

FESTIVALS AND THE TIME OF MEMORY

EDITORIAL

The current and the next issues of “Spazio Filosofico”, both devoted to *Festival* (*Festival I* and *II* respectively), are dedicated to Ugo Perone on the occasion of his 70th birthday. Perone’s friends and colleagues have chosen to celebrate his birthday in a philosophical way, namely, with a reflection on the concept of festival/holiday [*fiesta*] and its meaning for us today. Thrifty spirits might object that a journal issue is like a gift – one is enough. Are these not times of economic crisis? There is no real festival, however, without a *Zugabe*: without an addition, an encore, or a supplement. Hence, two issues, both devoted to a single concept.

The choice of the theme has not been accidental – the concept of “festival/holiday” plays in fact an important role in Perone’s thought. In an essay that is often quoted in various contributions to the two issues, Perone understands the pair of concepts “ultimate/penultimate,” which has been discussed by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in terms of “holidays/everydayness.”¹ For Bonhoeffer, God is present not where human abilities fail but rather “at the center of the village.” Likewise, for Perone, the square, which is the “symbol for the holiday time,”² is the center of town. It is even, “at the same time, the center of town and its interruption.”³

The interruption that is here introduced is indeed radical. Precisely because of its radicalness, it is however void of all nihilistic and fundamentalist features: “It does not destroy reality but rather interrupts its closed conclusiveness and opens up an unexpected depth for it.”⁴ As centers of reality, holidays constitute something like the form of reality; they represent what, in reality, is truly real (the reality of the real).

Perone adds that for this reason, memory is always intentioned to holidays: “In memory, we always recall that which is festive [...], we remember that which is worth staying.”⁵

Let us think of a concrete festival, for example, a wedding festival. In some sense, such a festival changes nothing in the life of the newlyweds. The reciprocal self-entrustment, which joins the two in marriage, is not something that happens in a day. It is born in a story and is tested in the story. The day of the wedding is simply an instant in such a story; yet, it is an instant that, for a moment, interrupts the story. For Perone, the interruption has a profound meaning – it is the newlyweds’ courageous attempt at

¹ U. PERONE, *Ambivalenza della quotidianità* [*The Ambivalence of Everydayness*], in “Annuario Filosofico”, 5 (1989), p. 142.

² *Ibidem*, p. 143.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 143.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 144.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 145.

considering the experience of mutual love and commitment as so strong and important to deserve celebration in front of everyone.

This interrupted everydayness is precisely what Perone would perhaps call “a possible present.” The intertwining of different ways ultimately represents the sequence of existential meanings, each of which is sufficient on its own. The interruption of meanings is geared not toward their elimination but rather toward the selection of what is worth staying. It is the painful discrimination between what stays and what, on the opposite, needs to be handed over to forgetfulness.

Interruption discloses the essence because “essence” is the philosophical name for what has been (the *Ge-wesen*), for the object of memory constituted by reality, and for the present itself in its irrevocable and essential aspects for us, in front of others and society.

It might appear as a provocation that Perone chooses to think of festivals and holidays within the context of a reflection on the ambiguity of everydayness. One could object that, like the good, festivals are exactly the place where all ambiguities are suspended, the site of a purity void of all ambivalence.

Phenomenological inaccuracy of such an objection aside (we could just think of the ambivalence of feelings that we all experience during a holiday to realize that there is ambiguity even and perhaps mainly in holidays), Perone’s strategy seems to be not a contraposition of ambiguity and holidays but rather a distinction, within everydayness, of good and bad ambiguity.

Briefly, “whether we experience the ambiguity contained in everydayness as revelatory multidimensionality or masking duplicity”⁶ depends on the relation we establish with holidays. According to Perone, the interruption of the ambiguity is not its termination but rather its polarization, that is, the distinction between ambiguity (everydayness, modernity, etc.) without hope and ambiguity full of hopes. The multidimensionality of reality is, ultimately, the happy version of what elsewhere and at other times we painfully experience as contradiction, labyrinthine lack of outcomes, and defective ambiguity.

When everydayness is interrupted, it is still everydayness, tiring and twisted as we all know it, and distant from the origin. It “moves away from the holiday”⁷ like the roads from the square. The square, which interrupts the roads, seems however to be there in order to remind us that in this path, at least something bears the name “essence” and is worth staying. The extreme resistance on behalf of such a fragment of being is the work of memory. Every holiday or festival is, ultimately, a memorial.

Ugo Perone’s Students

(Translated from Italian by Silvia Benso)

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 147.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 145.