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Finally, Vedova's "Carnivals"

Massimo Cacciari

I remember their discovery, along with Luigi Nono. Unexpected, secret encounters. Unforeseen obstacles for our research. Authentic "scandals."

It was the period when Luigi Nono was working on *Guai ai gelidi mostri*. The work was first performed in Cologne, in October 1983. In the program notes my essays were accompanied by reproductions of four works from the "Carnivals" cycle, which bore the same titles as the four parts of Nono's opera: *In Tyrannos*; *Lemuria*; *Das grosse Nichts der Tiere*; *Entwicklungsfremdheit*. These are the four dimensions through which Vedova's painting cycle is developed, or rather the four dimensions that each individual moment of the cycle assumes in itself, and interrogates and transforms according to its particular aspect.

In Tyrannos: The cry that would free itself from the idol of the "past-state," from the glance turned toward the paupertas horrida of the past-state's "power," which corrupts everything, which preaches death, which turns every light into a desert. The past-state "buries" man's destiny. The burial of every possibility. Man - has he already ceased to exist?

Lemuria: figures emerge from this night, ungrateful and spectral guests. When darkness can exist no longer, the lemurs threaten from the forests of shadow. They are the guardians of the past-state, with bodies of words, wreckage of discourse, the dead that kill the living, corruption and stench, without any refuge of peace. The cry *in tyrannos* still resounds, but its echo seems shattered, its hope becoming ever more desperate. The cry resounds again, but will it be able to transform itself into a figure, will it be able to become form? In accordance with the intact nobility of the word, the dignity of the discourse, will it be able to with-stand the "savage hunt" of the lemurs? In short - can there be a new word beyond annihilation, a new beginning after the past-state?

Das grosse Nichts der Tiere: Perhaps the animals know or predict it. Perhaps Openness, which the word "buried" cannot express, is guarded in the eyes of the animal. Perhaps it is in its silence that the "Adveniens", the unforeseeable ever-future, ever free from the past-state, remains "safe." And then the sign, the tone, the color must practically bow down at the fount of the animal, at the mirror of its glance - they must obey its silence. It is only from this *epoché* of the discourse, the new word can germinate.

Entwicklungsfremdheit: is this the new word? That everything that exists is not born to die? That everything that tends toward form is not superfluous vanity? That a truly "convinced," measured, shaped song, beaten on the anvil, fiber upon fiber, is not the prey of Chronos, and nothing more? "The force of the Earth, of the body, fades away," everything, from nothing, returns to nothing. Is this the only wisdom? Or is this supreme folly? Can one imagine a free extraneous-word from itself?

Like a sphinx, Vedova's *Narcissus* expresses the enigma. It is the "instant" in which Narcissus sees his own shadow, his own reflection, and wants to bring them out. Narcissus's "obsession" is the same as that of the work: to recall the image into itself, to draw it into itself, "to safety," to remove it

from the flow that condemns everything to the past-state. Narcissus-Sisyphus: for brought to light, the shadow vanishes, the reflection, once seized, is destroyed. But for the work, for the poet, a renunciation of failure would be the unpardonable sin.

Vedova's *Carnival* has the following itinerary: to follow, try, probe, with the hands and with all the nerves, one might say, every trace, every flash, every stammering of words in this "state of misery." To be alert, listening. When will night come to an end? Here, a mask seems to open up to one possible answer - or to invite one not to tire of questioning. What is Carnival, if not the repetition of the invitation to "know oneself," in the mask and beyond every mask? To put on the mask that always terrifies anew, and to put it down again? Carnival is the culmination of the past-state, but at the same time it is its catastrophe. For the past-state is completed, we can no longer fear it. But we cannot know if this instant will be able to take shape, to utter the word - if it will be a new beginning or none other than the first moment of repetition of the same thing.

Disenchantment would affirm that only this second repetition is real possibility. And yet Vedova's "Carnivals" always safeguard within themselves the idea of an instant strong enough to shatter the "cycle," to escape the vice-like grip of the already-said. While *respectans funera*, Vedova's Mask is also always a nostalgia for going, waiting, listening. No "icy monster" can consume the "Adveniens" that might be - and the work is none other than the place of this Invisible, the abode of this Ever-Future.