

JANI RUSCICA

- The uncertain present

One of the most interesting features of Jani Ruscica's work is its "oblique", continuously changing nature, in which it is difficult to distinguish a fix point, an univocal direction. As a matter of fact, the artist identifies a sense of persistent temporariness of the present, taking account of the transitoriness and fickleness of individual identity and social relationships. From time to time this very perception is somehow "inflected" in elegiacal or analytical key, in a constant narrative oscillation that reveals details and significances little by little.

In *Swan Song* (2004) the artist makes a journey through memory, to go exploring an important part of his own biographic identity, the Sicilian origin of his paternal side. The invitation to sing the lyrics of a popular Sicilian song becomes an elegiac expedient to pause his almost faltering eye on his family and relatives of old age, the protagonists of an ancient world to which his origins lead back, but which is necessarily past away and nearly disappearing. Directly in the title, *Swan Song*, there is a hint to the end, a distant time already went by, like in a reverse perspective that blurs the present by sliding it to the past. And just the latter is shadowed by the prelude of work, as the Sicilian puppet, seemingly exhausted, stops to fight as if he knows to play a role that by now is passed and anachronistic. The same tone is to be found in the brilliant closing of the work as well, where we see on a TV screen, put inside a domestic room, images and fragments of the video just finished. The artist takes the distance perspectively, giving us a conceptual frame that confirms the title, by showing a world and its traditions already extinguished. Therefore, for the artist, the autobiographic motive is an emotional request, the need of his memory to preserve part of his world and origins from the erosion of time. Like in the title of a collection of intense poems by the Italian poet Attilio Bertolucci, "Il tempo si consuma" - ("Time wears out"), Jani Ruscica focuses the dynamic of the inevitable decline of the present, involving two viewpoints - the autobiographical and the historical one - through the allegorical use of Sicilian popular customs, like the tradition of puppets and traditional chants, practiced and remembered by now only by a very old generation.

The latest research by Jani Ruscica maintains the same sharpness in the interpretation of the present and its symbolic nuances, yet focusing more on the enigma of subjectiveness and its relationship to social dynamics. In particular, the artist is moved by the definite sensation deriving from experience, fixed at the very time of its occurrence, thus making it possible to compare his work to the great European philosophical tradition of the *Bildung*, meant as reflection on the self-training process in relation to one's present.

As suggested by the title, the complex trilogy structure of *Contrapunctal* (2005) is just like a musical texture for inspiration. On a forest landscape, which sums up a number of iconographic codes directly referable to Finland, but which could also be one of the "Big woods", wild and ancestral, described in the novels by William Faulkner, a young lumberjack plays a sweet and snaky melody through the tool of his work used like a violin. The whole scene refers to solitude, to the ancient and powerful presence of nature, in whose immense spaces men occupy a fragile and temporary position. The peace as well as the prodigious melody produced by the lumberjack is interrupted by the outbreak, not far away, of a group of walkers, peaceful and indifferent in their rhythmical group movement. So the solitude of the lumberjack becomes drastically conscious, causing in him a feeling of stunned distance from the quite and satisfied everyday life of those who master with self-confidence their role in the world. Like Thomas Mann's *Tonio Kröger* felt all the exhaustion of his solitude and the weight of his diversity against those who are able to live in this world with amiable ordinariness, so Jani Ruscica seems to represent symbolically the difficulty to assert the peculiar character of his individual identity. Yet the narrative strategy of the artist does not involve a direct narrative approach, but stands on the threshold of the unsaid, simply

presenting clear and brief figurative hints. His “concise eye” reveals the decency typical of northern Europe, together with a cold and essential lexicon.

The structure of *Contrapunctal* shows next *Fluctuating theme*, the segment of the trilogy more distinctly metaphysical, where a group of men and women move forward slowly in the desolation of a very large place a huge building site or a nuclear destruction scenery. The movement of the group, engaged in singing a languishing choral chant, reveals little by little internal dynamics and implied relationships, giving the way to hypothesis and suggestions about the nature of their action. The entire scenario is created by the interaction of the possible future landscape and the passage of human figures, thus becoming a place of pure possibility, where the role of each one is still to be invented and defined without proceeding from any definite premises. Also in this segment, within a symbolically complex, surreal, somehow fantastic dimension, the reference to the relationship with the own self and the others is clear. The third element of the trilogy, yet the first to be realised, is the *Kiwano's theme*, where Juha Kiwano, a busker playing in the centre of Helsinki, is busy preparing, like in a ritual, pans and household furnishings like instruments for a musical performance. This ritual turns in an almost documentary reflection on the relationship with the urban space and velocity of a metropolitan dimension. This musical basis composed by Kiwano through his improvised instruments is the leit-motif common to the three elements of *Contrapunctal*. Starting from this music the choral melody of *Fluctuating theme* has been composed, and then starting from this latter, thanks to a next revision, the music of the lumberjack in *Sawdust theme*. This is the sign of an evident linguistic proximity aimed at highlighting the thematic continuity of the trilogy as a whole, which can be followed like a single music score focused on a deeply humanistic research and reflection.

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