento a diversi sistemi referenziali ed è necessaria una congruenza a questi sistemi per leggere l'opera: "il nostro è un atteggiamento estetico come azione piuttosto che come disposizione ad accogliere passivamente l'impronta "intrinseca" delle cose" (ivi, XXIX).

Leggere le immagini: la comprensione multimodale del testo

La relazione fra immagini e linguaggio verbale ha un ruolo centrale non solo per le scienze dell'immagine ma anche per la linguistica. Nel 1997 Christian Dölker (1997, 29) ha rivolto la sua attenzione all'argomento, sostenendo che il termine linguaggio venga normalmente usato sia in riferimento al linguaggio verbale che a quello visuale, e si è chiesto se in entrambi i casi possa essere inteso secondo lo stesso significato.[4] Secondo l'autore è infatti indispensabile fare chiarezza sulle differenze presenti fra i due sistemi, in modo da affrontare poi consapevolmente le caratteristiche specifiche di ognuno di essi. Nel 1997 egli arriva a elaborare il concetto di "competenza visuale" e formula una vera e propria grammatica dell'immagine, articolando la sua ricerca sulla nozione estesa di testo e inaugurando un approccio integrato alla lettura dei "testi ibridi" (*Gesamttexte*), ampiamente ripresa in ambito teorico negli anni successivi. La sua ipotesi sembra trovare conferma in quanto afferma W.J.T. Mitchell a distanza di quasi vent'anni: "Media are always mixtures of sensory and semiotic elements, and all the so-called «visual media» are *mixed* or hybrid formation, combining sound and sight, text and image. Even vision itself is not purely optical, requiring for its operations a coordination of optical and tactile impressions" (Mitchell 2015, 14).

Multimodalità

Per identificare gli atti comunicativi ibridi – quelli cioè che utilizzano diversi sistemi segnici contemporaneamente, come lingua, immagini, musica o altro – la linguistica ricorre al termine di "multimodalità".[5] La ricezione e la comprensione dei messaggi complessi avviene infatti attraverso l'integrazione di risorse di natura diversa e richiede da parte del fruitore una competenza ermeneutica multimodale, cioè il ricorso a criteri operativi non esclusivamente linguistici ma semiotici in senso ampio, che a seconda dei casi intervengono e condizionano anche la gestione degli elementi linguistici, visuali ecc. Suggeriscono insomma

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[4] "Der Begriff 'Sprache' ist sowohl in Bildsprache wie Wortsprache enthalten. Bedeutet er auch dasselbe?" (Doelker 1997, 29).

[5] Come è stato evidenziato a più riprese, la scelta terminologica che verte su questa categoria non è del tutto riuscita. Il termine "modalità" ha infatti diversi significati consolidati sia in filosofia e in logica, dove designa in primo luogo i concetti di possibilità, realtà e necessità, che in linguistica, dove per modalità si intende l'insieme delle risorse linguistiche usate per esprimere il modo, cioè l'atteggiamento del parlante rispetto all'enunciato prodotto. Anche il termine "multimodale" è polisemico. Per quel che concerne la linguistica, esso è stato introdotto inizialmente in riferimento alla comunicazione in presenza, dove per interagire si utilizzano varie modalità sensoriali, e alla lingua dei segni e di altri deficit, situazioni in cui il ricorso alla multimodalità consente un maggiore grado di comprensione; solo in tempi relativamente recenti e per derivazione viene impiegato in riferimento alla comunicazione mediata da computer.

che l'interdipendenza fra parole, testo scritto e immagini sia un dato da cui non si può prescindere per la comprensione del messaggio. La competenza multimodale implica la capacità da parte del lettore di integrare nella comprensione le diverse risorse; le possibili combinazioni sono numerose e non sempre combinate alla lingua. Elementi utili alla competenza multimodale sono, secondo quanto evidenzia Hartmut Stöckl: la capacità di riconoscere i tipi di immagine in modo categorizzante, cioè in modo che sia possibile attribuire un significato rilevante all'immagine nel contesto in cui essa viene usata; la capacità di comprendere il testo verbale in combinazione con il messaggio visuale e di integrare nel processo di comprensione della lingua le immagini contestualizzate e gli aspetti figurati della lingua e della scrittura (Stöckl 2011, 45).[6] Infatti "nelle situazioni comunicative tipiche della nostra società le immagini si presentano raramente da sole, più spesso si presentano in combinazione con altri sistemi di segni" (Stöckl 2011, 45).[7]

Hartmut Stöckl considera la comprensione visuale come un risultato di attività percettive e cognitive che non può prescindere da una prima fase di tipologizzazione, nella quale l'osservatore sottopone l'oggetto che ha di fronte ad un processo di categorizzazione. Esso è articolato in quattro passaggi di riconoscimento, rispettivamente: del contesto e della situazione; della struttura formale dell'immagine; delle relazioni presenti nell'immagine; delle relazioni fra lingua e immagine. Stando a quanto sostiene l'autore, la multimodalità è dunque caratterizzata dalla compresenza e correlazione in un unico testo ibrido (*Gesamttext*) di modalità semantiche pertinenti a diversi ambiti semiotici e anche a diversi livelli di lettura – riferibili alla semantica, alla teoria degli atti linguistici, ecc. Nel caso citato come esempio da Stöckl (Fig. 7) l'efficacia semantica dello slogan si regge interamente sull'immagine:

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[6] "Wichtige Komponenten einer multimodalen Kompetenz sind: die Fähigkeiten, Sorgen bzw. Typen von Bildern kategorisierend zu erkennen, dem Bild eine im Verwendungskontext Bedeutung zuzuweisen, den Sprachtest im Abgleich mit der visuellen Botschaft zu verstehen, semantisierte Sprache und kontextualisiertes Bild zu integrieren sowie die Bildlichkeit der Sprache und der Textfläche bzw. des Schriftkörpers in den Prozess des gesamt verstehen einzubeziehen." (Stöckl 2011, 45, nostro corsivo)

[7] "Bilder im kommunikativen Haushalt unserer Gesellschaft selten allein stehen, sondern zumeist mit Sprache und anderen Zeichensystemen verknüpft vorkommen" (Stöckl 2011, 46).

Fig. 7. "Not only for left lane but also for mountains, hills, rivers … Tuareg." (Stöckl 2011, 53).

La multimodalità è dunque al tempo stesso una competenza culturale e un particolare tipo di intelligenza individuale, "competenza multimodale" o "intelligenza trascrittiva" a seconda che si scelga la definizione di Stöckl (2011, 47) o Jäger (2002, 35), che rende accessibile il senso attraverso un processo di trascrizione da un sistema di segni ad un altro, mettendo in moto una complessa abilità cognitiva di tipo ermeneutico.
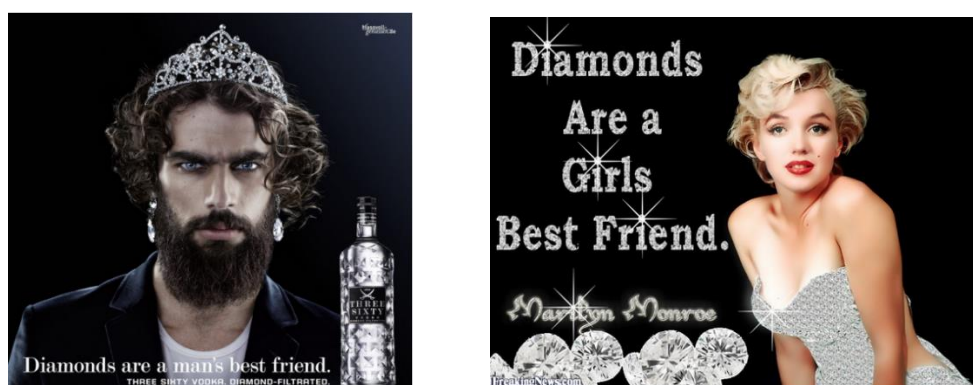

Fig. 8. Lo slogan della Vodka *Three sixty:* "Diamond are a man's best friend." E locandina della canzone cantata da Marilyn Monroe "Diamond Are a Girl's Best Friend."

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Anche nel caso della pubblicità della vodka *Three sixty* (Fig. 8) la struttura di appello del testo dello slogan pubblicitario: "Diamond are a man's best friend" risulta basata sulle capacità di riconoscimento dello spettatore di precise citazioni filmiche, in questo caso la canzone cantata da Marilyn Monroe "Diamond Are a Girl's Best Friend" inserita nel noto film *Gentlemen prefer blondes* del 1953, diretto da Howard Hawks. La comprensione dello slogan si regge infatti interamente sull'immagine e sull'enciclopedia del ricevente (la capacità di richiamare alla memoria il film, il suo titolo, l'interprete, la canzone) senza la quale la comprensione del messaggio avverrebbe in modo solo parziale.

La comprensione multimodale del testo può dunque essere considerata secondo la definizione di Fritz Herrmanns e Werner Holly (2007, 390), un tipo di "comprensione semiotica integrata";[8] in essa, come evidenzia Stöckl, i potenziali semantici di lingua e immagine hanno la particolarità di attivarsi reciprocamente. Nel caso dei testi digitali questo processo ermeneutico olistico risulta particolarmente evidente; infatti, come segnala Marie-Laure Ryan, il dato rilevante nella comunicazione mediata da computer è l'interattività con lo spettatore: "Digital media do not simply place us in front of a static text; they situate us inside a system that continually produces a dynamic object. In the words of N. Katherine Hayles: "We are the medium and the medium is us" (Ryan 2004, 329).

Atti iconici

Ulrich Schmitz, in un suo saggio del 2008 provocatoriamente intitolato *"Bildakte": How to Do Things with Pictures?*, ipotizza una possibile estensione della teoria degli atti linguistici anche alle immagini,[9] ridefinendoli *Bildakte*, "atti iconici". Sulla traccia di Sachs-Hombach introduce il concetto di "funzione illocutiva" delle immagini, una forza elementare legata alla loro proprietà indelessicale di raffigurare qualcosa (*Veranschaulichung*). L'elementare forza illocutiva dell'immagine consente al soggetto di raffigurarsi con l'immaginazione i singoli aspetti di oggetti reali o fittizi[10] e le relazioni concettuali che fra essi intercorrono; a differenza di quanto accadeva con i segni linguistici questo avviene però attraverso la visualizzazione dei tratti concettuali rilevanti in base al discorso e al contesto (Sachs-Hombach 2006, 189). I conglomerati di lingua e immagine non possono dunque che mantenere una forte dipendenza dal contesto o *Konbild* in cui vengono prodotti (Schmitz 2003, 257). Anche Horst Bredekamp (2015) si colloca sulla stessa linea, evidenziando come

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[8] "semiotisch integriertes Gesamtverstehen" (Hermanns, Holly 2007, 390).

[9] "Obviously, there are characteristic differences between words and pictures. In a pragmatic perspective, however, verbal and pictorial communication do function in much the same (or, to say the least, related) way. This is why Austin's and Searle's speech act theories can be applied to picture as well" (Schmitz 2008, 419).

[10] "Einzelne Aspekte realer oder fiktiver Gegenstande" (Schmitz 2008, 421).

sia stata proprio la ricerca pragmatica del linguaggio a fornire una traccia utile in riferimento all'atto ermeneutico di lettura delle immagini, che anche lui definisce atto iconico (*Bildakt*). Entrambi gli autori ricordano che il primo tentativo di fondare la teoria dell'atto iconico per analogia con l'atto linguistico si deve alle ricerche di Søren Kjørup (1978), che ha sostituito le parole di Austin con le immagini fondando la teoria dell'atto pittorico (definito in un primo tempo *pictorial speech act* poi *pictorial act*). Kjørup nella sua interpretazione ha sostituito le parole con le immagini quali strumenti attivi, soluzione ripresa da Bredekamp con la sua intuizione di mettere le immagini non sullo stesso piano delle parole, ma del parlante: "l'efficacia dell'atto iconico va intesa sul piano percettivo, del pensiero e del comportamento come qualcosa che scaturisce sia dalla forza dell'immagine stessa sia dalla reazione interattiva di colui che guarda, tocca, ascolta" (Bredekamp 2015, 36).

Nella prospettiva teorica dall'atto iconico possono essere inquadrate le "azioni politiche" dello *Zentrum für politische Schönheit.*[11] Attraverso una complessa attività ideativa plurilingue che alterna fasi programmatiche online di elevato valore artistico a *flash mob,* questo gruppo di artisti "crea" le notizie che vorrebbe leggere sulle prime pagine dei giornali, cercando in questo modo di far leva sulla dimensione etico-politica dei cittadini e conferendo dignità ai drammi sociali su cui l'attenzione del pubblico normalmente non converge. Con lo *ZPS* ci troviamo di fronte a un caso di riuscita ibridazione non solo di diverse strategie di comunicazione, ma anche di due domini: quello politico e quello estetico.
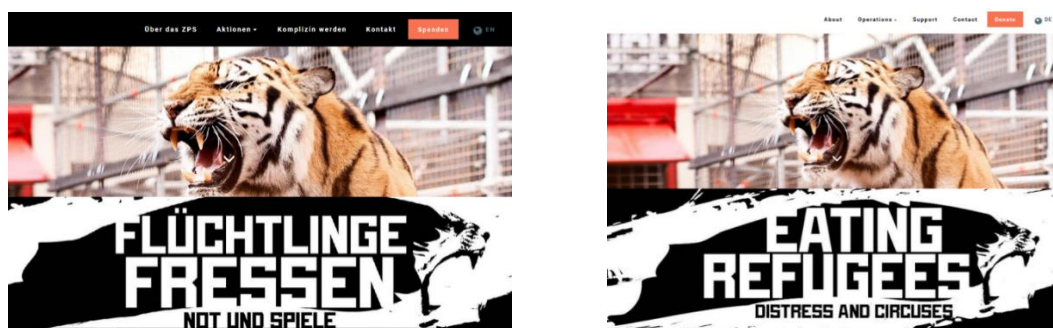
Fig. 9. *Zentrum für politische Schönheit,* azione: *Fluchtlinge Fressen. Not und Spiele (Eating Refugees. Distress and Circuses).*

L'azione *Fluchtlinge Fressen. Not und Spiele (Eating Refugees. Distress and Circuses.* Fig. 9) cerca di far convergere l'attenzione del pubblico sulle morti nel canale di Sicilia e ai confini dell'Europa meridionale. Lo slogan introduce una complessa operazione multimediale: il titolo dell'azione è una metafora di matrice culturale fortemente ancorata alle radici latine del mondo occidentale. Nell'estate del 2016 gli attivisti, dopo aver coinvolto il pubblico con un

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[11] Cfr.: http://politicalbeauty.com/index.html (29.03.2018).

sondaggio online in cui chiedevano ai loro follower di decidere se consentire ai rifugiati di giungere in Germania con un normale e sicuro viaggio aereo o invece condannarli al sacrificio, hanno provocatoriamente realizzato un'arena popolata da tigri libiche sotto la porta di Brandeburgo di Berlino dove simulare la "damnatio ad bestias" dei profughi.
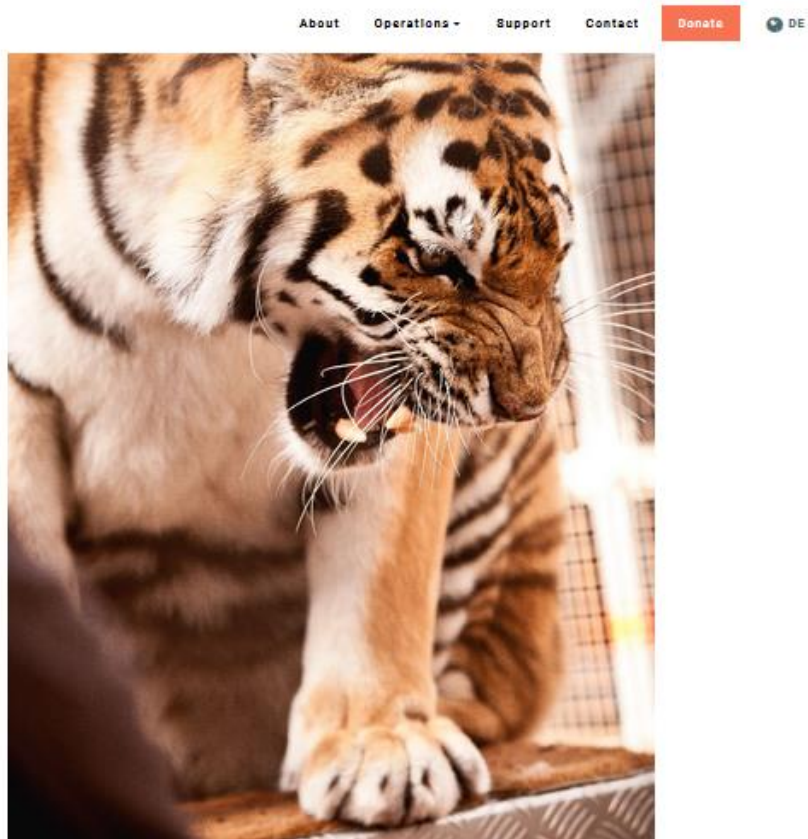
Fig. 10. *Eating Refugees. Distress and Circuses: Details of the arena.*[12]

Di particolare interesse è il testo in sovraimpressione sulla pagina dedicata all'azione intitolato *Details of the arena*: esso è infatti chiaramente ancorato dal deittico "hier" alle immagini che precedono e seguono nella sequenza dedicata all'azione *Fluchtlinge Fressen.* Oltre a creare un filo conduttore fra le immagini, il testo è incentrato sull'ambiguità della parola "arena" (Fig. 10). Sebbene in molte lingue sia un forestierismo, sul piano dell'intercomprensione la parola

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[12] http://politicalbeauty.com/eatingrefugees.html (29.03.2018).

risulta essere trasparente in inglese, tedesco, francese, spagnolo, russo. La sovrapposizione dei due significati della parola latina "arena" emerge qui chiaramente nel montaggio delle immagini, la sequenza delle foto presenti sulla pagina internet che fa sì che all'"arena dei gladiatori" del teatro si sovrapponga l'"arena della spiaggia" creando un effetto di *blending*.

Fig. 11. *Eating Refugees. Distress and Circuses: Details of the arena.*

La presenza delle immagini condiziona dunque la ricezione del testo scritto: gli elementi visuali determinano e restringono il campo di possibili inferenze facendo convergere l'attenzione del lettore sui due significati della parola "arena". Essi vengono anticipati attraverso le fotografie, la grafica e alcuni video[13] e in questo modo completano la corretta ricezione del testo che proprio sul termine "arena" costruisce la sua catena anaforica. In una costruzione complessa come una metafora entrano diversi elementi ognuno dei quali evoca un particolare spazio mentale, sovrapponendosi essi determinano un "blended third space" (Fauconnier 2001, 102), mediato in questo caso dalla parola "arena" a cui fa rimando anche il deittico "hier" presente nel testo. La ripresa anaforica non fa che rendere ancora più efficace il gioco di parole legato all'ambiguità del termine "arena" potenziando l'effetto della metafora in cui il mare sbrana come le tigri è il nucleo, già introdotto in apertura dell'azione con la sovrapposizione di immagini e slogan: *Eating Refugees. Distress and Circuses*. In entrambi i casi l'arena viene ripulita fra un evento e l'altro.

- Gladiatori nell'arena → vittime delle tigri → sotto gli occhi del pubblico
- Migranti sull'arena della spiaggia → vittime del mare → sotto gli occhi dell'EU

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[13] http://politicalbeauty.com/eatingrefugees.html (29.03.2018).

Conclusioni

Come evidenziano gli esempi analizzati, l'approccio ermeneutico dell'iconolinguistica risulta particolarmente funzionale alla comunicazione online. Nel caso della comunicazione digitale infatti l'effetto multimodale che nella comunicazione in presenza è lasciato a gesti, mimica, pragmatica, viene ottenuto sovrapponendo elementi di varia natura semica, capaci di restituire al lettore il *Konbild,* cioè i riferimenti al contesto e alla situazione di enunciazione che il materiale multimediale porta immancabilmente con sé, a cui accenna Schmitz (2003, 257).

Prima dell'avvento della cultura digitale citare la realtà era un procedimento complesso, molti elementi di cui questo tipo di intertestualità fa uso non erano infatti disponibili in tempo reale, non potevano essere richiamati estemporaneamente e l'operazione richiedeva competenze tecniche in alcuni casi anche molto raffinate. Oggi, attraverso la rete e i social, siamo ormai tutti perfettamente in grado di sottoporre alla visione di altre persone filmati che documentano fatti avvenuti nella realtà "in diretta" (Margrit Siever 2015). Nella dimensione tipica della comunicazione digitale le immagini e in generale tutte le citazioni grafiche, fotografiche, video, audio ecc. hanno acquisito un ruolo molto importante per la costruzione del significato, esse citano gli eventi del mondo reale in modo diretto nel testo ibridizzandosi e al tempo stesso facendo sì che il messaggio verbale diventi via via sempre più ellittico. In questa prospettiva vale dunque la pena di riflettere se la nuova dimensione ermeneutica nella quale siamo calati non implichi una più estesa ibridizzazione anche degli ambiti di ricerca ad essa pertinenti ed in particolare per quelli che si collocano sul confine fra parola e immagine.

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LETTURE

BORDERS OF THE VISIBLE

TERESA PRUDENTE

VIRGINIA WOOLF'S "IMAGEOGRAPHIE"
On New Paths in the Modernist Text-Image Interconnection

ABSTRACT: The complexity of the relationship between Modernism and the visual arts involves consideration of the key theoretical crux of how and to what extent images reproduce reality. The cinema in particular has exerted a strong influence on Modernist writers as the novelty of the medium, and the new possibilities it offered, could not but arise the interest of writers that were at work with new, experimental modalities of writing. Yet in Modernist writers, as it happens in major theoretical reflections on the 'representational' arts, the exploration of the relationship between images and words was a syncretic one, activating a dynamic interchange between words and pictorial, photographic and cinematic images (and narration). The review article starts from these premises to consider a recent work in the field, Adèle Cassigneul's *Voir, observer, penser. Virginia Woolf et la photo-cinématographie* (2018), which fills the gap of the less explored relationship between Modernism and photography while also proposing new aesthetic and poetic interpretative categories, such as Woolf's *photo-cinématographie* and *imageographie*.

KEYWORDS: Modernism, Virginia Woolf, Photography, Painting, Cinema, Theory of Art.

Modernism, Images and the Reality Effect

The Modernist experimentation indubitably offers key case studies in the inquiry on the relationship between texts and images. Three conceptual cruxes (at least) structure the inextricable connection linking words and "pictures" (widely intended) in Modernist texts: first, as it happens with many other epistemological revolutions, the way the mechanical inventions (the advancement in photography, the cinema) of the turning of the XX century have influenced Modernist writing; second, the way images are essential into the Modernist attempt at rendering consciousness; and third, the way Modernist writing in its employment of images touches upon the paramount issue of the mimetic, quasi or anti-mimetic nature of (recorded) images. These three elements are actually impossible to disentangle as they constantly interact and feed each other: the impact of the new means of mechanical reproduction of reality was so paramount for Modernist writers precisely because it suggested new modes of verbally depicting the processes of the mind, and the stimuli they derived from pictorial, photographic and cinematic images were in line with their focus on the redefinition of reality—and of the reality of consciousness. The dualism that has long dominated the view on Modernist writing, seeing it as an artistic form concentrated on (and possibly obsessed with) "an inward turn" (Kahler 1973) oblivious of "external reality" has

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been challenged, in the last decade, by more complex readings of the relationship between the mind and external reality. David Herman, for instance, has labelled the mentioned view as "a critical commonplace" (2011, 249) and underlined how "the upshot of modernist experimentation was not to plumb psychological depths, but to spread the mind abroad—to suggest that human psychology has the profile it does because of the extent to which it is interwoven with worldly circumstances. The mind does not reside within; instead it emerges through humans' dynamic interdependencies with the social and material environments they seek to navigate" (2011, 254). The key of this view, as Van Hulle remarks, is a less dichotomist notion of the cognitive dynamics between the mind and reality: "the image of the mind as an "inside", contrasted with an "outside", is based on a Cartesian model of the mind as an interior space, which is becoming increasingly implausible due to recent developments in cognitive science" (2012, 277).

It is not far fetching to understand the Modernist experimentation as intuitively, creatively, directed towards a notion of the mind, and its processes, that will be scientifically developed only decades later.[1] The Modernist exploration of the mind was not exclusively a psychological one, but it entailed the challenge to find new interchanges between language, perception and mental elaboration, so as to portray "reality" in the way (and in the moment) it becomes processed by the mind:

> Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness (Woolf 1993 [1925], 9).

> I try to give the unspoken, unacted thoughts of people in the way they occur (Joyce to Budgen, Budgen 1972, 92).

It is no surprise thus that images, and the means for their reproduction, had such a paramount impact on writers attempting at crystallising the manifold, protean content of the mind, and especially, as Ann Banfield (2000) has underlined for Woolf, those pre-verbal cognitive processes where senses and thought meet. Woolf, for instance, was explicit in her interest in images for their ability of rendering thought "visible without the help of words" (Woolf 1993 [1926], 57). Predictably, the new art of cinema was a major influence in light of its proposal of new ways of recording and representing reality: "the most fantastic contrasts could be flashed before us with a speed which the writer can only toil after in vain" (Woolf 1993 [1926], 58). Yet the implications of cinema were not limited to the rising of a technical medium capable of a more faithful reproduction of reality; on

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[1] It is one of the founding premises of the Cognitive Turn in the Humanities, which not only fosters the exploration of literary texts in light of cognitive theories but also sees artistic creation as capable of revealing the processes of the mind in an integrated way: "while many aspects of workaday mentation are primarily tied to either cognition or emotion or volition, the integrative experience exemplified by literary transaction overcomes the disadvantages of this type of mental specialization" (Hernadi 2002: 39).

the contrary, Woolf's reflections on the cinema focused, in a proto-cognitive fashion, on how the moving images, in their hyper-reality, rather displayed a

> Quality which does not belong to the simple photograph of real life. They have become not more beautiful, in the sense in which pictures are beautiful, but shall we call it (our vocabulary is miserably insufficient) more real, or real with a different reality from that which we perceive in daily life? (1993 [1926], 55).

By defining moving images as endowed with a "different reality", Woolf discloses her complex meditation on the dynamics between fiction and reality and fosters an interpretation of the concept of "representation" understood as aiming less at "reproducing" reality, but rather at "re-presencing" the different realities of the mind. In Woolf's view, the potentiality of the cinema was not connected to a more faithful adherence to (external) reality but rather to the proposal of new and more complex interchanges between reality and the mind, in the exploration of those creative borders that Deleuze will envisage in the relationship between cinema and thought: "the erasure of the unity between man and the world, in favour of a break which now leaves us only with a belief in this world" (81).

Significantly, such reflections were also present in early theorisations of the cinematic medium. As early as 1911, Ricciotto Canudo emphasized the striking novelty of the new art by underlining how the cinema represented "a new aesthetic function whence, in a most astonishing apotheosis, the *Plastic Art in Motion* will arise" (1988 [1911], 59). Going back to Lessing's classic division between spatial and temporal arts, and in accordance with his futurist view, Canudo theorized cinema's unprecedented ability to make these two categories interact by means of "a superb conciliation of the *Rhythms of Space* (the Plastic Arts) and the *Rhythms of Time* (Music and Poetry)," thus resulting into a "Painting and a Sculpture developing in Time" (1988 [1911], 59). Canudo's theorization, which opened the way to the acknowledgement of the cinema as an art, focused on those same issues which were to remain crucial in film theory and which clarify how the young art could not gain a specific status if not by facing confrontation and/or contrast with the existing arts. Canudo's emphasis on the potentialities of the new medium was not limited to its dynamic quality, but extended to how cinema offered, and was further to develop, "the extraordinary and striking faculty of representing *immateriality*" (1988 [1923], 301). This view emphasized how cinema was to be understood less as a "technical" medium capable of new and more sophisticated means of faithful reproduction of reality, but rather as a wholly new system of signs related more to the oneiric world than to 'reality'. This is also at the origin of that split in film theory which has remained a constant element over the 20th Century. Canudo's aim was to single out the specificities of cinematic language, and resorted, like Woolf, on the comparison between (moving) images and words:

> Cinema is reinaugurating the entire experience of writing—it is renewing writing. Essentially, it is a universal language, and not just by virtue of its visual and immediate expression of all human feelings...In its groping infancy, the cinema seeks its voices and words. It is bringing

us with all our acquired psychological complexity back to the great, true, primordial, synthetic language, prior even to confining literalness of sound. The moving image does not replace words, but rather becomes a new and powerful entity of its own. The screen, this single-paged book, as unique and infinite as life itself, permits the world—both internal and external—to be imprinted on its surface. (1988 [1911], 295-296).

The universal language of cinema was thus both a new form of expression and a "synthetic" language, one capable of allowing words, images, and movement to merge. Interestingly, despite the complexity of the evolution of the field of film theory, this early view, which insisted both on the autonomous quality of cinema and on its relationship with the other arts, has remained central. While Structuralism has offered invaluable tools to read the cinematic narrative (Chatman 1990) and Post-structuralism has widened the frame of examination by questioning the founding principle of representation and fruition, the debate emerged in the 1980s and 1990s has offered new views which show similarities to the theorization of early thinkers and directors such as Canudo, Münsterberg, Eisenstein. Perception itself has come into focus, first with Crary's analysis of the subject as an observer (1990 and 1999), and then with cognitively informed examinations, such as David Bordwell's (1989) analysis of how the audience interprets filmic narration and Nöel Carroll's (1988) rejection of the notion of the "impression of reality" arisen by the cinema. The ongoing debate has given rise to two directions of theorization: on one side, theories which re-affirm the essential fictionality of the world recreated by the visual arts (Wollheim 1980; Walton 1988) and, on the other, the rejection of such conception of illusion (John Hyman 1989, 2006).

The wide scope of the debate also reminds us how the issue of the mimetic/anti-mimetic qualities and potentialities of images is ultimately to be inquired by considering visual arts as a whole, as the line and dynamics connecting painting, photography and the cinema cannot be disregarded when dealing with the crux of the kind of reality images offer to the viewer. I have so far focused on cinema because it has been a major influence on the Modernist experimentation, as the novelty of the medium, and the new possibilities it offered, could not but arise the interest of, and influence, writers that were at work with new, experimental modalities of writing. Yet the synthetic nature of cinema underlined by Canudo is perfectly represented by how the Modernist reception of cinema incapsulated and allowed the merging not only of writing and moving images, but also of the different visual arts. Painting, photography and the cinema all converged into the way Modernist writing attempted at rendering consciousness visible and at recreating its processes via (often visual) words. Of the three arts, photography has been so far the least explored in its impact on Modernism, possibly because often seen only as a bridge connecting pictorial and cinematic images, a step in the mentioned technical 'refinement' of reproduction of reality. As said, though, the implications and the impact of the visual arts cannot be classified exclusively according to their "faithfulness" of reproduction, and more in-depth work is deserved to explore the role of photography in Modernist writing. A recent monograph (Hornby 2017) has proposed a significant advancement in the

field by analysing the dynamics of stillness and motion in Modernist prose (Proust, Joyce, Woolf) in connection with photography and cinema. More work is indubitably to follow, taking also into account how photography has often showed an interest in Modernist writers, not only, famously, in their iconic figures (the portraits of Woolf and Joyce by Man Ray and Gisèle Freund), but also in their writing, as in the case of Moholy-Nagy's "Vision in Motion" (1946), whose diagram offering a visual rendering of *Finnegans Wake* adds further elements to the transmedial nature of art.

Voir, Penser, Observer: On Woolf's *Photo-Cinématographie*

The syncretic view on the role of visual arts, and their impact on Modernist experimentation, is at the heart of a recent monograph that offers the original attempt at integrating painting, photography and cinema in a coherent yet dynamic reading of Woolf's writing. Adèle Cassigneul's *Voir, observer, penser, Virginia Woolf et la photo-cinématographie* (2018) proposes a poignant reconsideration of Woolf's writing in light of how images both influence and arise from Woolf's work. One of the most striking elements of the analysis is the proposal of new aesthetic and poetic categories, a theoretical re-thinking that is perfectly in line, and required by, Woolf's incessant creative innovation, but rarely attempted in critical works. The cooperation and interaction of photography and the cinema in Woolf's creative process give thus rise to Cassigneul's notion of *photo-cinématographie*, where the merging of the two arts, as the author explains in the introduction (11), does not imply disregarding their differences but, at the opposite, encapsulating their common ground as well as the dynamic tension between the two. Hybridity and (multiple) intermediality are the guiding concepts of Cassigneul's reading of Woolf's experimentation and, for this reason, the notion of *photo-cinématographie* results a fitting instrument to explore the many tensions active in Woolf's writing, not only those between image and text, but also the above-mentioned interchange between static and dynamic elements, time and space. Such a perspective allows indeed to operate a genuine transdisciplinary analysis, where the visual arts offer essential elements to better understand Woolf's experimentation but also, conversely, the writer's work allows to re-think the specificities and potentialities of the two arts, both separately and in their interaction. The key to this mutual exchange is a second new notion proposed by the book, that of Woolf's *imageographie*, which unifies all the varied iconic material constituting the rich background of the writer's engagement with the visual arts: not only the undeniable influence of Post-impressionism and early cinema, but also pictorial, photographic and cinematic works that have not yet been taken into account in relation to Woolf (14).

The cultural context of the writer's work is exhaustively explored, especially in the first chapter, by proposing a more complex view of Woolf's relationship with the Victorian heritage and, especially, its notion of realism. As anticipated,

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the Modernist writers' confrontation with the ideas of the real and realism is not to
be read exclusively as a rejection, but rather, as Cassigneul underlines, in terms of
dialogue and transformation (26). The Woolfian attempt at re-moulding the matter
of art so as to provide it with "the exact shape my brain holds" (Woolf 1977-1984,
IV, 53), as she wrote while working at *The Waves*, involves a magmatic
convergence of all the different stimuli. It is the solid yet "elastic net" (Woolf 1996
[1927], 41) traversing all her texts, from essays to novels, diaries, scrapbooks,
taking the shape of an invisible scaffolding where elements maintain their
dynamism while also being firmly connected, similar to the image Lily Briscoe
aims at recreating in her painting:

> Beautiful and bright it should be on the surface, feathery and evanescent, one colour melting
> into another like the colours on a butterfly's wing; but beneath the fabric must be clamped
> together with bolts of iron. It was to be a thing you could ruffle with your breath; and a thing
> you could not dislodge with a team of horses (Woolf 1996 [1927], 251).

It is a remarkable quality of Cassigneul's work to approach this vertiginous
vortex-like, nature of Woolf's thinking and creations—the *Granite & Rainbow* of
her poetics—by avoiding the analytical dissection that would disjoin the several
interacting patterns of the writer's constant engagement with thought and creation.
The first chapter of the book, especially, although articulated into a coherent
progression from pictorial to photographic and cinematic influences, offers an
extremely rich journey through Woolf's simultaneous reflections on and
experience with the three visual arts (including her typographic experience with
the Hogarth Press). The elements of Woolf's relationship with photography (50-
67) are particularly interesting, as they include not only Julia Cameron's influence
on the writer, but consideration of Woolf's own photographic activity and her
problematic attitude towards been photographed (and portrayed). Furthermore, the
presence of photographs as illustrations for Woolf's work is considered, especially
in relation to the significant case of *Orlando*, where, following the categories
proposed by Ryan, who interestingly employs as an example Julia Cameron's work
(2018, 39), fictional photos are provided for a fictional text. Here especially the
complexity of the relationship between writing and images becomes evident, as
the fictional photographic documentation of Orlando—staged pictures of the
actual inspiration for the novel, Vita Sackville West—activates a kaleidoscopic
effect which shows the complexity of Woolf's recombination of categories, not
only those of fiction and reality, but also those connected to temporal stratification
(298-300).

In this sense, the text offers an unprecedented wealth of documentation on
Woolf's relation with images, but is also able to turn this material into an original
hermeneutic tool: the writer's *imageographie* is actually, in Cassigneul's view, a
double faceted notion which refers not only to Woolf's iconic context and
background, but also to her modalities of viewing, observing and (cognitively) re-
elaborating images (and/into words). Thus, the *imageographie* comes also to
express the image-making quality of Woolf's writing. This is not just evoked by

Cassigneul but retraced via the analysis of passages from Woolf's works where the writing is traversed by images and images arise from the text (see, for instance, 230).

The same method, which moves from a careful retracing of the cultural context and consideration of the theoretical implications of the visual media to their role in the texts is employed in the following chapters. *Photo-cinématographie* is analysed especially in relation to Woolf's portrayal of the city, with focus also on less explored influences such as Vertov and Weine. The third chapter engages with the dense Deleuzian notion of the *image-temps* and Woolf's photo-albums are analysed as emblematic of the dialectics between instant and duration that she explores in her works. Finally, the fourth chapter resumes the previously examined hybrid and dynamic qualities of Woolf's writing and make them converge into consideration of the Woolfian notion of a hybrid, fluid gender identity. Here, the anti-dichotomist perspective that Cassigneul has kept in sight in examining the relation between words and images is applied to the negotiation between individual and society as well as, in Ricoeur's terms, subjectivity and alterity.

As it is evident, Cassigneul's monograph is an engaging reading, which challenges common places as well as simplifications on both Woolf's experimentation and, more in general, the way the visual arts interact with writing. The stimuli and the elements for the analysis are innumerable yet a solid theoretical background makes them coherently converge and allows readers to follow a pattern that keeps providing, in Woolfian fashion, different directions of thought while also remaining cohesively focused on a few guiding notions. Two main concepts, plasticity and complexity, help this cohesive design, as they provide the key aesthetic and philosophic cruxes around which reflection not only on the image-text connection, but also on the relation between the three visual arts can converge.

Recent works on the interchange between Modernist writing and the visual arts seem thus to pave the way to that interrelated exploration that I have mentioned at the beginning, not only by filling the present gap on Modernism and photography, but also by proposing new modalities and tools of investigation. The theoretical background proves essential to add substance to this new line of inquiry as it provides that fundamental meeting-point between cultural, rhetorical and philosophical analyses that Modernist text require in light of the complex background from which they emerged. Deleuze thinking on images, and the cinema, for instance, has remained a constant reference point to understand the experimental interaction of words and images in Modernist texts, as well as the work of Merleu-Ponty, Bachelard, Barthes, Arnheim. Possible new lines of investigation in the field may aim at bridging the gap between this essential, and invaluable, philosophical background, and the cognitive visual theory mentioned in the first part of this article. Significantly, both perspectives share a primary interest in the perceiving subject and his/her modalities of apprehension and mental re-elaboration and, contrary to what is possibly a rather common belief, cognitively informed analyses often refrain from offering definitive, "scientific",

explanation of perception and mental processes: on the contrary, especially if integrated with the quoted philosophical views, they may re-activate that fruitful tension between reality and unreality/imagination, and different modalities of artistic recreation which, as we have seen, stands at the heart of Modernist experimentation.

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LORENZO DEVILLA, RÉMY PORQUIER
VENDREDI PLURILINGUE[1]

ABSTRACT: *Robinson Crusoe*, published by Daniel Defoe in 1719, and its translations in many languages are interesting in three ways: the subject matter of the novel; the interactions between Robinson and Friday (one of the first literary instances of dialogues between individuals of different mother tongues); the way the translators deal with Friday's interlanguage. According to the respective target languages, the translators, who must represent oral interactions in a written form, meet with a double requirement of intelligibility and plausibility. The translator's choice depends on the specificities, morphosyntactic and phonographic, of the languages, along with the representations of such interactions. Based on the dialogues between Friday and Robinson, this article starts with an analysis of the Italian translation before comparing it with the French and Spanish translations.

KEYWORDS: Translation, Interlanguage, Imprinting.

> Si j'avais à imaginer un nouveau Robinson, je ne le placerais pas dans une île déserte, mais dans une ville de douze millions d'habitants dont il ne saurait déchiffrer ni la parole ni l'écriture : ce serait là, je crois, la forme moderne du mythe.[2]
> Roland Barthes

La notion de contact de langues, à travers ses divers développements théoriques depuis Weinreich (1953), intéresse à plusieurs titres la didactique des langues, l'acquisition des langues, la traduction et la littérature. Elle trouve une illustration spécifique en littérature, d'une part bien sûr par la traduction en diverses langues, mais aussi par la place que font certaines œuvres littéraires, dans leur contenu même, aux situations de contacts de langues entre locuteurs de langues différentes et à la mention de leurs échanges verbaux et paraverbaux.

De telles mentions, le *Robinson Crusoe* de Daniel Defoe fournit l'un des premiers échantillons, par la forme dialoguée des échanges entre Robinson et

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[1] Cet article est le fruit d'une étroite collaboration entre ses auteurs. Lorenzo Devilla a rédigé les parties "La traduction italienne" et "Vendredi italien"; Rémy Porquier a rédigé les parties "Sur quatre langues" et "Comparaisons avec les traductions française et espagnole". L'introduction, la conclusion et la bibliographie ont été rédigées par les deux auteurs.

[2] Cette citation renvoie au mythe de l'île déserte où se retrouveraient – dans l'île et dans le mythe – des locuteurs de langues différentes.

Vendredi, et par les commentaires de l'auteur sur cette situation d'interaction exolingue.

On étudie ici la façon dont est représenté le parler de Vendredi, à partir de la version d'origine de 1719 et dans sa traduction en italien, ainsi qu'en français et en espagnol. Sera d'abord examinée la traduction italienne, avant de la confronter aux traductions française et espagnole, de façon à montrer comment y est représenté le lecte « en langues romanes » de Vendredi et comment les traducteurs, comme initialement l'auteur, s'y trouvent confrontés à des critères de plausibilité et d'intelligibilité.

Cette double exigence d'intelligibilité et de plausibilité tient à plusieurs contraintes : V ne peut pas parler comme un natif, donc comme Robinson, son parler doit être typé comme tel, mais de façon relativement cohérente et intelligible.

Souvent, dans des œuvres de fiction, le parler reprend les stéréotypes de lecte associés à une langue maternelle particulière (le parler d'anglais, d'allemands,[3] etc.) ou à des stéréotypes neutres de parlers non natifs. Or V apparaît comme un locuteur alloglotte sans L1 identifiée (« no man's language », comme on parle de « no man's land »), et dont le parler ne peut donc être caractérisé que par des traits stéréotypiques neutres de locuteur non natif.

Si l'on consulte, en ce début de XXIe siècle, les informations disponibles sur les œuvres littéraires les plus traduites d'une langue à d'autres,[4] *Robinson Crusoe* y figure en bonne place. Ce roman de Daniel Defoe de 1719, traduit et lu depuis trois siècles, conjugue, pour son époque, plusieurs spécificités.

L'une consiste à imaginer, sans expérience personnelle de l'auteur, le séjour d'un être humain isolé dans une île déserte pendant près de trente années ; une autre à tenir le récit, en forme de journal, de cette expérience imaginée ; une autre encore à intégrer dans ce récit de fiction, une fois close la solitude, des dialogues au discours direct (comparables à des transcriptions d'enregistrements sonores de nos jours). S'y ajoute le fait qu'une part majeure de ces dialogues s'échange entre deux êtres humains n'ayant au départ en partage aucun idiome, et donc amenés à communiquer dans la langue de l'un, en anglais dans le texte original, langue maternelle pour Robinson, langue étrangère pour Vendredi. Un enjeu de ces interactions est, outre la représentation écrite d'échanges oraux, leur intelligibilité et leur plausibilité. Intelligibilité : que les paroles de V soient compréhensibles pour le lecteur, au besoin à l'aide de commentaires du narrateur ; plausibilité : que le parler de V, dont la L1 est inconnue du lecteur comme du narrateur, soit crédible comme parler non natif. Une systématicité relative est au moins un critère de plausibilité.

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[3] Voir par exemple Porquier 2002.

[4] Voir l'*Index translationum* de l'UNESCO. Voir aussi, sur diverses traductions de *Robinson Crusoe*, Barrada 1991, Stouff 2012 et Mounin 2016 [1955], 65-66. Aucun de ces textes n'évoque la traduction du parler de Vendredi.

La traduction italienne

On examinera d'abord, à rebours de l'histoire translinguistique du roman, la traduction italienne, la version lue par les italophones, pour la confronter à sa source, la version initiale en anglais.

On se place donc ici du point de vue de la réception en langue italienne d'un lecteur de *Robinson Crusoe* et de la façon dont celui-ci « lit », reçoit et perçoit – éventuellement entend – le parler de Vendredi, en l'occurrence locuteur non natif de l'italien, mais l'ayant appris à travers ses contacts avec Robinson.

L'édition italienne utilisée pour notre analyse est celle publiée en 1998 : *Le avventure di Robinson Crusoe* (a cura di Giuseppe Sertoli, trad. di Antonio Meo e Giuseppe Sertoli). Giuseppe Sertoli a travaillé sur divers auteurs de langue anglaise (Joseph Conrad, Samuel Johnson, Laurence Sterne, Daniel Defoe) et publié, sur *Robinson Crusoe*, *I due Robinson e altri saggi sulla letteratura inglese del Settecento* (2014). Il signe également, dans l'édition de 1998 précitée, « Introduzione a Le avventure di Robinson Crusoe » (V-XI). Antonio Meo, traducteur d'auteurs de langue anglaise (Sterne, Defoe, Emily Brontë, Swift), est également l'auteur d'une traduction antérieure de *Robinson Crusoe* (1963).[5]

Dans leur « Nota alla traduzione » (XLI -XLII), les deux traducteurs signalent que « la revisione della traduzione di Meo si è limitata a correggere qualche (rara) svista e a intervenire (meno raramente) sul lessico e sulla sintassi ». Aucune mention ne concerne le traitement du parler de Vendredi.

C'est sur le parler, le lecte, l'interlangue de V que porte d'abord notre analyse.

Le parler de Vendredi, par comparaison avec celui de Robinson, comporte plusieurs spécificités, correspondant à la systématicité, l'un des traits caractérisant, pour les chercheurs en acquisition des langues, les lectes d'apprenants de langue et de locuteurs non natifs (Klein 1992, Perdue 1993, et pour l'italien langue cible Giacalone Ramat 1992, 1993, 1995). Cela se caractérise par des régularités, repérables comme écarts par rapport à l'anglais parlé par Robinson dans les dialogues avec Vendredi. Cette systématicité n'est pas totale, comme il a été observé par ailleurs dans les travaux en ce domaine, et comme on le verra dans le corpus étudié. Il restera à savoir dans quelle mesure cet écart, entre systématicité et différences, est le fait du texte original ou de la traduction, ou bien sûr – et alors comment – des deux.

Rappelons ici les principales caractéristiques du lecte de Vendredi dans la version anglaise initiale (Porquier 2013) :

– verbe non fléchi (« my nation have no canoe », « there my nation take one, two, great thousand ») ;

– absence de copule (« the boat full of white mans ») ;

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[5] Autres traductions : Defoe 1953 (trad. par Bice Vettori) ; Defoe 1954 ; Defoe 1993 (éd. et trad. par Alberto Cavallari).

– négation réduite avec *no* ou *not* antéposé au verbe (« why God not kill the devil », « me no understand ») ;

– prédominance des formes fortes des pronoms (« me come to you ») ;

– absence de marquage et/ou marquage inapproprié du pluriel des noms (« you see English mans eat prisoner as well as savage mans »).

Vendredi en italien

Les régularités dans les écarts entre le parler de V et celui de R s'observent essentiellement dans la syntaxe et la morphologie, non dans le lexique. Celui-ci, relativement abondant, n'est affecté qu'au niveau morphologique. Ni les adjectifs ni les noms ne manifestent, dans la traduction italienne, d'''erreur'' de genre, fidèles en cela à la version anglaise d'origine, où le genre n'est marqué ni dans les adjectifs ni dans les noms.

Autour des dialogues apparaissent des commentaires ou des gloses du narrateur, visant à assurer l'intelligibilité des paroles de Vendredi[6] :

> V No, fare fratelli con loro, *cioè, secondo la mia interpretazione, avevano fatto una tregua.*[…] (206)
> V Essi non mangiare uomi ma quando fare guerra, *cioè a dire, non mangiano se non quegli uomini che li aggrediscono e vengono catturati in battaglia.* (206-207)
> V No, essi non uccidere me, essi volentieri imparare. *Voleva dire con queste parole che sarebbero stati desiderosi di imparare.* (208)
> V Si, si, desiderare essere tutt'e due là, non desiderare Venerdí là, e padrone non là. *In una parola, non pensava di andarci senza di me.* (209)
> V Oh prego! Oh prego! No sparare, me sparare poi, *voleva dire fra poco.* (271)

Uomi

Un trait morpholexical apparaît, dans le lecte de V, dans la récurrence de *uomi* (pour *uomini*)[7] :

> V No, no, Venerdí dire loro vivere bene; dire loro pregare Dio; dire loro mangiare pane di orzo, carne di bestia, latte, non mangiare ancora uomi. (209-210)
> V Tu fare molto grande bene, dice, tu insegnare uomi (210)
> V Oh padrone! Vedete uomi inglesi mangiare prigioniero come selvaggi (232)

d'ailleurs commentée à deux reprises par le narrateur :

> *Mi disse* […] *che essi avevano ucciso* «multi uomi», *così disse* […] (199)

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[6] Le narrateur se fait là truchement. Au traducteur, ces gloses servent d'aide, en quelque sorte à rebours, pour traduire les formulations lectales de V qu'elles interprètent et explicitent.

[7] Sauf dans un seul cas, dans le tout premier dialogue : P : « Bene, Venerdí, e che cosa fa il tuo popolo degli uomini che prende ? Li porta e se li mangia, come fanno questi ? », V : « Si, mio popolo mangia uomini anche ; mangia tutti » (198).

V Noi salvare uomi bianchi da annegare. *Al che gli domandai se c'erano degli uomi bianchi, come li aveva chiamati, nella barca.*
V Sí, *disse*, sí, barca piena uomi bianchi (206)

Vendredi "régularise'' là en quelque sorte un pluriel irrégulier de la langue italienne. Il s'agit d'un choix du traducteur, pour rendre en italien la forme *mans* (au lieu du pluriel irrégulier *men*) de l'anglais de Vendredi.

Absence de verbe copule ou auxiliaire

L'un des traits du lecte de V est l'absence fréquente de verbe copule ou auxiliaire (*essere* ou *avere*) :

P : Tu sei stato qui con loro ?
V : Sì, io stato qui. (198)
V : Sì, *disse*, sì, barca piena uomi bianchi (206)
V : No arrabbiato ! No arrabbiato (209)
V : Egli non molto forte, non molto potente come Diavolo?
P : Sì, Sì, *dico io*, Venerdì, Dio è più potente del diavolo; Dio è superiore al diavolo […]
V : Ma, *dice lui rimando*, se Dio molto forte, molte potente come diavolo, perché Dio non uccidere diavolo, così lui non fare più male? (202)

mais

 V Perché tu essere arrabbiato pazzo con Venerdì? Che cosa avere fatto me? (209)

ou même coexistence dans un même énoncé :

Bene, *dice Venerdì*, ma tu dire Dio essere così forte, così grande. Egli non molto forte, non molto potente come Diavolo 202

Ce dernier passage appelle quelques remarques : V utilise *essere* dans la première phrase, (« tu dire Dio essere cosí forte »), non dans la seconde (« egli non molto forte »), ni dans sa réplique à R qui lui a dit : « Dio è più potente del diavolo ; Dio è superiore al diavolo ».
Nous reviendrons plus loin (*frayage*) sur ce type d'observation.

Absence d'article

devant les substantifs
 V Essi fanno correre uno, due, tre, e me, e fanno andare nella canoa; mio popolo non avere canoa quella volta. (198)
 V se Dio molto forte, molte potente come diavolo, perché Dio non uccidere diavolo (202)
 V Me vedere barca come questa venire mio paese. (206)
 V Così noi uccidere orso in mio paese? (272)

devant les adjectifs possessifs :

V Mio popolo battere molto con tutto ciò (198)
V Me vedere barca come questa venire mio paese. (206)
V O gioia! *esclama.* O letizia! ecco, vedere mio paese, (207)

Négation (non/no)

Le cas de la négation est ici évoqué non comme exemple d'écart mais comme illustrant un aspect de la systématicité du lecte de V. Il utilise toujours en effet *non* en position préverbale et *no* comme forme holophrastique, tout comme dans le parler de R.

mio popolo non avere canoa quella volta. (198)
Egli non molto forte, non molto potente come Diavolo? (202)
Riservare, alla fine? Me non capire; ma perché non uccidere diavolo ora? perché non ucciderlo molto tempo fa? (202)
No, fare fratelli con loro (206)
No, no, Venerdì dire loro vivere bene; dire loro pregare Dio; dire loro mangiare pane di orzo, carne di bestia, latte, non mangiare ancora uomi. (208)
Sì, sì, desiderare essere tutt'e due là, non desiderare Venerdì là, e padrone non là (209)

Il ne reste en contre-exemples, comme occurrences de *no*, que :

no arrabbiato
V No arrabbiato! No arrabbiato! (209)

d'où est absent le verbe copule, et

no sparare
V No sparare, no sparare! Stare fermi, voi ridere molto. (270)
V No sparare, *risponde Venerdì*, no ancora; se me sparare orsa, me non uccidere (271)

où *sparare* a la valeur d'un impératif. On remarque, dans le dernier exemple, la co-occurrence de *no ancora*, où on peut voir une réplique de *no sparare* (= « no sparare ancora »), et de *non uccidere (*« me non uccidere »).

Formes d'adresse et pronoms

Sur la façon dont, dans les quatre versions, V et R s'autodésignent et s'interdésignent, on ne peut séparer les pronoms des formes d'adresse.
Dès le début des interactions, R appelle V *Vendredi* mais lui enjoint de l'appeler « maître » :

Poco dopo cominciai a parlargli, e a insegnargli a parlarmi; e, per prima cosa, gli feci capire che il suo nome sarebbe stato Venerdì, che era il giorno in cui gli avevo salvato la vita. Gli detti quel nome a ricordo della data. Ugualmente gli insegnai a dire «Padrone», e poi gli feci

sapere che doveva chiamarmi con quel nome. Gli insegnai ugualmente a dire «sì» e «no», e a capirne il significato (p. 190).[8]

Dès lors, ils se désigneront et s'interpelleront eux-mêmes ainsi, Vendredi se désignant lui-même par *Venerdí* (*Friday* en anglais) en plusieurs occasions :

Why you angry mad with Friday (221)	Perché tu <u>essere</u> arrabbiato pazzo con Venerdì ? (209)
What you send Friday away for? Take kill Friday, no send Friday away (222)	Perché vuoi mandare via Venerdì? Prendere, Uccidere Venerdì, non mandare via Venerdì. (210)

et s'adressant à plusieurs reprises à R par *Padrone* (*Master* en anglais) :

O Master! O Master! O sorrow! O grief! (226)	Oh padrone! Oh padrone! Oh dolore! Oh mare! (214)
Me die when you bid die, Master (227)	Me morire quando tu ordinare morire, padrone. (214)
wish be both there, no wish Friday there, no Master there (221)	desiderare essere tutt'e due là, non desiderare Venerdì là, e padrone non là (209)
Friday tell them not to live good, tell them to pray God (220)	Venerdì dire loro vivere bene ; dire loro pregare Dio (208)

Dès le premier dialogue, où interviennent les déictiques (pronoms) personnels, V utilise en pronom sujet de première personne la forme *me* (forme forte) dans diverses positions syntaxiques :

Essi molti più che mio popolo dove ero **me**; essi prendono uno, due, tre e me. Mio popolo strabatté loro in quel posto, dove non ero **me** (198)
Me vedere barca come questa venire mio paese. (206)
me molto felice essere in mio popolo (208)
No, essi non uccidere **me,** essi volentieri imparare. (208)
Perché tu essere arrabbiato pazzo con <u>Venerdí</u>? Che cosa avere fatto **me**? (209)
Lui mangiare **me**! mangiare **me**! […] **Me** mangiare lui; **me** farvi fare bella risata! (270)
Ah ! *ci grida Venerdí*, ora **voi** veder **me** insegnare orso a ballare (271)

avec seulement deux occurrences de *io* :

Sì, **io** stato qui. (198)
così tu**, io,** diavolo, tutti malvagi, tutti conservati per pentirci (202)

V s'adresse le plus souvent à R en *tu/te*[9] :

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[8] « En peu de temps, je commençai à lui parler et à lui apprendre à me parler. D'abord, je lui fis savoir que son nom serait Vendredi, c'était le jour où je lui avais sauvé la vie et je l'appelai ainsi en mémoire de ce jour. En même temps, je lui enseignai également à m'appeler "maître", à dire oui et non, et je lui appris ce que ces mots signifiaient ».

[9] Ainsi s'adresse-t-il aussi à l'ours, lors du combat avec l'animal : « Ascolta **tu**, ascolta **tu**, *dice Venerdí*, **me** parlare con **te** » (270) ; « Bene, bene, *dice Venerdí*, **tu** non venire piú avanti, **me** andare, **me** andare ; **tu** non venire da **me, me** venire da **te** » (271-272).

Bene, *dice Venerdì*, ma **tu** dire Dio essere così forte, così grande. (202)
così **tu,** io**,** diavolo, tutti malvagi, tutti conservati per pentirci (202)
me dire loro non mangiare **te**, **me** fare essi amare **te**. (208)
Perché **tu** essere arrabbiato pazzo con <u>Venerdì</u>? (209)
tu insegnare me bene, **tu** insegnare loro bene. (209-210)
Tu prendere, uccidere Venerdì (210)

avec un seul contre-exemple :

Oh padrone! **Voi** dar**mi** permesso! **Me** stringere mano con **lui** (270)

On voit ainsi comparativement comment se distribuent chez V et chez R les déictiques personnels et les formes d'adresse :

	R	V
désigné par R	*io*	*tu/te*
désigné par V	*Padrone, tu/te, (voi)*	*Venerdi, me, (io)*

Verbes à l'infinitif

L'un des traits les plus saillants du lecte de V s'observe dans la récurrence de l'infinitif dans les formes verbales :

V Sì, sì, noi sempre combattere meglio (198)
V Ma, *dice lui rimando*, se Dio molto forte, molte potente come diavolo, perché Dio non uccidere diavolo, così lui non fare più male? (202)
V Me vedere barca come questa venire mio paese. (206)
V No, no, *responde lui*, me dire loro non mangiare te, me fare essi amare te. (208)
V No, no, Venerdì dire loro vivere bene; dire loro pregare Dio; dire loro mangiare pane di orzo, carne di bestia, latte, non mangiare ancora uomi. (208)
V Tu fare molto grande bene, dice, tu insegnare uomi selvaggi essere buoni, tranquilli, docili; tu dire loro conoscere Dio, pregare Dio, e vivere nuova vita. (209)
V Si, si, desiderare essere tutt'e due là, non desiderare Venerdì là, e padrone non là (209)
V Bene, bene, *dice Venerdì*, tu non venire più avanti, me andare, me andare; tu non venire da me, me venire da te. (271)

Ce trait du lecte de V apparaît très régulier vu la diversité des référents-sujets (S1, S2, S3, P3), des diverses valeurs temporelles-modales et l'occurrence de doubles infinitifs (« me fare essi amare te », « desiderare essere tutt'e due là », « tu dire loro conoscere Dio »).

Mais on rencontre de rares contre-exemples (formes personnelles conjuguées) :

V : Tutte le creature dicono Oh a lui. (200)
P : Bene, Venerdì, e che cosa fa il tuo popolo degli uomini che prende ?
Li porta e se li mangia, come fanno questi?
V : Si, mio popolo mangia uomini anche; mangia tutti.
P : Dove li porta?

V : Vanno in altro luogo, dove credono.
P : Vengono qui?
V : Sì, sì, vengono qui; vanno anche in altro luogo.
P : Tu sei stato qui con loro?
V : Sì, io stato qui. (198)
V : Essi fanno correre uno, due, tre, e me, e fanno andare nella canoa (198)

Frayage interlocutoire

V tient forcément son lecte de ses interactions avec R et avec la langue de R. Si, au-delà des différences globales, l'on remarque maintes instances cotextuelles nettes de frayage de R → V, on n'en observe que deux inverses, où R parle comme V :

P Io andare! *esclamo io*, ma mi mangeranno se vado là. (208)
P Io andare là, Venerdì!, *gli dico*, che cosa ci faccio là ? (209-210)

dans des cotextes où V parle, comme presque toujours, « à l'infinitif ».

Sur quatre langues

On va maintenant rapprocher l'analyse précédente de celles faites auparavant sur les versions anglaise, française et espagnole. Pour les comparer, mais aussi pour voir comment les traducteurs ont géré cette contrainte, ou cet enjeu, de rendre le lecte de Vendredi intelligible et plausible dans des passages précis. Autrement dit, de traiter ces passages, en traducteurs, selon les spécificités des langues source et cibles.

Pour la commodité et la lisibilité des comparaisons, nous adoptons une présentation « dialingue » (Porquier 1998), à partir des tableaux « juxtacolonnaires » que nous avons établis pour le corpus considéré, dont voici un échantillon[10] :

anglais	français	espagnol	italien
me no understand	moi pas comprendre	yo no entender	me non capire
I do not understand	*je ne comprends pas*	*(yo) no entiendo*	*(io) non capisco*

La mise en contact des langues (anglais, français, espagnol, italien) opérée là matériellement par nous vise à rendre saillantes et lisibles les similitudes ou les différences de traduction, et/ou à faire apparaître des détails de traduction mis en évidence par cette co-présentation dialingue des occurrences de dialogue. On peut voir dans cette présentation une sorte de projection comparative de l'œuvre traduisante des auteurs respectifs des trois traductions.

Les trois langues romanes, de par leur proximité typologique, possèdent des traits communs qui les distinguent de l'anglais, et qui apparaissent dans le lecte

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[10] En italique, la forme correspondante normée de chacune des langues.

de Vendredi, comme par exemple la forme verbale de l'infinitif. Il s'agit de distinguer ce qui relève de la langue cible (à charge des choix du traducteur) et ce qui peut être considéré comme un archétype de lecte non natif (cet archétype étant marqué selon les traits typologiques de la langue cible, non de la langue source, puisque V n'a pas de L1 identifiée).

Comparaisons avec les traductions française et espagnole

Pour cette brève comparaison, nous retenons les traits examinés et analysés dans les versions anglaise (d'origine), française, espagnole et ici italienne :

L'absence d'article

Dans les quatre versions, l'absence d'article est globalement systématique, mais diversement appréciable selon le statut de l'article indéfini dans les diverses langues, et selon le statut des déterminants possessifs (article + possessif) en italien. C'est pris comme trait (possessif sans article) dans l'italien de V :

F So we kill bear in my country (289)	V Cosi noi uccidere orso in mio paese (271)	V Ainsi nous tue ours d dans ma contrée (190-191)	V Así matar oso en país mío. (252)

V : Mio popolo battere molto con tutto ciò (198)
V Me vedere barca come questa venire mio paese. (206)

L'absence de verbe copule

L'absence de verbe copule apparaît de façon partiellement homogène dans les quatre versions considérées :

the boat full of white mans (219)	barca piena uomi bianchi (206)	le bateau plein d'hommes blancs (217)	bote lleno todo de hombres blancos (193)
if God much strong (214)	si Dieu beaucoup plus fort (212)	se Dio molto forte (220)	si Dios mas fuerte (189)

Négation

Pour la négation, où sont marquées les différences entre l'anglais, le français et l'espagnol (l'anglais et le français ont, différemment, une double négation, l'espagnol non), l'italien sert ici de repère neutre, doté de deux formes *no/non*.

anglais	italien	français	espagnol
me no understand	me non capire	moi pas comprendre	yo no entender

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| *I **do not** understand* | *(io) **non** capisco* | *je **ne** comprends **pas*** | *(yo) **no** entiendo* |

La négation est ici un bon révélateur de la façon dont la structure spécifique de chaque langue conditionne la caractérisation du parler de Vendredi, et dont les traductions diffèrent à cet égard. La négation ayant une forme monosegmentale en italien (*non/no*) et en espagnol (*no*), le lecte de V ne manifeste là pas d'écart par rapport au parler de R. En anglais et en français, où la négation a le plus souvent une forme bisegmentale (*do not*, *ne pas*), le parler de V s'y trouve marqué de façons différentes, par *no/not* en anglais, par *non /(ne) pas* en français :

my nation have no canoe that time (210)	mio popolo non avere canoa quella volta. (198)	ma nation n'avoir pas canot cette fois (206)	Nación mía no tener entonces canoa (185)
why God not kill the devil so make him no more do wicked ? (215)	perché Dio non uccidere diavolo, così lui non fare più male? (202)	pourquoi Dieu pas tuer le diable pour faire lui non plus méchant ? (213)	¿porque Dios no destruye demonio y así este ya no puede hacer más daño? (189)
me no understand; but why not kill the Devil now ?(215)	Me non capire; ma perché non uccidere diavolo ora? fa? (202)	moi pas comprendre ; mais pourquoi non tuer le diable maintenant? (213)	Yo no entender eso. ¿Por qué no matar demonio ahora? (189)
they no eat mans but when make the war fight (219)	Essi non mangiare uomi ma quando fare guerra (206)	eux manger non hommes que quand la guerre fait battre (217)	Ellos no comer hombres sino cuando hacer pelea (193)
You no come farther? (288)	V Come, non venire più avanti? (271)	Toi pas venir plus loin ? (290)	¿Tú no venir más cerca? (251)

Pronoms et formes d'adresse

Dans les trois langues romanes, il fallait, au-delà de la fidélité en traduction des formes d'adresse, opter pour la traduction de *you*, selon la spécificité de la langue cible et la singularité, voulue intelligible et plausible, du lecte de Vendredi et de l'interaction entre Vendredi et Robinson.
En voici une synthèse :

anglais

	R	V
désigné par R	*I*	*you*
désigné par V	*Master, you*	*Friday, me*

italien

	R	V
désigné par R	*io*	*tu/te*
désigné par V	*Padrone, voi, tu/te*	*Venerdi, me, (io)*

français

	R	V
désigné par R	*je, moi*	*tu, te, vous*[11]
désigné par V	*Maître, vous*	*Vendredi, moi*

espagnol

	R	V
désigné par R	*yo*	*tú*
désigné par V	*amo, te*	*Viernes, me, yo*

Le cas de l'infinitif

La prédominance de l'infinitif dans le lecte de V, dans la traduction italienne, rejoint celle de cette forme verbale observée dans les traductions française et espagnole retenues.

Italien	Français	Espagnol
Sì, sì, noi sempre combattere meglio (198) V : Sì, sì, potere andare in due canoe (199) Me vedere barca come questa venire mio paese (206) me dire loro non mangiare te (208) tu dire loro conoscere Dio, pregare Dio, e vivere nuova vita (209) Bene, bene, *dice Venerdì*, tu non venire più avanti, me andare, me andare; tu non venire da me, me venire da te. (271)	Oui, oui, nous toujours se battre le meilleur (206) Oui, oui, pouvoir y aller dans deux canots (210) Moi voir pareil bateau ainsi venir au lieu à ma nation (217) moi faire eux non manger vous (219) vous leur enseigner connaître Dieu, prier Dieu et vivre nouvelle vie (221) Bien, bien ! *dit-il*, toi pas venir plus loin, moi aller, moi aller ; toi pas venir à moi, moi aller à toi. (290)	Sí, sí; nosotros siempre combatir los mejores (185) Sí, sí, yo poder ir en dos canoas (199) Yo ver bote igual venir a país mío. (192) yo hacer ellos no comerte (196) decirles conocer a Dios, rezar Señor, vivir nueva vida (196) Bueno, bueno. ¿Tú no querer venir? Entonces yo marchar. Tú no venir, yo ir. (252)

Une comparaison détaillée montre là les similitudes quasiment totales entre les traductions française, espagnole et italienne. Ces trois langues possèdent en commun, à la différence de l'anglais, une forme verbale morphologiquement spécifique d'infinitif et une grande diversité morphologique de formes verbales selon les personnes, les temps et les modes. Même si les trois langues n'ont pas exactement la même distribution morphologique de l'infinitif,[12] les traductions se rejoignent là pour marquer nettement[13] ce trait lectal du parler de Vendredi.

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[11] Une seule occurrence : R « Vendredi, que voulez-vous faire maintenant ? Pourquoi ne tirez-vous pas ? » (290).

[12] Trois formes en italien (*-are* , *- ere* , *-ire*), trois en espagnol (*-ar, -ir, -er*), six en français.

[13] Sur 30 verbes de chacune des trois langues.

L'homogénéité des traductions sur ce point n'est donc pas a priori surprenante mais soulève deux questions complémentaires : pourquoi ce trait lectal de l'infinitif a-t-il été choisi dès la traduction française de 1833[14] ? Pourquoi a-t-il été repris dans les traductions en italien et en espagnol ?

Soit il s'agit d'une caractéristique avérée d'un parler non natif, ce que ne corroborent pas les recherches récemment faites en ce domaine ; si la complexité morphologique des formes verbales (temps, personne, mode) dans leur réalisation orale pourrait expliquer le recours à (et la prégnance d') une forme invariable, cela ne correspond probablement pas à la réalité de l'exposition à l'oral dans ce type de situation exolingue. Mais on ne peut faire grief à Defoe ni aux traducteurs successifs, y compris les plus récents, de ne pas être au fait des recherches d'aujourd'hui sur l'acquisition des langues. Le français revêt là un statut particulier : à la différence de l'italien et de l'espagnol, il connaît des formes verbales homophones (*passer, passé, passez, passais* ; *fini, finis, finies, finies,* etc.) qui, faute d'une transcription phonétique possible dans un texte littéraire, obligent à choisir une transcription lisible et intelligible, au détriment éventuel de la plausibilité.

Soit il s'agit d'une ressource métalangagière, l'infinitif, en français, en italien et en espagnol, étant non seulement une forme invariable, mais aussi le baptême dictionnairique des verbes, en entrée, et leur dénomination métalinguistique : (« le verbe *aimer* », « *pouvoir* est un verbe irrégulier », « ne pas confondre *désirer* et *sidérer* », etc.). Ou bien il s'agit alors d'un stéréotype de parler non natif, illustré dans divers échantillons littéraires, dans des bandes dessinées (albums de Tintin et Milou) ou des films[15], ou dans des mentions inter-socio-linguistico-culturelles. On en trouve des exemples, pour le français, dans des dialogues entre sous-officiers français et soldats africains au début du XX$^{\text{e}}$ siècle[16] :

> […] les tirailleurs parlent avec leurs officiers leur variété de 'petit-nègre', le 'français-tirailleur', comme nous le montre par exemple le premier roman autobiographique africain (1926), d'un ancien tirailleur relatant la période de la Guerre de 1914-1918 :
> – Bakary, que fais-tu, dit-il enfin d'une voix aussi douce que la voix paternelle chargée de bienveillance.
> Je le regarde, je lui réponds :
> – Mon capitaine, moi content lire français, moi beaucoup content Français. […]
> – C'est bien, Bakary, moi content de toi ; toi connais lire France, toi bon garçon, bon soldat.
> Le capitaine Coste écrit lui-même sur le carnet : « La France » il me dit : « Voilà. Ça: l; ça: a; tout faire « la »; maintenant toi dire « La France », toi connais lire français.
> Je reprends le carnet en disant au capitaine :
> – Moi pas bien connaître dire français, mon capitaine, pas sur papier, mais connais lire

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[14] Et, même question, conservé dans les traductions françaises les plus récentes ?

[15] Du film *Robinson Crusoe*, de Luis Buñuel (1954), existent les versions espagnole, anglaise, française et italienne (*Le avventure di Robinson Crusoe,* visionnable sur https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0U3m4Uj5EM).

[16] Merci à Licia Reggiani de nous avoir communiqué ces références.

français dans cœur à toi. (Cité par Costantini 2008, 117).

Les traducteurs montreraient donc dans ce cas un penchant pour la réception du texte traduit, adaptant le texte de départ à la culture de la langue cible (sur ces aspects voir Devilla 2010).

Ou bien une autre explication, non contradictoire, est dans l'éventuelle influence les unes sur les autres des traductions successives : les traducteurs auraient-ils imité et/ou transposé les traits stéréotypiques des autres langues ? La traduction française ancienne (1833) de Petrus Borel aurait-elle été consultée, jusqu'à les influencer, par des traducteurs ultérieurs en d'autres langues romanes ? Un « frayage de traduction », en quelque sorte ? Revenons justement au frayage.

Frayage

Le frayage V → R est, d'une certaine manière, amorcé au tout début de leur premier dialogue du roman, où R répète la formulation lectale de V, procédé courant en dialogue, montrant par là qu'il la comprend, l'entérine et va y répondre :

F : Yes, yes, we always fight the better […].
M : You always fight the better, how came you to be taken prisoner then, Friday ? 210

Ce frayage est adéquatement reproduit par les traductions :

F : Yes, yes, we always fight the better […]. M : "You always fight the better, how came you to be taken prisoner then, Friday?" (210)	V : Sì, sì, noi sempre combattere meglio […]. P : Voi sempre combattere meglio. E come avviene che fosti preso prigioniero allora, Venerdì? (198)	V : Oui, oui, nous toujours se battre le meilleur […] M : Vous toujours se battre le meilleur ; d'où vient alors, Vendredi, que tu as été fait prisonnier ? (206)	V : Sí, sí ; nosotros siempre combatir los mejores. A : Si vosotros siempre luchar los mejores ¿por qué tú ser hecho prisionero, Viernes? (185)

et transposé dans le verbe à l'infinitif.
Les deux occurrences de frayage de R sur V, notées plus haut, sont identiquement traitées par l'infinitif dans les trois langues romanes :

I told him I would make a canoe for him. He told me he would go, if I would go with him. R "I go!" *says I.* (220-221)	*Je lui promis de lui faire un canot. Il me dit alors qu'il irait si j'allais avec lui.* R Moi partir avec toi ! *m'écriai- je.* (219)	*Prometí hacerle una canoa y el replicó que iría si yo le acompañaba.* A ¡Ir yo! – *exclamé* – (195-196)	*Gli dissi che gli avrei fatto una canoa. Mi rispose che sarebbe andato se io avessi voluto andare con lui.*

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			P Io andare! *esclamo io* (208)

"I go there, Friday!" says I. "What shall I do there?" […] (221-222)	R Moi aller avec toi, Vendredi ! m'écriai-je ; mais que ferais-je là ? (220-221)	R – Yo ir allí, Viernes – le dije – pero ¿que puedo hacer entre tu gente? (195)	P Io andare là, Venerdì !, gli dico, che cosa ci faccio là? (209-210)

On remarque alors que seule la traduction espagnole choisit, et seulement dans le premier long dialogue entre R et V, de faire parler longuement R à l'infinitif, comme V. De ce long passage dialogué, voici, en format dialingue, un bref extrait :

M : Well, Friday, and what does your nation do with the men they take? Do they carry them away, and eat them, as these did? F : Yes, my nation eat mans too, eat all up. M : Where do they go to carry them? V : Go to other place, where they think. M : Do they come hither? F: Yes, yes, they come hither; come other else place. M : Have you been with them ? (210)	M : Eh bien, Vendredi, que fait ta nation des hommes qu'elle prend ? les emmène-t-elle et les mange-t-elle aussi ? V : Oui, ma nation manger hommes aussi, manger tous. M : Où les mène-t-elle ? V : Aller à autre place où elle pense. M : Vient-elle ici ? V: Oui, oui ; elle venir ici, venir autre place. M : Es-tu venu ici avec vos gens ? (206)	A : ¿Qué hacer nación tuya con hombres que coge? ¿Llevar también lejos y comerlos igual que estos hacer aquí? V : Sí, también nación mía comer hombres, comerlos todos. A : ¿Donde nación tuya llevarlos? V : Otro lugar, no siempre mismo sitio. A : ¿Traer aquí también? V : Sí, sí, isla también; otras partes también. A :¿Tú venir aquí con nación tuya? (185)	P : Bene, Venerdì, e che cosa fa il tuo popolo degli uomini che prende? Li porta e se li mangia, come fanno questi? V : Sì, mio popolo mangia uomini anche; mangia tutti. P : Dove li porta? V : Vanno in altro luogo, dove credono. P : Vengono qui? V : Sì, sì, vengono qui; vanno anche in altro luogo. P : Tu sei stato qui con loro? (198)

La comparaison met là en évidence l'initiative du traducteur espagnol, qui paraît interprétable soit comme une inadvertance de traduction, soit comme un choix de traduction, comme si le traducteur avait choisi de mettre en scène langagière (en *foreigner talk*) la première interaction orale transcrite entre V et R, et d'y inscrire, de façon suggestive, une trace – un trait de la démarche exolingue de Robinson ? – de ce qu'avaient pu être leurs échanges initiaux – dont le roman ne porte pas mention, sauf dans de brèves évocations des progrès initiaux de Vendredi – et dont aucun écrivain d'alors n'aurait pu proposer de trace orale ou écrite lisible dans un roman.

Le tableau suivant montre les traits du lecte de Vendredi, leurs points communs et leur diversification selon les langues.

	Anglais	Italien	Français	Espagnol
verbe non fléchi	(+)	+	+	+
verbe à l'infinitif		+	+	+
absence de verbe copule ou auxiliaire	+	+	+	+
négation	+	(--)	+	--
prédominance formes fortes pronoms	+	(+)	+	--
marquage absent ou inapproprié	+	(+)	(-)	--
absence d'article	+	+	+	+

Conclusion(s)

On a pu voir comment, selon les différences et les spécificités typologiques des langues concernées, les traducteurs adaptent, et dans l'ensemble respectent (transposition à chaque fois) l'enjeu exolingue, où cohérence fait lien entre plausibilité et intelligibilité (il faut de la régularité, de la systématicité, pour que ce soit intelligible et plausible), impliquant une cohérence de traduction.

On voit là se configurer, dans le processus conjoint de l'auteur et des traducteurs, une représentation prototypique logo-culturelle de lecte alloglotte, modulée par les spécificités des langues cibles (langue cible pour V, langues cibles pour les traducteurs) et par le travail qu'y investissent les traducteurs. Et, à les comparer, les traductions s'éclairent l'une l'autre, jusqu'à éclairer le texte d'origine.

On aura noté que les observations sur le lecte de V, dans les différentes traductions considérées, tout comme dans le texte d'origine, portent essentiellement sur le syntagme nominal et sur le noyau verbal, non sur le lexique ni sur l'ensemble des structures syntaxiques. Cela incite à aller voir ce qu'il en est dans des traductions de *Robinson Crusoe* en des langues typologiquement différentes (turc, polonais, finnois, chinois, etc.), et aussi dans une langue assez proche, comme le roumain. La seule langue avec laquelle une comparaison s'avère là impossible est la langue maternelle de Vendredi…

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LEE HERRMANN

"BOTHERSOME FORMS, OF COURSE, WERE MECHANICALLY EXTERMINATED"

Colonialism, Science, Racial Dysgenia, and Extermination in the Work of H.P. Lovecraft, Intertextually and Beyond

ABSTRACT: The science-fiction writer H.P. Lovecraft is famed for his apocalyptic oeuvre. His work is deeply marked by racialist science and colonial history, linking them as structural constants that produce the outbreaks of horror in his stories. The horror is repeatedly represented as a dysgenic devolution with exterminatory implications. Yet similar treatments of racialized fear are commonly expressed in many non-fiction texts and biopolitical agendas, particularly in colonial contexts, and this conjunction also occurs in real events, including the historical apocalypse of the Holocaust. This paper will discuss Lovecraft's apocalyptic fiction as a structural elaboration of the consequences of colonialism, racism, and scientific rationalism that reveals, despite its fantastic irrationality, a fundamental truth about extermination and modernity.
KEYWORDS: Colonialism, Scientific Racism, Extermination, Eugenics, H.P. Lovecraft.

INTRODUCTION

The reader may be relieved to be informed immediately that the coolly genocidal sentiments quoted in this paper's title are not the product of a military diary or scientific report from Central Europe, circa 1942, but are taken from an American science-fiction story, published in 1936. The fictitious exterminations so referenced are thus wholly speculative. They were the price of the positive eugenic results achieved by the most advanced civilization ever to exist on Earth, a triumph of scientific rationalism: The alien race of colonizers whose highly-civilized intellectual and aesthetic pursuits required the development of a menial slave-force to free them from work must, perforce, exterminate some bothersome forms on the way, and such work would likely be done best mechanically, that is, scientifically. If such imaginary genocides, in the tale, are merely part of the backstory, pages of a history that has never been written, the reader may yet feel a certain disquiet at encountering mechanical mass murder taken for granted as the price of science and civilization, be it 1936 or 1942. The coincidence, then, of such a highly specific conceit appearing in both American pulp-fiction entertainment and the scientific plans for Nazi colonization of eastern territories, described by Goetz Aly and Susanne Heim as "the state directed mass extermination of human beings as a functional necessity for a long-term program

of social modernization," requires explanation. If, as Aly and Heim (2002 [1991], 2, 5-6) say, "behind all this lay certain conceptual models," such models should be accessible through an analysis of fiction that dramatizes social reality.

This short story or novella, "At the Mountains of Madness," was written by H.P. Lovecraft, the most popular of the authors who were published in the pulp magazine *Weird Tales* in the 1920s and 1930s, judged by his current cultural footprint and semi-canonization, although he remained quite obscure at the time. Posthumously his work has since been extensively and internationally reprinted and re-interpreted in several feature films, table-games, and graphic novels. He lived from 1890 to 1937, publishing pulp fiction mostly in the last quarter of his life. An amateur astronomer and a literary enthusiast, he produced and distributed, via hectography, his own works from the age of about ten, forerunners of what today are called 'zines. He wrote an astronomy column for the local newspaper and went on to produce a magazine in a network of self-publishers, serving as president of their organization. As an individual, he was an antiquarian and a scientist, a Romantic and a rationalist, highly erudite but a failed student. As an author, his work has ramified not only into other products but into a network of other stories and writers treating of what has come to be called his mythos. One recent work, *Providence*, from the graphic-novelist Alan Moore, dramatizes this very process of cultural efflorescence as if the author's ideas came literally to be reified, horrors come to life because the occult forces driving them were real (Moore, Burrows, 2017). As the excerpt in this paper's title shows, the concept has some merit.

Probably Lovecraft's most popular work, "At the Mountains of Madness" tells the tale of a scientific expedition to the Antarctic continent that discovers, behind a massive mountain range, the extinct remains of an ancient civilization of extra-terrestrials, a race living on earth hundreds of millions of years before human life. Advanced to that point in science fiction where technology becomes indistinguishable from magic, to paraphrase Arthur C. Clarke, the alien colonizers genetically engineered a subservient life-form, a slave-creature they created that did all the menial work and heavy lifting upon which their higher civilization rested. In the process, "bothersome forms, of course, were mechanically exterminated," including "a shambling primitive mammal, used sometimes for food and sometimes as an amusing buffoon... whose vaguely simian and human foreshadowings were unmistakable." By interpreting the art and monuments they discover, the explorers follow the history of this civilization: how it became decadent, devolving and retreating to underground Antarctic caverns, and how it was eventually overthrown by the revolt of the race of slaves it had created. It is these black protoplasmic organisms that destroy and consume all but the last survivors of the hubristic human scientific expedition (Lovecraft 1936). The survivors who narrate the story express the desire to end further exploration lest the resurrection of these and other eternal horrors provoke

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the apocalyptic destruction of humanity.

If the amusing and simian buffoon is likely a snide reference to what at the time would have been called the Negro—other such references being far from uncommon in Lovecraft—more subtle features of racist characterization can be found in the slave-race "shoggoths," described as black, foul-smelling, and capable only of imitation. Since it is in fact these racialized protoplasms that threaten the exploring scientists and the edifice of modernity itself, race is far from a surface element in this story, or for that matter in most of the author's work. To his weird fiction applies perfectly Franz Fanon's observation that "Racism is never a super-added element discovered by chance in the investigation of the cultural data... the cultural whole [is] deeply modified by the existence of racism" (Fanon in Young 1995, 91). In the case of the science-fiction author, the scientific construction of race as a natural law, its origins, and its consequences are often the building blocks of his imagined terrors.

The text of the tale is written very much in the language of academic scientific inquiry. Details abound of the equipment, experiments, and movements of the scientists, including co-ordinates of longitude and latitude, and this empirical framework upholds the extravagant discursions, from the stars down to Atlantean depths, which describe the evolution of the civilization of the "Elder Ones" and their slave "shoggoths." This way of structuring the text was a conscious aesthetic decision by the author to allow for the suspension of disbelief, and recurs throughout his work. At the same time, this story employs many tropes perhaps best known from the nordic racialist occultism of the Thule Society (Kershaw 1999, 113, 138-139), tropes evoked with utopian and elegiac sentiments by Lovecraft in an earlier poem, Nemesis, referring to the ancient era when "Man, yet untainted and happy, dwelt in bliss on his far arctic isle" (Lovecraft 1918). Yet these elements are not arrayed in manner of the triumphalist teleologies of a victorious higher civilization. Instead, things fall apart, are in fact violently torn apart and destroyed. Science, specifically a science of colonial power, leads not to progress but to horror and disintegration, and this contrarian telos is doubly marked in the text, effecting the end of the ancient alien civilization and the modern human scientific expedition. The program of social modernization collapses under its own weight.

One of Lovecraft's most repeated and structurally indispensable plot device features biologized racial degeneration that leads to personal, local, or possibly global doom, a degeneration depicted in the terms of the grotesquerie of pan-European scientific physiognomies and taxonomies of racial inferiority. His settings are settler-colonial and colonial, often working as plot devices in themselves such that trade, exploration, and settlement incite dysgenia, degeneration, or potential apocalypse; the *Heart of Darkness* scenario plays a repeated role in Lovecraft's oeuvre. As historical and intertextual contextualization will show, these concerns and scenarios were endemic in the

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period in which he lived, yet treated uniquely in his fiction.

His characters are frequently scientists and researchers and the language even of alchemical demonology is couched in a scientific framework. However, Lovecraft's protagonists, unlike Poe's Dupin or Chandler's Marlowe, do not use research and ratiocination to organize the facts and restore order, but rather they uncover occult science devoted to monstrous disorder. Comparison with the Third Reich is not idle when genocide may be casually regarded as the prerogative of advanced races, albeit not necessarily to the benefit of humanity, and the fear that is repeatedly dramatized in Lovecraft's science fiction is the same fear of zero-sum apocalyptic racial obliteration that Hitler's antisemitic speeches consistently project and threaten, and which provided the rhetorically "logical" legitimization for the Holocaust (Kershaw 1999, 563-564, and 2000, 150-153). This is why the author of fantastic fiction can prophesy a real racist apocalypse. This settler-colonial nexus of colonialism, science, extermination, and racialized dysgenic fantasy, whose individual elements construct the entitled quotation, is the central destabilizing force in Lovecraft's fiction.

DYSGENIA AND SCIENTIFIC RACISM

An early story was "The Lurking Fear," which appeared in 1923 in *Home Brew*, part of an amateur network of writers and low-print-run journals. The fear was, precisely, a racial degeneration through hybridity in a colonial setting. That setting is emphasized by a familial genealogy and a remote mansion dating back to "a New Amsterdam merchant" of 1670, where "Dutch civilisation once feebly and transiently penetrated." Rejecting "the English civilisation," however, the Martense family stagnates in the desolate American wilderness, "interbreeding" first with the "menial class" and then with the "mongrel population," who in turn are depicted through colonial tropes. Racially inferior, these "squatters" or, tellingly, "natives" are "simple animals... gently descending the evolutionary scale" who live a stereotype as "poor mongrels who sometimes leave their valleys to trade handwoven baskets for such primitive necessities as they cannot shoot, raise, or make." Shunned by all and with "an unclean animal aspect," over the course of a century and a half the colonial family degenerate into simian, burrowing anthropophagi identifiable by their ocular heterochromia, "a queer hereditary dissimilarity of eyes." Lovecraft depicts one as "a filthy whitish gorilla thing with sharp yellow fangs and matted fur. It was the ultimate product of mammalian degeneration; the frightful outcome of isolated spawning, multiplication, and cannibal nutrition..." The white beast, a scientistically metaphorical product of settler colonialism, feeds on the poor mongrels to a suggestive point: "great numbers of them had actually been killed and removed, just as the wild animals had been exterminated" (Lovecraft 1971 [1927], 13-15, 22).

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Another early tale, first appearing in the amateur journal *Wolverine* in 1921, "Facts Concerning the late Arthur Jermyn and His Family," also published in 1924 as "The White Ape" in *Weird Tales*, reaches similarly sinister conclusions. Its setting and plot is marked by colonial and relationships and racist fantasy: the lineage of the House of Jermyn is corrupted by an ancestor's mating with a white ape-princess while exploring the Congo, bequeathing sorrow and extinction to their progeny. The white apes were themselves hybrids, created when "the great apes had overrun the dying city" of the lost white tribe (Lovecraft 1999 [1924a], 14-23), which is to say that this element of colonial unease is doubly represented in the plot; readers' attention is directed to the results of colonial penetration.

Now, sex with apes could be called an interdisciplinary subgenre of colonial-imperialist Euro-American popular culture. The very appearance of the gorilla as an actual animal—its "discovery" by Europeans—is a result of colonial activity in Africa, and the scientist-explorer Paul Du Chaillu, the first European to see one, used the suggestion of interspecies sex to spice up his naturalist public lectures. The idea appeared as science in "The Orang-Outan Carrying Off a Negro Girl," the inner-cover illustration of a 1795 English edition of Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae*, an early text establishing racial hierarchy as natural law (Hund 2015, 50). As high art, the image was twice produced for the Paris Salon in first scandalous and then award-winning sculptures, "Gorilla Carrying Off a Negress" (1859) and "Gorilla Carrying Off a Woman" (1887), by Eugene Fremiet (Zgórniak, Kapera, Singer 2006, 219-237, and Gott, Weir 2013, 39-41). The suggestive conceit is probably most famous from cinema's 1933 *King Kong*, which was a favorite of Hitler's, who knew the film as King Kong and the White Woman (*King Kong und Die Weisse Frau*). In the film, one recalls, the concept was doubly present, not only in the white woman that was the object of the giant ape's desires, but in the native non-white women offered to him on Skull Island (Wallace, Cooper 1933).[1]

In "Arthur Jermyn," Lovecraft literalizes the results of this racist fantasy by describing the family's dysgenic degeneration, not without a certain parodic flair: One descendant meets his end when he goes ape and attacks a circus gorilla, with whom he was "singularly fascinated," by "bit[ing] fiendishly at its hairy throat" before the brute beats him to death. The story's great-great-great-grandson immolates himself upon discovering this racial history, and the Royal Anthropological Society itself hushes everything up, not least the facial resemblance between the mummified white ape-ess and the last of the Jermyns. Yet the racist taxonomy that drives the tale is undermined, as the double-hybridity suggests; the Jermyn funeral pyre is more dark omen than triumphal purification or guilty expiation: it is suggested at the beginning of the tale that this hybrid ape ancestry is ubiquitous, that "if we knew what we are," we would

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[1] Hitler's appreciation in Kershaw 1999, 485.

all burn ourselves to death (Lovecraft 1999 [1924a]).

The evidence for racial difference is scientific. Arthur Jermyn, the titular descendant, creates a "thrill of repulsion" in those who meet him on account of "his facial angle" and "the length of his arms" (*ibid.*). Facial angle was one of the measurable signs of racial inferiority, originally developed by Pieter Camper in the late eighteenth century and continuing through the work of Paul Broca, Josiah Nott, and Samuel Morton, the latter author of the extremely influential craniological treatises *Crania Aegyptiaca* and *Crania Americana*, wherein white mental superiority was scientifically demonstrated by skull measurements and visually documented by skull drawings. As Morton's titles demonstrate, this science itself is a colonial product. In fact, his experiments with the colonially-obtained skulls of Egypt "proved" that that racial dysgenia, a decline through hybridity, had doomed the originally white civilization of ancient Egypt.[2] The skull provides evidence of scientific racial knowledge in many Lovecraft stories, including "The Lurking Fear" and signally in "The Rats in the Walls," and it is noteworthy how the author highlights the institutional quality of such knowledge, here with a Royal Society (in other stories with Brown University and characters' frequent trips to real libraries), even as the institution conceals or obfuscates the truth. Science plays a dual role as an empirical foundation, but its pursuit and the knowledge thus obtained lead to the direst self-exterminatory ends.

Such tension drives "The Rats in the Walls," published in *Weird Tales* in 1924. This dysgenic nightmare represents a hypertrophied process of devolution in which the narrator himself degenerates into a cannibal, the process depicted through utterances in successively older languages that terminate in grunting, a clear fictional illustration of the concurrent academic hierarchies of race, language, and civilization. Though set in England, Lovecraft infuses American colonial history into the tale through the narrator's family history, detailed enough to include a Civil War scene of burning and destruction, which drives the last-of-his-line protagonist to put in order and occupy the ancient family seat of "Exham Priory." He brings with him a reminder of his past in a black cat named "Nigger-Man," who follows a sound like rats down to the entry to a gigantic crypt which is then explored. A scientific team assembles for this purpose, including a well-known archaeologist, an anthropologist, a psychic, and a military man. Like so many Samuel Mortons, craniology allows this story's fictional team of scientist investigators to identify and qualify a quantity of subhuman, ape-ling skeletal remains on the evolutionary scale, as "pithecanthropoid," "lower than the Piltdown man," or "slightly more human than a gorilla;" one batch of devolved "skeleton things must have descended as quadrupeds through the last twenty or more generations." Finding himself in an ancestral charnel house where his forebears had raised their own cannibal

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[2] See Fredrickson 1977, 77, and Kendi 2016, 179-180.

nutrition for consumption in ancient rites, the narrator degenerates backward linguistico-dysgenically, attacks and feeds on his associate, and ends up confined in a mental institution (Lovecraft 1999 [1924b], 104-108).[3]

Lovecraft's most involved treatment of racialized dysgenic devolution is the long story "The Shadow over Innsmouth." The theme is ichthyological, as the members of an isolated New England community are actually physically devolving into fish-things by following the tradition of the "Kanaky" Indians and mating with the "water-beasts." The processes of settler colonization are marked through historical and geneological research, and the narrator's interest is kindled through artifacts emerging from Innsmouth but originating from the hybrid biological rituals. Science warns of the dangers of half-castery when the local librarian displays "disgust at a community slipping far down the cultural scale" (Anglo-Saxondom on a descent into a slimy aquarium, perhaps), and the devolution is scientized as "changes in osseous factors as basic as the shape of the skull." The narrator must in the end cut short his investigation and flee the town, but the narrative winds down with him physically devolving into a queer foreign fish because of a hereditary pathogeny. One great-grandparent was the hybrid result of a Kanaky-mating: the narrator degenerates because he is an ichthyo-octaroon. Unusually, however, the narrator rejects suicide and begins to accept his situation. From the early sensation that "some frightful influence... was seeking gradually to drag me out of the sane world of wholesome life into unnameable abysses of blackness and alienage," he is moved to "feel queerly drawn toward the unknown sea-depths" and that "stupendous and unheard-of splendours await me below" in the civilization of the "Deep Ones." This sort of happy end is atypical of Lovecraft's tales, and it is not so happy as all that, for these Deep Ones, "someday, if they remembered, they would rise again for the tribute Great Cthulu craved," which is human sacrifice (Lovecraft 1999 [1936], 277, 282, 295-299). In Lovecraft's mythos, hybrid spawn bode ever ill; what the librarian laments, and what the Germans call *Verkanakerung* (see below) has the potential to unleash an apocalypse.

These stories feature dramatized versions of the racialized paranoia of the times, but beneath the ravaging ape-men and degenerated cannibals—themselves, usually threatening white women, a common cover motif for *Weird Tales* and other pulps—there is also a common structural continuity of narrative flow: colonial activity (i.e. taking artifacts and taking possession of land and property but also spawning, interbreeding, and "mongrelizing"), then scientific

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[3] Joshi speculates that Lovecraft may have been influenced in his linguistic representation of atavistic devolution by the Irwin Cobb story "The Unbroken Chain," passed to him by F. Belknap Long in 1923: "This tale deals with a Frenchman who has a small percentage of negroid [*sic*] blood from a slave brought to America in 1918. When he is run down by a train he cries out in an African Language—"Niama tumba!"—the words that his black ancestor shouted when he was attacked by a rhinoceros in Africa", *ibid.*, 381-382, 384 n33.

investigation and attainment of knowledge, leading to horror and destruction. The scientific rationalism is not merely a formal trope that recurs and drives the narrators and the narrative forward, it also functions within the texts to balance the extremity of the fantastic conceits and to ground the suspension of disbelief. The realia of texts and institutions, some truly real, like Margaret Murray's 1921 *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (an anthropological investigation proposing that European witchery arose from an underground-dwelling pre-Aryan race) and some truly false, like "the Necronomicon of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred" (which has subsequently been produced, postmodernistically, as if it were real), this metatextual intertextuality functions as does the camera-eye of Dos Passos, a modernist technique associated with realism (despite the fact that such modernist technique sometimes contrasts with Lovecraft's prose, which seems to look back nostalgically). Lovecraft's science-fiction uses science and realia to fulfill a referential function that establishes textual credibility, before the prose launches itself into speculative heights or abysses. The rational thus functionally empowers the irruption of the irrational and horrible, perhaps, it is suggested, even unto extermination.

RACE AND EXTERMINATION

Historically, exterminationist beliefs in the USA expressed themselves scientifically through the biopolitical exclusion of black Americans. The abolitionist minister Theodore Parker (1860) wrote a friend that African-Americans would simply die out in the face of the superior whites, a withering away of the race that Parker justified historically, in a shift of the Native American experience onto another colonially subjugated population (Fredrickson, 119-120, 157). A planter's wife on her plantation, or rather her husband's, confided to her diary that in the wake of emancipation, the "black" former slaves will end up being exterminated like vermin (in Litwack 1979, 11). US President Andrew Johnson explained to Frederick Douglass that allowing black Americans to vote would inevitably lead to a zero-sum race war in which one "race" could only be exterminated (Johnson 1992 [1866], 46). Most apocalyptically, there was the Memphis municipal judge in the white riot of 1866, exhorting the rampaging mob amidst the flames to "kill every damned one of the nigger race and burn up the cradle".[4]

One is high-culturally familiar with Joseph Conrad critically linking sanitary mass murder to colonial activity—"Exterminate all the brutes!" as Kurz would have it, in that character's epitaph to his "Report on the Suppression of Savage Customs." Lovecraft's 1927 "The Horror at Red Hook" replays the *Heart of Darkness* narrative in Brooklyn where not Marlow but Malone descends into the

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[4] See Rable 2007, 33-42; Waller 1984, 233-246.

darkness. Lovecraft invokes Conrad while scientizing and fantasizing the theme; the Red Hook neighborhood's "Syrian, Spanish, Italian, and negro [*sic*] element," a "babel of sound and filth," is viewed by the protagonist "with an anthropologist's shudder..." (even before his investigations uncover the "Yezidi" satanic cult, "Asian dregs" with "squat figures and characteristic squinting physiognomies"). Malone "united imagination with scientific knowledge, that modern people under lawless conditions tend uncannily to repeat the darkest instinctive patterns of primitive half-ape savagery." Scientific knowledge links the dark instinctive savagery to modernity and proposes modern solutions: Kurz proposed his final solution at the end of a report on how to civilize the natives. When the climax is precipitated by three children, "blue-eyed Norwegians," having been kidnapped and killed by "the unbelievable throng of mixed foreigners," the sacrifice of the Nordics provokes a police "clean-up," that is, a raid on an ethnic ghetto featuring mass arrests.[5] The notion of half-ape Italians and Spaniards may be refuted as racist fantasy by modern readers, but they will recognize the sad reality of police raids on ethnic ghettos as the modern savagery to which such notions lead.

Malone's police investigation leads to a white man, Robert Sudyam, who has descended among the teeming lower races and is orchestrating human sacrifice according to the rites of "dark religions antedating the Aryan world." Indeed, Malone discovers the classic antisemitic blood-libel: children are sacrificed to Lilith. Although the "unclassified slant-eyed" cult is a *mélange* of the non-Aryan, this essential opposition marks the tale—the Hebrew word *Adonai* appears in the story's central incantation—and one may read the "Arab with a hatefully negroid mouth," the "blear-eyed pockmarked youths," and the gamut of racist physiognomies as working for Jewish-demonic world domination in the classic paranoid antisemitic style of the police forgery *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. As in much of Lovecraft, the end of the investigation, in which a row of buildings collapse, killing many policemen, and the Kurz-figure Sudyam kills himself, is no end at all. Disorder continues, and the cult survives, "pushed on by blind laws of biology."[6]

The highly racist affect of this story seems to have been provoked by Lovecraft's own brief sojourn in New York. It was written after a period in which Lovecraft went south to the city for two years, construed by his most prominent academicizing exponent, S.T. Joshi, as well as other interpreters and authors, in the way Hitler represented his Vienna moment,[7] an association superficially marked by Joshi's infelicitous choice of words in declaring that these stories were the "*consequences of a world view* [italics in original]," the latter being a

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[5] Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles pulp detective Marlowe shows the popularity of this Conradian narrative telos; Lovecraft 1927.

[6] See Lovecraft 1927; Friedländer 1997, 76, 94-97.

[7] See Kershaw 1999, 61; Joshi and others in Woodward 2008.

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pet phrase of Hitler's to describe his antisemitic convictions. Lovecraft reacted negatively to what Joshi calls the "heterogenous megalopolis," to a point that the author described it thus in a private letter to fellow-scribe Frank Belknap Long:

> The organic things—Italo-Semitico-Mongoloid—inhabiting that awful cesspool could not by any stretch of the imagination be call'd human. They were monstrous and nebulous adumbrations of the pithecanthropoid and amoebal; vaguely molded from some stinking viscious slime of earth's corruption, and slithering and oozing in an on the filthy streets or in an out of windows and doorways in a fashion suggestive of nothing but infesting worms or deep-sea unnamabilities [*sic* throughout].[8]

A scene similarly metaphorizing this bio-politics of atavism can be found in Joseph Conrad's novel *The Secret Agent*, in which the Assistant Commissioner descends into the neighborhood of the "criminal classes," a "descent into a slimy aquarium" and "immoral atmosphere" which "assimilated him" into "but one more of the queer foreign fish" and gave him a sense "of evil freedom." The secret policeman finds himself "all alone in the jungle," searching not for Kurtz but for foreign radical socialists in 1907 London (Conrad 1963 [1907], 150-153).

Other Lovecraft scenes and stories follow the contours of a *Heart of Darkness* narrative. In "The Call of Cthulhu" the conceit is staged in the Louisiana bayou, where the police, accompanied by "the muffled beat of tom-toms," enter "black arcades of horror… substantially unknown and untraversed by white men." The "black morass," once penetrated, reveals a voodoo ritual where the "indescribable horde of human abnormality" do their chanting bonfire dance with "animalistic fury and orgiastic license" inside a circle of scaffolding hung with the bodies of their human sacrifices. The provenance of this death cult is explicitly colonial: the titular monster is an ancient god of the indigenous population of the South Pacific. The academic investigator follows clues of artifacts taken from them, only to discover that the intrusion has awakened and freed the god to doomful purpose, with apocalyptic implications for humanity. It is not merely the beating drums and voodoo that racialize the ritual: the cults are literally marked by the author as racially hybrid. In Louisiana, the "hybrid spawn were braying, bellowing, and writhing around a monstrous ring-shaped bonfire" while in the South Pacific our sturdy European traders find the "swarthy cult-fiends" are a "queer and evil-looking crew of Kanakas [*sic*] and half-castes." Of these latter, "there was some peculiarly abominable quality about them which made their destruction seem almost a duty," and indeed "they were forced to kill them all" (Lovecraft 1999 [1928], 139-169, 152, 161). This latter phrase and the action of the plot are precisely the suppression of savage customs requiring that one exterminate all the brutes. Yet at the same time, it is the killing of the natives and "half-castes" and the subsequent exploratory incursion of the sailors on the undiscovered island that releases the bloodthirsty god and brings his racially

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[8] Lovecraft to F. Belknap Long, 21 March 1924, and Joshi quoted in Hefner 2014: 657-658.

decadent death-cult to New Orleans.

The bodies hanging in the bayou are also an eerie reflection of that "strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees" (Allen 1939): the victims of lynching in the US South. This practice of enforcing the natural law of white supremacy publically enacted the torture and often the immolation of black Americans. Pieces of victims' bodies were frequently taken as souvenirs; W.E.B. Dubois saw the knuckles of Georgia's Sam Hose on display in a butcher shop window after Hose was spuriously accused of rape, captured, and then before a crowd of hundreds, tortured, castrated, and burned alive (Dray 202, 4-13). The South represented this ritualized violence, which Donald Matthews has explicitly compared to human sacrifice (Mattherw 2002: 20-47), as a defense against dysgenia, against the degradation of the integrity and power of the white race. South Carolina Senator Ben Tillman addressed Congress in 1900: "We of the South have never recognized the right of the negro to govern white men, and we never will. We have never believed him to be equal to the white man, and we will not submit to his gratifying his lust on our wives and daughters without lynching him" (Tillman 1900). Lovecraft accepted this representation, although his point of reference for its truth was fictional, Thomas Dixon's novel *The Clansman* and its stage adaptation.[9] Given Lovecraft's knowledge of lynching, and the racialization of the sacrificial rite, his gruesome fiction reflects, as through a glass darkly, a gruesome reality of settler-colonial power. While Tillman and Dixon wax triumphant through their celebration of ritualized murder, the author of weird tales inverts it, giving it a narrative form that represents the moral degradation of civilization through colonial activity.

This colonially-derived racialization and general narrative structure appears in works of non-fiction as well. Jack London applied the ethnographic techniques of anthropology to "a new class of urban savages," in his 1902 *The People of the Abyss.* Salvation Army founder "General" William Booth used it in his 1890 *In Darkest England, and the Way Out*, which both in title and in text aped Henry Morton Stanley's best-selling *In Darkest Africa*. Stanley describes colonial explorations in the Belgian Congo with an exterminationist bent, sometimes wiping out whole villages for sport, funded and published by American newspaperman James Gordon Bennett, who called Africans a "species of human vermin," bothersome forms, one might say, whose destruction was almost a duty. Booth invokes this narrative in a non-exterminationist description of the misery of England's working classes. Continuities are evident with Jacob Riis's photographic exposé *How the Other Half Lives*, wherein the subjects are depicted using naturalist and ethnographic imagery—the ethnically-defined neighborhoods of New York's Lower East Side, ghettos, were referred to as "colonies" at the time—and such self-consciously realist social observation, as

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[9] See Lovecraft 1976, 77; Freidman 1970, 60, 168.

Brooks Hefner has put it, "drew on nativist and racist thought that was widespread in the nation to stigmatize the urban poor as dangerous."[10] Riis's photographs, like Booth's *exposée*, were documentary illustrations that projected racialized inferiority onto their subjects in the name of progressive scientific reform, that is, a project of social modernization.

One sees in these discursive continuities how civilizing London or New York may require different conclusions from Kurz's and different methods from Stanley's, with regard to civilizing a fictional and the real Congo, while remaining responses to the same hypothetical problem. In Lovecraft's fiction, however, the investigations that explore this problem scientifically, be it in England, Louisiana, Brooklyn, the Catskills, Antarctica, or the South Pacific, lead implacably toward dysgenic degeneration, self-immolation, and apocalyptic threats to human life. As an author, Lovecraft emphasized that his work aimed toward and derived from an exceptional sensitivity to uncanny emotional perceptions (Lovecraft 1967, 141-142). One may suggest, given the war that began the year after his death, that he perceived and dramatized a certain reality about the intersection of colonialism, race, science, and western civilization: an uncanny truth of modernity.

NON-FICTION

Real horrors provoked by racist power would in the end render picayune the terrors of Lovecraft's apocalyptic fiction. The science of race, the fear of dysgenia, and exterminatory conceits communicate intertextually across various fields of activity. Direct comparisons between the European anti-Semitic gutter press, as well as more influential voices, reveal much of how Lovecraft expressed a highly particular version of Great Power racial obsessions. For that matter, from 1915-1923 Lovecraft wrote for and edited the 13 issues of his self-published journal *The Conservative*, wherein he opposed immigration, espoused militarism, and lamented German and English racial fratricide. With a print run in the low hundreds, it circulated in a web of amateur cultural journals. Sentiments like this would have sold well in interwar Vienna: "Tracing the career of the Teuton through medieval and modern history, we can find no possible excuse for denying his actual biological supremacy... his innate racial qualities have raised him to preeminence. There is no branch of modern civilisation that is not his making" (Lovecraft 2013, 17-18, 45).

Fact or fiction? Are texts like *Mein Kampf* and the *Protocols*, in fact, non-fiction? Consider the self-published Teutonic supremacist Jörg Lanz "von

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[10] See Hochschild 1999, 49-50, 98-99; Hefner 2014, 661; McLaughlin 2000, 21-23. An early non-white/urban-poor conflation is Engels' *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844*, published in English in 1887.

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Liebenfels" (the title being the "Aryan von," self-conferred membership in the world's racial aristocracy), idiosyncratic contributor to the interwar Viennese antisemitic scene. In his world-view, Jews were created by Adam and Eve engaging in bestiality with primates, and indeed "most of the world is in the likeness of the apes," dangerous "Sodom-Ape-lings" who "through their arts of love (*Liebeskünste*)... breed themselves to a higher level and us to a lower level." He also called for the "extirpation of the animal man and the development of the higher new-man," offering a succinct history of colonial imperialism in the New World, a dubious racial science, and a prophetic summary of Nazi colonial plans for the Wild East (Lanz in Vieler 1996, 148-150). Lanz's magazine *Ostara* was likely present in Hitler's reading matter but without specific influence, functioning perhaps as would a text like *King Kong*. Lanz published in a cheap, mass-distribution format like *Weird Tales* and other American pulp fiction, and in *Ostara*, there were similar "Predatory dark 'beast-men' who preyed on the 'blond' women with animal lust and bestial instincts that were corrupting and destroying mankind and its culture."[11] This imaginary "non-fictional" world is precisely that of Lovecraft's white ape-ess, devolutionary boneyard, and hybrid immigrant cult.

The strength of affect and scientism in Lovecraft's above-quoted epistolary denunciation of monstrous, pithecanthropoid, Italo-Semitico-Mongoloids prefigure the infamously antisemitic Nazi fellow-traveller Céline, with his "Bulgaro-Bastaves, Afro-Polacks," and "Sub-Hebraics." In Lovecraft's story "He," for example, by means of "half-breed" rites learned from the Indians, the narrator is shown a vision of the future where "swarming loathsomely on aerial galleries I saw the yellow, squint-eyed people of that city, robed horribly in orange and red, dancing insanely to the pounding of fevered kettle drums, and the clatter of obscene crotala..." This is the threat to white world-supremacy realized, the future after the passing of the white race: "the Chinese in Brest," in Céline's (1996 [1960], 2, 64) words (Lovecraft 1999 [1926], 124-125).

Céline might be summarizing this insistent point in Lovecraft's oeuvre when he declaims, "It's enough to make you scream... to shudder, if you have the least inkling of instinct left in your veins [...] They erupt from the depths of the ages, to terrify us, to draw us into miscegenation, [...] and, finally, into the Apocalypse!" (Céline in Mason 2010) Similar exaggerated affect is displayed by Thomas Carlyle, when he metaphorizes the loss of direct colonial political and economic control in Jamaica as a marriage between "Quashee" and English liberals that would produce offspring of "dark extensive moon-calves, unnameable abortions, wide-coiled monstrosities, such as the world has not seen hithertoo!" This characterization of apocalyptic miscegenation deftly serves to describe Lovecraft's demonic threats in general, even stylistically, as in Malone's

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[11] Lanz's text quoted by and described by Kershaw 1999, 50-51.

vision in the "mongrel" depths of Brooklyn, where "headless moon-calves bleated to the Magna Mater" in the crypt where children were sacrificed. Carlyle, not coincidentally, expounds in this text, "Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question," on the problems of colonial activity, science, race, and dysgenia. His science is economic: the counterforce to hybrid degeneration is the continuing production of "fruits spicy and commercial" (Carlyle 1901, 298).

Colonial slavery like that of Jamaica developed the material basis for modernity much as the corollary racist science previously touched on anchored the racial hierarchy to black inferiority. Even Céline's loose-cannon racism—Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish religions each and all trying to mongrelize the white race, for example—followed academic orthodoxy in putting black on the bottom. Lovecraft, for his part, considered the "Blacks" to be "fundamentally the biological inferior of all White and even Mongolian races" (Lovecraft 2013, 18). This specific hierarchy is in fact the referential support of Céline's anti-Semitic ranting; black inferiority is the basis of everything that is wrong with Jews. Céline lamented that Jews "negrified" Aryan culture to a "tom-tom beat," thanks to their "nigger blood." Note the tom-tom beat, clearly a popular mimetic code, operating synecdochally, like *Kanake*, in new contexts. "The nigger Jew is in the process of toppling over the Aryan in communism and robot art... The Jew is a nigger... The Jew is only the product of a cross between niggers and Asiatic barbarians" (Céline in Andrew 1996, 85). A visual analog to this nonsense is the "Black Jew" on the poster of the Nazi degenerate music exposition, where the specific features of black caricature in the depiction of hair, lips, and eyes represent Jews through the figure's emblazoned six-pointed star.[12] Not only the hybrid obsession but also the logical dependency of this relation reveal the origins of modern biopolitical antisemitism in New World colonial settlement and labor regimes. The East, as Hitler put it, would be the Mississippi of the Third Reich (Kershaw 2000, 434; see also Kakel 2011). In the event, however, the Nazi East resembled rather more Lovecraft's depictions of Exham Priory and degenerate death-cults than any modernist future of the Fuehrer's imagination.

Lovecraft's references to the Kanak of the South Pacific, whose imaginary rites would be transplanted to the New England coast, is another example of the broader representations of colonial racial supremacy, as Lovecraft employs one indigenous culture as a representation of the collective indigenous other. This process is explicit in the very use of the term "Indian," or the Nazi idea of "Jewdom." Of particular interest here is the fact that the Kanak specifically have served exactly this synecdochal purpose as a metaphoric "racial inferior" in the German language itself, as the English-derived words *Kannaker* or

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[12] The University of Virginia library attributes this term *Entartete* (degenerate) to Cesare Lombroso, that is, a physical process of degeneration caused by atavism discovered and confirmed through the scientific examination of skulls; see poster at: https://explore.lib.virginia.edu/exhibits/show/censored/walkthrough/entartete.

Kannakermann moved from referring to the specific peoples of the South Pacific to a general ethnic insult, *Kanake*, by 1900. At this point it was defined as synonymous with the anti-Slav and anti-Czech insult *Hanake*, both signifying a despicable, low (*niederträchtigen*) person. After World War II, *Kanake* was used to insult southern and eastern immigrants to Germany, especially Turks (some of whom have responded by re-appropriating the term for identity formation in a process mirroring the adoption of "nigga" by some African-American youth today). In 1920, the *Deutsches Kolonial-Lexicon* grew to reflect this obsession, listing *verkanakern* and *Verkanakerung* as meaning "the sinking of Whites down to the level of the natives."[13] The racial, economic, and social aspects of colonial labor regimes converge linguistically in the German language as they do narratively in Lovecraft's fiction. In a story like the "The Shadow over Innsmouth" one finds a dramatization of racial decline resulting from a literal *Verkanakerung* that demonstrates the depth of intertextual continuity in racialized discourse regimes across linguistic, cultural, and genre barriers.

RACE AND EUGENIC LEGISLATION

Though a work of fiction, the racist attitudes of "The Horror at Red Hook" are similar to those of the contemporary American political and scientific elite toward immigration, embodied in the exclusionary US Immigration Act of 1924, which severely limited entry to racially suspect ethnic groups. The story marks the biological threat in one way by the sheer profusion of specific racial and ethnic classifications in the text, more than in any other Lovecraft story, a veritable incantation of racially-inferior immigrant categories, "dregs wisely turned back by Ellis Island" (Lovecraft 1927). The lurking fear expressed itself in broader society, politically and scientifically, through dire prognostications of dygenic racial degeneration through the laws of biology.

A key figure in the politicization of racist science in the United States was Madison Grant, author of 1916's *The Passing of the Great Race: Or, The Racial Basis of European History*. This influential text was praised by Hitler as his bible, perhaps over-exhuberantly, but it passed contemporary scientific muster. Academic journals such as the *American Historical Review* and the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* gave positive reviews to *The Passing of the White Race*, intellectually validating sentiments like "the cross between any of the three European races and a Jew is a Jew" (Grant 1936, 18). In 1920 Grant's follower Lothrop Stoddard published *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy*, becoming a popular enough figure to be

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[13] Originally in English the term signified a certain exterminatory violence: "esp. one in Queensland as labourer on the sugar plantations" according to the OED; Gozturk 2010, 278-802.

referenced in *The Great Gatsby*. Grant played the doyen role on the executive committee of the Eugenics Records Office at the Cold Spring Harbor National Laboratory, which was later run by Grant's most influential associate, Harry Hamilton Laughlin, funded mostly by Wickliffe Draper and the Pioneer Fund. Political validation came from no less a political comer than Herbert Hoover, who sponsored a eugenics conference at the New York National History Museum in 1921 that was inspired by Grant's tome, the introduction to which was written by Henry Fairfield Osborn, the head of the museum and a leading anthropologist. Madison Grant and his closest followers were, in short, deeply integrated into political and academic circles in the United States.

Grant, working with Laughlin, also influenced national legislation like the 1924 Immigration Act and state legislation like the Virginia Racial Integrity Act of 1924. In fact, Laughlin wrote a model law upon which the latter statute and fourteen other state laws were based. Nor was Hitler's enthusiasm for American scientific racism the only connection to the Nazis. As early as 1921, Laughlin was helping publicize the foundational texts of Nazi race theory in private letters and scholarly publications like the *London Eugenics News*. Laughlin corresponded with the German "racial hygiene" promoters Alfred Ploetz and Fritz Lenz, first chair of "race-hygiene" at the University of Munich, and Laughlin and the German doctor, colonial skull-collector, involuntary-subject medical experimenter, and forced-sterilization enthusiast Eugen Fischer arranged to get each other's articles translated and published. Fischer's 1913 paper on the "problem of miscegenation" was the ideological basis for the Nuremberg Laws of 1935—the term itself is of American Civil War origin. When the Nazi forced sterilization law, the Law for the Prevention of Defective Progeny, was decreed in 1933, Laughlin printed it with praise in his *Eugenical News*; as Paul Lombardo has said, "positive publicity for the Nazi eugenics program filled the pages of his journal." In April 1934 he published papers by Frick ("German Population and Race Politics"), Fischer ("Eugenics in Germany"), and others ("German Sterilization Progress"). He also distributed, using the Pioneer Fund, the Nazi pro-euthanasia and antisemitic documentary *Erbkrank* (*The Hereditarily Diseased*) shown in US public high schools, among other venues (Lombardo 2002, 761-762).[14]

Laughlin also created the Committee to Study and to Report on the Best Practical Means of Cutting Off the Defective Germ Plasm in the American Population, with the goal "to purify the breeding stock of the race at all costs." The committee was a model of academic co-operation, chaired by the president of Stanford and influential scientists from Harvard, Yale, Princeton, the University of Chicago, and more. A French member was the surgeon Alexis Carrell, Nobel Prize recipient at the Rockefeller Institute, who declared in a 1935

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[14] On the origins of "miscegenation," see Frederickson, 171-175.

best-seller that criminals, the insane, and "those who have misled the public in important matters... should be humanely and economically disposed of in small euthanasic institutions supplied with proper gases." Capable of overfilling New York lecture halls to the point of 5,000 listeners, Carrell believed that a "High Council of Doctors" should be empowered to safeguard the rule of "the dominant white races" (Proctor 1988, 180). He echoed views expressed earlier in the United States by American Dr. William Duncan McKim, author of *Heredity and Human Progress* (1900): "The surest, the simplest, the kindest, and most humane means for preventing reproduction among those whom we deem unworthy is a gentle, painless death" (Allison 2011, 47). Laughlin sent an enthusiastic surrogate, Dr. Clarence Cambell, to read his contribution to the 1935 Berlin International Congress for the Scientific Investigation of Population Problems. The Honorary President and keynote speaker of this conference was the future war criminal, Frick, the President was Fischer, and other presenters were the luminaries of Nazi racial science. Cambell declared that "Germany has set a pattern which all other nations must follow" and closed his speech with a toast "to that great leader, Adolf Hitler," as *Time* magazine reported in a sympathetic tone. Cambell's own contribution to the conference included the conclusion that "the difference between the Jew and the Aryan is as unsurmountable [*sic*] as that between black and white" (Lombardo 2002, 773).

In the latter statement, one observes the logical derivation previously discussed. It may also help explain how Laughlin's views earned him the post of the US House of Representatives' expert adviser on the Committee of Immigration and Naturalization. Institutional ties between eliminationist and exterminationist racism run much more deeply and broadly than these indicative references; Pioneer-funded author Earnest Sevier Cox's *White America: The American Racial Problem as Seen in a Worldwide Perspective* (edited and promoted by Grant) was read on the Senate floor by Mississippi's Theodore Bilbo as part of a filibuster to stop an anti-lynching bill, and Bilbo had received funds from Pioneer for the development of a 1939 bill for the forced deportation of all black Americans to Africa—a "Madagascar plan," in so many words, like that to deport Jews which had been bandied about by the French, Poles, and Germans before and during World War II. More to the point, Laughlin's publications, agitation, and political power played a role in the US Supreme Court's 1927 decision declaring that forced sterilization was constitutional; their decision upheld the several involuntary sterilization laws for various states that he had formulated. These statutes in turn informed the text of the 1933 forced-sterilization Nazi Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring: in 1927 and 1933, National Socialism and American democracy were in complete legal accord with the eugenic principle that "to prevent our society from being swamped with incompetence," as wrote Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., "society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their

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kind." Likewise, in July 1941, beginning the escalation of *Einsatzengruppen* murders, Heinrich Himmler could order the elimination of the local population on grounds of their being "racially and humanly inferior."[15]

These very different political contexts, one democratic, for whites, and the other authoritarian, both institutionalized scientific schemes of social modernization based on the fear of "racial" degeneration, but one must observe that the Nazis went quite a bit farther in attempting to realize their exterminationist vision. Only, as it were, some 60,000 people were forcibly sterilized in the United States under state law—a figure, however, that excludes all the African-American women who were sterilized without their knowledge or consent during other medical procedures (Dorr 2006, 359-362).[16] The United States did not institutionally endorse exterminationist mass-murder, but rather eliminationist involuntary surgery, in defense of racist homogeny and white supremacy. More than statutory convergence, one focuses on the deeper narrative that defines the international teleology of racialized power. Scientific inquiry, based on colonial fruits, or rather skulls, demands its knowledge be applied. Academics, demagogues, bureaucrats, and doctors cite one another's discoveries to combat the lurking fear of racial dysgenia. The skull of the SS insignia can in this sense be seen as triumphal scientism on the march.

The Eugenics Records Office never expanded its authority like the SS, Harry Laughlin never went on to commit crimes against humanity, and Oliver Wendell Holmes was not Heinrich Himmler. Yet, even if historian Garland Allen is correct in asserting that "Germany had a far more active and virulent pro-Nordic and pro-Aryan tradition than most mainstream American eugenicists," and that American eugenics policy should be understood as part of the "origin of eugenics movements in a wide range of countries," (Allen 2004, 451- 452) surely such claims make it even more noteworthy that the United States was the source of both the legal statutes providing the model texts for Nazi Germany[17] and the warmest praise coming from politically-connected academics, as the Third Reich took the first steps toward the most apocalyptic racist extermination event in human history.

A LITERARY REFLECTION

In the May-July issues of 1941, the latter being the month in which Himmler began decisively escalating racist mass-murder in territory occupied by Germany,

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[15] See McDonald 2013, 381-382, 384; Yudell 2014, 94; Aly, Heim 2002 [1991], 141-142, 160-165; Longerich, 2012 [2008], 531.

[16] Involuntary sterilization continued in the United States well into the 1950s (Reilly 1987, 153-170). Native Americans were also involuntarily sterilized by the state (Lawrence 2000, 400-419).

[17] For further details see Whitman 2017.

H.P. Lovecraft's last new work was published posthumously in *Weird Tales*, "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward." In it he describes a necromantic league of alchemists, of American colonial origin but some gone back to Europe, whose scientific wizardry has progressed from self-empowerment to calling forth extra-dimensional demons who threaten the mental sanity and physical life of ordinary men. The lead antagonist, Joseph Curwen, who had threatened the community before only to be destroyed, comes back from defeat to take over his descendent and continue his experiments and human sacrifices. He corresponds with allies in Hungary, Romania, and Prague, sharing plans, techniques, and information, seeking power and knowledge, and scrupling at nothing. The hubris of Curwen defeats them, through the use of the cult's own knowledge, but the bestial forms of evil they have called out of unknown depths continue to lurk beneath the surface, ever hungry to feed (Lovecraft 1941 [1927]).

The coincidence in dates, events, and themes can only be meaningful in the acausal terms of Jungian synchronicity, since the tale was written around 1927, but the fictional and real death-cults in the story and in history have interesting parallels. The inspired alchemist, in the form of Paracelsus, was a subject of Nazi cinema, appropriating an image which, to quote film scholar Mark Rentschler quoting George Mosse, "had circulated within a larger apocalyptic tradition concerned with 'the abolition of time and the overcoming of death.'" Rentschler describes the film's climactic confrontation with Death: "Paracelsus confronts the double that obsesses and occupies him, both his enabler and his undoer..." (Rentschler 1996, 177, 189) Lovecraft's text begins by quoting Cotton Mather paraphrasing the seventeenth-century French alchemist Borellus (Pierre Borel) on the possibility of ritualized chemical necromancy through the "essential Saltes," which the Curwen character uses to arrest aging and gain a certain physical immortality. He will be undone by the same means that enable him, when the proper incantation from his own experiments reduces him to dust (Lovecraft 1941 [1927]).

In keeping with the other Lovecraft stories under discussion, the setting is profoundly colonial. Curwen, born in Salem in the late seventeenth century, has his first series of necromantic experiments interrupted when the Rhode Island community decides to put an end to them, and him, just before the American Revolution. He has built a business of trade, specifically the slave-trade, and depends upon chemicals and minerals available through colonial shipping, the "strange substances he brought from London and the Indies." The colonial period is the early history of this modern death cult, emphasized in the text by the archaic language of the antagonists that continues to mark their early-twentieth-century rituals and experiments. That history is thus both past and present, as the substance of the knowledge they have gained impinges on their collective high-modern machinations and comes to obsess the young Charles Ward (Lovecraft 1941 [1927]).

The shade of Cotton Mather speaks in the text both literally and figuratively, and Mather was no stranger to exterminationist warfare or juridically cataloged irruptions of the irrational. The native population to be destroyed in King Phillip's and King William's Wars were to his mind "horrid sorcerers, and hellish conjurers, and such as have conversed with demons." Conversely, during the Essex County witch trials, Mather supported the use of "spectral evidence," aural and visual hallucinations described by the witnesses who saw them: the creation of evidence in juridical and academic modes, based wholly on visions of the unreal, that is, conversing with demons (Slotkin 1973, 119, 132-141). Such doubling and double standards goes to the root of later fears of racial degeneration in that these early Indian wars of the late seventeenth century were the sites of massacres (particularly in the exterminatory Pequot Massacre) where Anglo-Dutch ferocity alienated their Indian allies, the hellish conjurors; as historian Jill Lepore writes, "colonists' fears of 'degenerating' into Indians had only been exacerbated by their own 'savage' conduct" (1998, 175).

Racism in the "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward is marked most importantly by the question of hybrid spawn; Curwen has as assistants, first in the eighteenth century, "a sullen pair of aged Narragansett Indians... the wife of a very repulsive cast of countenance, probably due to a mixture of negro blood," then in the twentieth he relies on an "evil Portuguese mulatto." The same relationship between rituals of death and racial hybridity that has been seen in other works appears here, although much more subtly, more as the dissonance that qualifies the chord than the central melodic theme. The evil, repulsive mulattos working for the antagonist have their mirror images in a married couple who help Charles Ward, and these are stereotypes of the moonlight-and-magnolias school, "old Asa and his stout wife Hannah" (Lovecraft 1941 [1927]). Loyal and servile they may be, but it is also through them that the portrait of Curwen is found, and the portrait marks the beginning of the physical and mental degeneration of Ward, a similar causal relationship to the activity of the cat "Nigger-Man" in "The Rats in the Walls." The dysgenic conceit is attenuated as a racialized phenomenon, yet the essential relationship is maintained. Curwen's servants are the only hybrid characters, and he is the only agent of devolution, which is provoked in his lineal descendent.

Extermination, in this text, is merely familial and local, in the sense that it is visited upon Charles Ward, who does not survive the resurrection of his past, but it also appears in that colonial past itself. Curwen imported slaves in order to feed them to the creatures he alchemically called forth. Surely one of the most bloodily direct representations of slavery and colonial power, Lovecraft offers a story of an individual's economic and familial growth that is based on human sacrifice. Mass-murder is the basis for the necromancers' edifice of knowledge as a historical and a historicized necessary condition for their twentieth-century blood-stained altar. Furthermore, their powers are obtained through the torture

and interrogation of those they bring into the living world and make their prisoners, and the whip, symbol of slavery, is the particular implement of that torture of the resurrected human captives. The prison-crypt imagined by Lovecraft is not the site of religious confession or expiated guilt but the site of extraction. Although the wizards are defeated, and the extractive economy of the past that empowers them comes to an end, Curwen has called up the demonic feeders again; at the end of the story it is implied that they remain imprisoned underground, so that racialized murder in the name of power is always a standing possibility, a legacy of colonial design.

Despite the occult trappings, the way the narrative expresses its thanatopic telos is marked by science, or scientism. Curwen's arrested aging is given a medical sheen by a doctor's physical examination which determines that "the process of metabolism had become retarded to a degree beyond precedent" (Lovecraft 1941 [1927]). The text then summarizes a debate on the psychological condition of the patient, rather academically. The process of raising the dead and the demonic turns out to be a highly precise alchemical procedure whose variations and incantations have been discovered through the shared investigations of the necromancers. The precise sites of graves and precisely who rests in them, which salts should be used together and with which linguistic rites, all these details of their experiments are given the reader, often through letters, textual correspondence. The use of the alchemical materials require orderly storage, labeling, and cataloging. This evidence forms an essential part of the narrative, one not merely expository: the data gleaned by Dr. Willett through investigating Curwen's laboratories, libraries, and sacrificial chamber, down to the specificity of a catalog number, empowers him to banish the leader of the scientific death wizards.

The irrational research of the antagonists is mirrored by the protagonists' own research in the rational world, at the (real) John Hay Library and in the use of a press-cutting service, for two examples, and in the titular character's archival investigation of his ancestor Curwen. The story is narrated with repeated references to the provenance of information in one source or another—both primary and secondary—as well as geographical precision and architectural *realia*, that give a juridical or academic text-linguistic quality to this work of science fiction. There are other doubles in the text, like the Curwen portrait that Charles Ward increasingly comes to resemble, Curwen's taking the place of Ward, and Willett's behavior in the crypt-cum-laboratory-cum-prison, where he enacts a ritual just as Curwen would, subconsciously impelled by the contents of the texts he has found. Their textual authority alone causes him to act, ignoring consequences that may well not benefit humanity. How different, then, are the alchemical wizards of Lovecraft's imagination from the eugenic academics gathered in conference, exchanging texts, citing one another, and supervising racist legislation with transparently exterminatory implications?

"The Case of Charles Dexter Ward" depicts the re-emergence of a colonial necromancy in the modern world whose most sinister imaginatory practices can be seen reflected in reality in World War II and the Holocaust, characterized by historian Ian Kershaw as "the Abyss," "Hell on Earth," and the "Bottomless Pit of Inhumanity" (2015, 295, 346, 356). The doubling and interchange characterize an irruption of the irrational, the horrific, that is empowered by rational historical, academic, and alchemical research, and that depends on the physical and intellectual rewards of colonial racism. In both history and Lovecraft's fiction, the gateway to this abyss was uncovered by colonial occupation, opened by science, and plunged through in order to combat degeneration, physical and metaphysical, based on fears of racialized dysgenia.

CONCLUSION

In these weird tales, juridical decrees, academic treatises, private speech, and political manifestos, modernist scientific materialism provides the vocabulary for understanding the world; seen as both a philosophy and a body of empirical knowledge, this concentrated intellectual capital legitimates racist distinctions and eliminationist, even exterminationist, violence. These distinctions are really only one distinction, that between the master race, which however defined is always a variation on colonially-derived whiteness, and everyone else. In science and Lovecraft's science-fiction, when that distinction blurs, the imagined result is the collapse of modern civilization. Miscegenation is construed as apocalypse, resulting from original sin, as in "Arthur Jermyn," or monstrous crime, as in "Red Hook." The same conclusions were reached by political powers and scientific experts on race. Lovecraft himself stated beliefs that were broadly congruent with them, yet his fiction also expressed the truth of where it would so shortly lead, a truth that seemed to elude such as Harry Laughlin.

The protagonists of the author's supernatural fiction face the same abstract conflict described by many historians in dealing with the reality of Nazi atrocities, a conflict between civilized modernity and horrible cruelty: the Holocaust was a plan for social modernization and thus was conceived as a triumph of scientific rationality. However, in Lovecraft's fiction, the conflict is not a moral contradiction. The progressive telos of modernity is reversed. Thanatos reigns. His own statements on writing weird fiction help explain this alchemy. "The function of creative fiction is merely to express and interpret events and sensations as they are, regardless of how they tend or what they prove—good or evil, attractive or repulsive, stimulating or depressing, with the author always acting as a vivid and detached chronicler rather than as a teacher, sympathizer, or vendor of opinion... fundamentally either adverse or indifferent to to the tastes and traditional outward sentiments of mankind, and to the health, sanity, and normal expansive welfare of the species." He sought to produce fear

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through "a malign and particular suspension or defeat of [the] fixed laws of Nature." One has seen how the age and the author determined natural law through race and scientific rationalism, but Lovecraft wished to suspend their juridical reign over his imagination, even as his stories structurally represented the realities of his age in colonialism, race, and science. Consciously stripping away the certainties of a triumphant rationalist modernity, the events and sensations produced by those structural realities were consistently imagined as "a hideous cloud over mankind's very destiny" (Lovecraft 1967, 144, 157, 175). The literary mirror produced a truthful distortion. In the fictions of nightmare science and the science of horrific fiction, the apocalypse arrives when racial distinction is breached and white supremacy is eroded; in the real world, humankind unleashed an apocalypse of mass death when racist distinctions were upheld and white supremacy was enforced. H.P. Lovecraft's stories dramatize the real fruits of the branches of white-supremacist thought: the apocalyptic insanity of the most advanced civilization and the moral failure of rational scientific materialism.

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