

Streets and Dreams

“Cities’ knowledge, likely in a dream, goes on with decoding the expressive images”

-Siegfried Kracauer

On edges of sleep, meant as a shape derived from political activity, Walter Benjamin concentrated his meaning of contemporary life in a “One Way” street [Einbahnstrasse], dedicating it to a certain fascinating woman that he met during spring 1924 in Capri: “This street is called *Asja Lacis*, name of which was as if an engineer had opened it in the author”.

In a similar way, these women of Ernesto Tatafiore being shown here (*nudo indissolubile di strade e sogni* from its own conception) seem predisposed to be traveled through, by the spectator, accessible, and at the same time lucid, as if the beauty of their gender was to be predicted here in it these figures, they show themselves able to revolutionize the destiny of those who come into their presence. From here they receive their public dimension –political?-, something not to be ignored.

Women that are streets and streets that are dreams... who has not pondered on –or has been afraid of- at one time in their life the unimaginable consequences that a simple glance, given in the street almost by chance, while wandering aimlessly, could be able to reach one's own life or that of someone else. Radically diverting the destiny of a precious existence, making it something foolish, inscribing it as a catastrophic parable (the butterfly's flattering theory)...; “This is the only one proof we possess about God's existence”, affirms Baudrillard on this matter.

[...]

“I drank in an instant/ in her pupil, pale sky where tempests germinate,
The sweetness that enthrals and the pleasure that kills.

A lightning flash... then night! Fleeting beauty
By whose glance I was suddenly reborn,
Will I see you no more before eternity?”

These are the famous verses that Baudelaire dedicates to a transient Parisian
that passes by unperceived, although not by him –in “*Les fleurs du mal*”-

Likewise the inaccessible relation that an image establishes, especially works of
art, with the desire –the destiny- of they who approach it, affirming this
inversion of the predictable cause: “a vile cause, an extraordinary effect”. We do
like things, or somebody, because of the most insignificant of reasons, which
always implies the setting in motion of demonic mechanisms.

Because in the bosom of the incessant myriad of psychic exchanges that hound
us and jump into the path of the metropolitan traffic, every sparkle in the look
that activates our nervous system (Nietzsche observes that this was one of the
main characteristics of urban modern man) opens up a street, brand new
possibilities, fancies, or any other new path we are tempted to undertake.
“Streets and dreams” once again.

Tatafiore’s indifferent females, who with a lively look, in spite of the ambiguity
in their eyes (perhaps they observe us from restless sleep: impenetrable
anguish, ornamentally empty, and at the same time with an unquestionable
intelligence) also open themselves, for those who want to cross through them, a
specific route marked with signs of inescapable attention (exactly as
Benjamin’s one way street as those primitive advertisements and luminous
signs that modernity unstoppably gives up to): from the eyes to the lips; then to
the nipples, and from this to sex, then traveling along the way past the

occasional tattoo; in between the to-and-fro movement of long hair... Do we have to travel along all these points in order to be able to reach the woman that is behind them? What would then happen, moreover, if we wrongly interpret all that they express and show so passively and openly?

The path, however, is always the same: a permanent recognition that leads anyone who takes it, to different and unexpected destinations. In effect, the woman does not tire herself in all the women of her kind, Tatafiore's images give testimony, despite their connection to the ideal, to something like a personality (psychology? maybe would be too much) differing in each one of these players, only perceptible to the keen eye that analyses them beyond its basic physiology. On the other hand, it is well known that the visitor only ever gets to know the back roads of any urban network only after both have reached a certain level of intimacy; the mental plan of an "urbe" arise as a probable result of a "trial" and "error process": fruit of the relationship and experience –even in the sexual sense-.

[“A person is known only by someone who is hopelessly in love with him”. (Walter Benjamin)]. Languid presence of poses and gestures of this dispersed harem that it is nothing else but a reflection of the “*furor melanconicus*” with the total sureness all of them perceive in the beyond, to the other side of the mirror in which they are contemplating themselves without changing an undaunted pose. [In this way, would our passion be the piazza that provokes these scenes without any reason? Every kind of perspective is an anamorphosis, and the main one may become the most aberrant, when the point of view is completely “dejected”. To see yourself in front of a mirror as you really are, without doubt is the most expressive symptom to suffer any visual pathology.]

Remember, if you can, that detected substrate melancholy beating in the more intimate layers of the painting and drawings,: “at the bottom of Tatafiore's images we get to know the nostalgic state that never turns into regression, it is better described as the power of a cultural an existential memory that developed itself outside of the sequence that is simple and logical, and that it is able to

converge inside itself pressures and references scattered about a visual inward-journey that has got the structure of surface vision". (A. Bonito Oliva).

In the itinerary of corporal recognition, we have to be the occasional victims of the "mannerist technique of the rodeo" (G. R. Hocke); that is: prisoners of touch and its visual synesthesia, from the postponed drifting of sense from the senses, even if Tatafiore himself has assured in some other moment, "*dal profondo della terra, la testa si innalza sul corpo*".

Nevertheless, these bodies, in contradiction to the plate that identifies each one of the canvases, give way, in all occasions, and without exception, to the side of the archetype: their support by the silhouette, their chromatic synthesis, the flattening, the comprehension of their flesh, or the loss of the distinguishing detail between them, put together in a mould that in the end cannot help personalizing its own language, embodied in the same writing. [How few mouths open to say anything in Tatafiore's works!, where, on the other hand, the written word is never absent... I remember hearing him saying something like: "Picasso, Tiziano, io e Bruegel camminiamo senza parlare"; maybe this is an important part of the explanation...]

The naked bodies of this artist's would say of themselves organized to amplify a fictitious tongue's weft, articulated by those loose landmarks quoted earlier; imaginary language that tacks backstitch after backstitch on aesthetic contemplation.

[“A text-woman. / A text-soul / The universe writes itself in the body.” (E. Jabes)] Eye, lip, nipple, tattoo, pubis, hair... The body which results from this comprehension built up from key elements is something similar to the understanding of the time from the “fiestas” of the Gadamer`s calendar, or the other brilliant attempt to bring together in a corpus the different old range of goods in the social framework, as in the public one, so powerfully brining into view Simmel's aesthetic sensitivity in the new contemporary spaces where “container” played its part –the universal exhibition, for example-: “The close proximity where more heterogenic products converge, creates a paralysis in the

of capacity perception, an authentic hypnosis [...] in its fragmentations of unfocussed impressions that remain in the memory of the fact that here one has to enjoy oneself.”

To refine oneself is to become more fragile. (“Fragility, you have a woman’s name!”, Hamlet would exclaim), as the control over the aesthetic well knows. The thicknessless and lightly sulking bodies of these red women (“Beauty is a something ardent and sad”, Baudelaire assures us) contains the different sensations that their calls for attention announce through graphic signs. In the streets something almost identical happens with our more inaccessible sensations through shop windows and advertising, with the difference that here the main strategy is that of “reflection” more than that of contact (by definition impossible with any kind of “acquired” good). Finally, both cases are a consequence of our current understanding of modernity partially characterized, by Baudelaire, as *“le transitoire, le fugitive, le contingent.”*

It is clear that Tatafiore is a painter who draws his paintings. The marked line that builds his paintings from the beginning, does not leave him until the their completion, indeed, but it does mutate. The mass of flesh defined in its “lines”, the territory from the tactile aspect comes up as an evidence, as “true body”. However, and Tatafiore himself underlines: “Il corpo femminile contentiore flessibile di alter cose (esterno – interno).”

Ambivalence of the players for this Napolitan painter is obvious: “Ricorda: un seno che nutre, un seno che uccide” (E. Tatafiore). It could not be any other way in a psychoanalytical-artist as he indeed is: every sign, shape, becomes a symbol, hiding behind it some other latent meaning that, little by little, takes us back to the origin of a source, where freedom is supposed to be: trauma, myth, etymology, sex, hunger, survival...

The marked eroticism from the outside to the inside of his naked female bodies, gets close to the abyss of the Sphinx (“decoding: reveal me or I will devour you”), always dual and enigmatic, but only when someone considers it as nature beyond its uncontrollable decorating expansion, the ornamental result as a

consequence of his obsession in/with the picture plane still does not bring into question the idea that background does not give rise to a perverse meaning.

The Sphinx is the equivalent, aesthetically speaking, of the motive's strabismus: "the surrounding elements participate to underline the general strabismus of the scene." (A. Bonito Oliva)

It seems inevitable the drift in the design and the styling, which without doubt helps this "happy swinging condition" on all levels, Tatafiore's delicate, animated, weightlessness, characteristic from his very beginnings. "In any case the images are built up with a light trace and a pictorial simplicity that found the lyric representation of an anthropological condition, crossing by opposed impulses, the subject and history's requests", Bonito Oliva wrote in his Spanish introduction about what is nowadays remote Italian *Transvanguardia*, in 1983.

"Disegno le donne, le dipingo e l'una rimanda all'altra come in un racconto continuo. E continuo è il desiderio di sciogliere il loro mistero. Mistero come le dune del Sahara che camminano con il vento o come il mare, dove puoi vedere mille volte lo stesso fondo trovandovi cose diverse, e ti chiedi perché." (E. Tatafiore)

Incontrando un'amica per strada (2005), is without any doubt the masterwork of this fine voyage along the streets and dreams that Tatafiore presents in the Fernando Latorre Gallery, Madrid. As exemplary case of what we have so far remarked, this female body's wall development denies the corporal hyperpresence of her own image, generates another excess, that one of the artificial double dimensions where nature's voice abandons herself to the illusionism and stylized fiction. In this work as in the rest of the naked pieces that complete the "streets" of the exposition and the rest of portraits-dreams from where is possible to see leaning out Picasso, Lenin, Marat, Mao, among other old known of the Napolitan painter, the subject concentrate itself in an authentic stylish shield –"Il corpo diventa il travestimento dell'anima"-.

We cannot overlook at this point the traditional evaluation of the portraits of the Cinquecento, especially Bronzino, that so frequently has been read as being the most representative of “l’dea di fredda, inaccessibile grandezza” (H. Hatdn), prototype of high portrait: “I suoi modelli appaiono freddi, distanti, distaccati, lunari, chiusi ermeticamente nella corazza del contegno”, reporting Carmine Benicasa words.

If the theory is true, that to watch is to constantly avoid the others look (to stare at somebody’s eyes is, in any culture, an intolerable aggression), the appearance of the subject in painting and in drawing, as Tatafiore understands both disciplines, is at the same time symbolic: this particular reciprocity between the source and the reflection: “*Vultus aut vulva*, in latin: the symbolic exchange is carried out between two terms, one of them indicates what it is not to be seen, and the other the intimate side of the face, to be seen only on certain occasions”, Jean Clair explains in his “The praise of the visible”. He is also going to be responsible for throwing the stone right now at the moment I take my hand away from the paper, leaving you alone with the doubt of how to “read” with more pertinence these paths, bodies, streets and dreams amalgam that Tatafiore brings to Madrid at the turn of the year. In principle it seems friendly and inoffensive, amusement for those who just like to play at watching, more than seeing: “Do we know the meaning whose responsibility is the business of painting? So close to the inhumane, could it still enlighten appearances?” I suppose that this is easier to answer concentrating on these works, until we disappear ever so slightly into them...

Oscar Alonso Molina

