

Accardi's black and white canvases ('54-55) are the « prehistory » (as she says) of her autonomous language. They testify to the « vigour » of the intact and fragile substance (without models) of her being in relation to the world. She responds to the *tabula rasa* of the « Forma » and « Origine » groups (two concepts of essentiality) with her own zero degrees: « labirints », « the fabulous », « fragments », « sieges » (all her own terms), in other words, the beginning of organization of the primordial seething. Two fundamental poles emerge, positive/negative, black/white, complementary and interlocked. The black/white relationship seems to be chosen not so much because it is non-degradable and more propitious to sublimation but instead as a primordial division, shadow/light, coming from an undifferentiated world. The words « black » and « bianco » have the same root, *blek*, which means colourless, bleached. Therefore, the black/white space emerges as a result of the long absence. In this still elementary space occurs the gradual recognition of her own signs which align themselves in « sieges ». The organization of this new space is authentic but not naive. Later, in her « integrations » ('56-57) the arrangements of the signs acquire greater amplitude. Empty space and distance, as negative signs, become equally meaningful.

The canvas *Labyrinth with Sectors* ('57) is a turning point. Harmonic space is presented on two levels, one « natural » and the other reduced, (as archived specimens). At last there appears an element of the spectrum which is differentiated: red. In her « archive » paintings (after '60) the signs hitherto arrived at intuitively are explored to the point of a liberating obsession. A continuum of signs emerges, an articulated writing. The two-dimensional opacity of the black sign on white canvas (or vice-versa) disappears. Blinding pulsating bi-colour explodes.

1966: Accardi uses sicofoil (a shiny, transparent material) and further increases the activity of the sign/space relationship: layered and fragmented surfaces (with crosses, diagonals, sections or stripes), creating a multiplication of spaces, of possibilities of signs overlapping (the canvas underneath disappears), and of combinations of

rudimentary colours. The writing flourishes freely in the transparent space. Then, from '66 to '68 comes the first *Tent* (the multi-coloured temple) and the solar environment (see *Big Umbrella*, '67). This creative phase corresponds to an urgency for unity, to a refusal of partitioning (woman is present as culturally emancipated but is absent as a different hypothesis of the world). The end of the Sixties was for Carla a period of ferocious introspection, of the discovery of her own historical and unconscious condition.

It was then that she had the vision of the primordial experience of feminine desire, the pink and luminous labyrinth, the mother, the love preceding castration and the rival intervention of the father, the circular reality preceding the metaphorization of woman. The environment *Three Big Tents* ('68-69) is the most total and the freest point in a private trip through cultural space. Now, if it is true that Carla Accardi's clear intuitions on colour and space were not dependent on any others (in Europe or the U.S.A.), the fact remains that they were partly privatized for reasons irrelevant to the usual notions of avant-garde or pre-eminence, for pure incongruence. Let me explain: I am tempted to think that every authentic « communication » of femininity (like of blackness) mysteriously participates within two spaces — that structured by Culture (with its models and codes, whether they be respected or denied notions of Classicism or of Avant-Garde) and, on the other hand, the « incongruous » space of the impossible encounter, of the incommensurable difference.

With *Three Big Tents* Carla Accardi came forward as corporeity, a dimension of feminine pleasure, a reality all the more embarrassing since the transgression was chaste and not aggressive. This vocation, written in filagree, does not diminish the more public one (and vice-versa). In '70, Accardi's paintings are the trace of a little suicide, what I call the syndrome of austerity in women: it is a self-censuring mechanism that starts up after the bursting affirmation of pleasure and the disregard of the goings on in the cultural environment. It is the desire to remove, to castigate, the fear of losing credibility and the Freudian « law of the father ». This

happens to Accardi after the pink *Tent*, when she did a series of beautiful, lead-grey paintings with thin, cold signs on transparent backgrounds or on white cloth.

Then she managed to recuperate a soft and happy vocation, coexisting with an acute control of expressive methods. The chastised grey gives way to the colours (re-elaborated and symbolical) of a human landscape: flesh colour, sea blue, sky grey, earth red, forest green. Manual precariousness gives way to a modular geometry used in such a way that it does not cool the sign. Open, precise, the painted curve echoes the natural curve of the transparent material (*Big Blue, Dark Red, Grey*, 1974).

Through her mental (as opposed to retinal) painting, Carla Accardi has always been within the more « distilled » artistic experiences, which inexorably carried her away from painting in the narrow sense. Her present interlaced transparent works are closer to the work of the conceptualists than to the « new painters », conceptualism in the feminine?

In her « transparencies » ('74-75), « writing » and space are not distinct entities. The space is woven and written at the same time, starting from the transparent material, which sinks into itself and traces its path, within the structural confines of the dark wood stretchers. I do not want to say that the « woven » language is more specifically feminine than the painted language, because language is not a synonym for activity, much less for atavism. I only want to suggest the existence of an ancestral familiarity between an ancestral, feminine activity and a twentieth century artist. It is a familiarity that (in the case of Carla Accardi) does not run the risk of regression or ghettoization because if, after her long voyage through worldly expressive processes, she has come back to an ancestral feminine gesture, she has done so by exorcising its atavism and immanency (that is obscurantism) through awareness and free vocation. Carla Accardi's « feminine sign » is not, therefore, the curve, transparency or weaving, but a passage through a certain appropriation (or negation) of culture, a different (incongruous) quality of experiencing time and power, a way of being in relation to the world.

Salvo

Italy without Sicily leaves no image in the spirit, because Sicily is the key to everything. Goethe, 1787

I leave the Italians to compare what Goethe said with the work of Salvo, an Italian and a Sicilian. The key to our enigmatic difference from the others lies in History. The relationship with our own history is necessarily a matter of self-awareness and self-comprehension. When Salvo inscribes his name among the colours of the Italian flag, in *Trico-*

lore, or includes himself among the world's Great Names, in *40 Nomi*, or says of himself that *Io sono il migliore* (I am the best), it is certainly not the measure of his self-awareness which impresses us. On the contrary, works of this type are restricted to the western modus of cultural activity as presented in the historiography of art and in its institution.

Here, on the other hand, *the premisses are reversed*. It is not history which determines the value and the position

within those values. Instead, it is the artist (the person to be evaluated) who determines his own value and that of his work. It is an all too commonplace fact that any aesthetic theory, however metahistorical it may wish to appear, is clearly distinguished by its epoch and by its historical context. This is easily proved a posteriori. Any critical activity in this field is thus also historical. History must therefore (also) be the object of this activity if it wishes to throw light upon itself. The claim to an ob-

jectively historical view would be as mistaken as a theory of the construction stone in the additive formation of history and of the consequentiality of an epoch. The historicity of a theory, on the other hand, ought to consist in a comparison of the birth of (cultural) expressions with that of categories. At bottom, the problem of every critical science is the fact that it has to devote itself to the building-up of a *meta-plan*, to the erection of an *autonomy* which is in itself stabilizing, so as to remain specifically within a scientific and progressive thought.

In the case of Salvo one decisive category is that of the self-portrait. After a break in his work from '66 to '69, Salvo puts his own self-portrait next to other newspaper photographs, in one of his new works (*12 Autoritratti*). Then he substitutes (in *Salvo il marinaio*) (Salvo the sailor) the name Sinbad for his own in the book «Sinbad the Sailor» copied out in his own handwriting. Finally, he inserts his own portrait in famous paintings re-painted by him. The category is that of the self-portrait, though what is decisive subsequently is the operation carried out in his mind.

The self-portrait, and in general the portrait, is primarily not so much an aesthetic product as the result of a need for representation. Independently from his or her physical presence, the person represented wishes to be present. The portrait represents him in the truest sense of the word, as various legal customs testify with concrete examples. In accordance with ceremonial usage, princely honours were rendered to Byzantine emperors, and for that matter, death sentences are known to have been carried out *in effigy* in cases of criminals who have fled. In Gessler's (William Tell's) hat and in sympathetic magic the most mythical forms of imaginary presence can be found. The characteristically representative strength of the portrait makes it a yardstick for measuring the relations between social roles

and their changes, and at the same time it conditions the growth of the patterns of representation necessary to translate conventional conditions into images.

The tendency to be concerned with oneself — traceable with numerous examples in any artistic tendency — raises questions about the motivation for self-portraits and about the *self* which is represented. These questions cannot be answered generically, as they each call for separate detailed studies depending on the example. But is the self-portrait a *self*-portrait, is it an *ego*-portrait, or is it an *es*-portrait? Alongside the doubts about artistic intention and aesthetic implications, this ought, in any case, to be the most important question for making a self-portrait understandable in its character. Of course, the idea of *self-fulfilment* plays a comprehensively basic part in all human action. Does this self-fulfilment take the form of mediation between unconscious and conscious which, by eliminating the contrasts between the two spheres, leads to individuation, or is it a tendency aimed at autonomy which causes the individual to escape from control by his environment? Or does the passive *Ego* formed by individual experience manifest itself in the self-portrait as the structure of a personality based on the orientation of social needs, desires or interests? Or is it the instinctive *Es* which, in contrast with the *Ego*, evades the control of the conscious? Or is it the *Super-Ego* which, in this case too, maintains the constitutive role attributed to it by the necessity for socialization? Or lastly, how and in what does the self-portrait differ from the roles which are implicit in it?

With no less importance, the same number of questions should be directed at the degree of self-ascertainment which necessarily takes place in self-portraits, if they are not formal adaptations. In unfolding this conscience, the artist also, with his self-portrait, places himself on

a «moral» and a «political» platform; he evades the function of the painting with the conventional need for a complete and collective conscience. In a society in which the incapacity to communicate and the loss of identity go hand in hand, the self-portrait becomes an explicit symbol of an identity formed in communication with the environment, in conflict with the environment itself. Thus in Salvo's works, the self-portrait really differs in its *function* within the artistic context and in its constitution (material) as a type of painting.

The role of the *individual* (Salvo) is described here in his *collective sense* (the artist) on the basis of a category of «signs» whose task is not however to unveil but to be aware that the forms in which thought and action are recorded signify the *limit* and simultaneously the *conditions/possibilities* of the function of these forms. The categories become conventions emptied of their sense.

Salvo's works like *Onora il padre e la madre* (*Honour thy father and mother*) or *I tre regni* (*The three kingdoms*) exempt thoughts on culture — that have become self-evident civilizers, samples of useful and obliging behaviour — from the plane of everyday things so as to lead them back to that of universal validity. In an exemplary manner the individual here assumes a role that has become increasingly clear in the course of history, namely, that the individual becomes the bearer of culture. «Collective experience» has been degraded to become a process of assimilation. The *Bildung* (i.e., training, education, culture) of the culture-bearing classes has been deprived, through free access to it by everyone, of its base. Culture has become an individual service, though with the connotations of that individual's epoch. The subject of Salvo's work are the problems of the history of culture and the formation of cultural theories.

Werner Lippert

Giulio Paolini

HOW THE IMAGINARY REBELS AGAINST IMAGINATION

What point has the state of freedom of intellectuals and artists now reached in our late-capitalist western world? The hallucinatory conditions they live in make them forget, amongst other things, to ask themselves this question. They tend to be vaguely progressive and rightly consider that to aspire to an unconditional freedom is to verge on reactionariness.

Except in a few cases, the intellectual is not liable to the vulgar and direct repression by power and does not resort to the individual assertion of suicide. Is there a reason behind the fact that intellectuals cannot call themselves repressed and need not commit suicide for political reasons? Yes, and it is that same condition, which I have described

as hallucinatory, of their social relations: the margin of oscillation between illusion and reality where they once reigned and are now exiled. Whenever a Soviet dissenter crosses a free western boundary, with a ritual that waters everything down except the pathetic memory of northern intellectuals who have always sought the southern sun, I wonder what the border of our own exile is.

On the one hand, the intellectual is already a reserve for the individual who makes ready, as such, to perform the role of reserve for the mass — as a specialization of the mass; and on the other hand, the intellectual realises that he has been banished into what he pompously calls his own specific, but he does not dare to draw the proper consequences from this fact. He knows how to assess the degrees between liberty and lack of liberty, but not the socially correspond-

ing steps from imaginary to reality.

The imaginary is his exile. The body politic of society, if it is institutional, forces him to sort his own ghosts out for himself; and if it is radical or more farsighted, it challenges him by stating that culture is hunger. I too believe that in a future perspective the only possible culture will be hunger. But meanwhile freedom as exile, or tolerance as abandonment, which intellectuals benefit from, is altering the agents and the site of their conflicts.

A growing number of works of imagination are marked — not by a struggle of the possible against what exists — but by a completely inner rebellion, tailored to its own isolation, of the imaginary against imagination, of what is created against the creator himself; with consequences that are not purely metaphysical.