

INTRODUCTION IN TEN RANDOM PARAGRAPHS

1.

When he came to me for the first time, on a recommendation from a mutual friend, he was just eighteen. And I didn't realize it.

2.

The first work of his chosen for a project of mine was a diptych. One of the two images it included was a self-portrait (*Autoritratto*, 1999): the visage, squashed from the top border of the frame on what seemed to be a large cushion, looked at the camera. The gaze had the intensity of a capture: more than just looking, it seemed to be seeking, offering itself, the gaze of the "other." The second image was that of his hand (*La mia mano*, 1999) as it pushed the shutter button. The "other," then, was first and foremost he himself. I used the diptych as the announcement and invitation for an exhibition entitled *Finale di partita*. *Endgame*. *Fin de partie*, d'après Samuel Beckett, but with other implications: a de facto *redde rationem* of Western art at the end of the second millennium.

3.

Giovanni Ozzola's art is an iconic art – photographs and video-installations – from which all narrative is erased. Thus, an apparent contradiction in terms. If an icon doesn't narrate, what does it do?

4.

Ozzola's horizon is the visible world (*Sichtbare Welt*). Where few events occur, but those that do are the few fundamental ones: dawns, sunsets, mornings, the light that alters the profile of things, water and earth, plants, interiors and exteriors. What we have, then, is an unfurling of images.

The variations of the atmosphere, like the variations of light, become moments of an adventure suspended on the ample rhythms of an existence in which everything opens up to possibility. The

possibility of a serendipitous experience, not so much brimming over as dilated, expanded beyond the cell of the I, diluted in the diaphanous or invasive light of that which offers itself to our sight. The I stays still; immobile, it occupies its own point of vision and, instead of concealing itself within it, tends to dilute itself, finally allowing itself to be absorbed by what it looks at. The gaze dissolves into the vision. [bodies that immerse themselves into a sea greater than their silences]

5.

While (the book, this book) opens in a green room (Camera verde, 2003) – in the morning, the freshness of mornings after the stifling heat of nights, that comes before they vanish and deliver us up, unprepared, to the brightness of day; green -- a result of the blending of glaucous, more than of azure, with hyaline, more than yellow -- is enclosed in the roseate light – the rose of roses printed on the taffeta quilting – which envelops and overflows an out-of-focus armchair (Poltrona, 2003): the late afternoon light of a summer the heat of which is mitigated by the calm atmosphere of an interior. What stories do images delivered in this way divulge, and of what other stories are they a quiet memory?
[they bloom in silence]

6.

The voyage neither begins nor ends. We are inside it. Resting. On a boat moving “into the dazzling light” of another day beginning, or dying away. We become indistinct in the great light, and no longer alone.

7.

A gallery of images that manifest themselves as so many initiatory visions, as if we had never seen anything up until then, not due to a congenital blindness, but rather because up until then we had kept our eyes closed, immersed in a long, dreamless sleep. At the moment in which we open our eyes, what we perceive, in this state of reawakening more than of revelation, is motionless and pervaded, or pierced, with light. Light is thus the prime motive of vision and, at the same time, it disturbs vision, marks it, conditions it, directs it. Nights, dawns, a source of light that rises or sets, that varies, and is grasped in its transmutation, in its uninterrupted variation,

of which the image catches an unrepeatable and fluctuating moment. Thus, the diptychs, triptychs and sequences are an attempt to establish a continuity that the individual image would be unable to offer, except as a point in an indeterminate series of points.

[up to the point at which (that point is past)]

In the end, an image is nothing but a surface which, in Ozzola's work, is more a curtain than a window. Such an image is a sensual diaphragm between the space occupied by the person looking on and that other-than-itself which promises a gratification, but without revealing itself, only accessing the senses through that amazing curtain. What it reveals at times is at best a horizon line, smooth, or barely disrupted by shapes that seem on the point of dissolving like mirages, daytime phantasms typical of those particular atmospheric conditions that make everything in sight around us diaphanous and flou. Other times, backstage areas and only partially-raised curtains are depicted, hiding something – and having the very same substance and function as Leopardian hedges. Or – and this is the case of early works – objects are fragmented on the taught cord of the desirous gaze. Or – later – light filters thinly into an interior, announcing its own power outside and spreading its calmness inside.

Ozzola's world is based, then, on this continuous rapport between an inside – an interior, but also the I of the looker, the artist himself in primis – and an outside – the res extensa that expands, immense, mysterious and full of promise, beyond the barriers of the I. This relationship is made concrete in ecstatic images, or rather, as I said above, in a sensual diaphragm: plants, curtains of plants, clouds, fogs, water. On this diaphragm, at times, objects, profiles and ghostly figures are depicted, which soothe the anxiety contained in every concreteness.

8.

In the video-installations, the conceptual structure is the same. Plus, in these cases, the definition of the space occupied by the looker is prepared, to use the expression John Cage used to speak of the prepared piano. With this type of work, Ozzola attempts to create something that is outside of him, while the photograph remains the manifestation, albeit objectual, and yet the object of a subtle concreteness, of a personal vision. The video-installation, vice-versa, implies on the one hand the construction and activation of an environment external to the space of the I, and on the other hand the activation of an image in movement that simulates a world parallel to that in which the prepared space is located and traversed by

analogous energy flows. Video is, then, both a window – like the photographic icon – and a screen – like the surface of the photograph – arranged inside the prepared space. In conclusion, the video-installations propose two parallel spaces, one real – the prepared one --, and the other virtual, the former inhabited by the looker, and the other in which what is offered up to view manifests itself, and then impose the need for an encounter, a contact.

9.

All of Ozzola's operations are as simple as drops of water, and the visions he offers us through his works have the character of auroras, births, beginnings. Let us pick up from here.

[We all knew how difficult it was to get to that point. The noise of the world and bad habits acquired over years of mala educaciòn easily distracted us from that simple goal. At times it seemed – and this was a further deception – necessary to recuperate a lost time that risked become more and more inaccessible day by day. And when we gave in to this temptation, we could soon realize we had deviated. And we would have had to pick up again from where we had left off.]

[The hours in which the day announces itself through the tenuous and intense mutation of light have always seemed to me a marvelous gift that some unknown power had had the graciousness to suddenly offer me. I never expressly sought them out.

Instead, I sought, and dreamed of, the summer, “full summer,” ageless and timeless.

In the end, there are two gifts.]

10.

But nothing then is set, not even the beginning. This lack of fixity makes all of Ozzola's work aerial and voluble, ready either to take multiple forms or to vanish.

At times, we know what it is that vanishes, but it is not equally as certain that we can say what remains. Does the artist dare to respond to this question?

But perhaps art does not leave, and has never left traces, polluting traces: every trace, like every residue, pollutes. And this is what saves it from its dissolution – or should we say from his dissolution, and that of others? And then, even the question posed above will not be a problem.

[“Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.” (Virginia Woolf)]

Pier Luigi Tazzi
Capalle, April 2004.