

THE SKETCHBOOK

"Your eyes are not pained by what you see". On occasion of an exhibition of Andreas M. Kaufmann at Bunkier Sztuki, Kraków, 2002

Up until the 20th century, and above all until the emergence of the media of mass communication, the creator of images traveled the world to represent landscapes, events and people which he could then communicate to others. These representations were accumulated in collections or were, in their more popular format, associated with rituals or celebrations. Photography and the techniques of reproduction caused an explosion in the access to images to the point where we now say we are invaded by them. Images invade us, assault us, bombard us... why do we use a military vocabulary? Are things so bad?

In the past the artist was obliged to move around continually in search of the new. This is not to say that the artist's immediate environment was not worthy of interest and attention. The Dutch and Flemish painters of the 16th and 17th century raised the everyday to the category of pictorial theme in opposition to religious or heroic subjects. Forerunners of the reality show "Big Brother", championed the here and now as something exceptional, something to be celebrated. What facts, events or people can we celebrate today?

In Andreas Kaufmann's archive of images there is an abundance of images associated with catastrophes, although we also find images that refer to science, to the attaining and treasuring of knowledge. There are faces, bodies, words... from the past and from the present. It seems to me to be the sketchbook of the artist (or the intellectual worker) who is engaged in selecting and ordering the avalanche of images that are all around him and invade him. As they surround and invade every one of us... The public sphere has been turned into a bottomless well, into which there fall day after day events that we know through images.

Narrative seems to be the loser. Is an image worth more than thousand words? The word itself seems to have been turned into an image, but its voice has been drowned in the great media spectacle, or as some are saying, in the middle of the 'war of dreams'.

As the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has written: "European Poets of the Thirteen Century called the essential nucleus of their poetry the stanza, that is, a capacious dwelling, receptacle, because it safeguarded, along with all the formal elements of the canzone, that joy d'amour that these poets entrusted to poetry as its unique object. But what is this object? To what enjoyment does poetry dispose its stanza as the receptive "womb" of its entire art? What does its trobar so tenaciously enclose?"

Access to what is problematic in these questions is barred by the forgetfulness of a scission that derives from the origin of our culture and that is usually accepted as the more natural thing—that goes, so to speak, without saying—when in fact it is the only truly worth interrogating. The scission in question is that between poetry and philosophy, between the poetic word and the word of thought. This split is so fundamental to our cultural tradition that Plato could

already declare it “an ancient enmity”. According to a conception that is only implicitly contained in the Platonic critique of poetry, but that has in modern times acquired a hegemonic character, the scission of the word is construed to mean that poetry possesses its object without knowing it while philosophy knows its object without possessing it. In the West, the word is thus divided between a word that is unaware, as it fallen from the sky, and enjoys the object of knowledge by representing it in beautiful form, and a word that has all seriousness and consciousness for itself but does not enjoy its object because it does not know how to represent it.

The split between poetry and philosophy testifies to the impossibility, for Western culture, of fully possessing the object of knowledge (for the problem of knowledge is a problem of posesión, and every problem of obsession is a problem of enjoyment, that is, of language). In our culture, knowledge (according to an antinomy that Aby Warburg diagnosed as the “schizophrenia” of Western culture) is divided between inspired-ecstatic and rational-conscious poles, neither ever succeeding in wholly reducing the other. Insofar as philosophy and poetry have passively accepted this division, philosophy has failed to elaborate a proper language, as if there could be a royal road to truth that would avoid the problem of its representation, and poetry has developed neither a method nor self-consciousness. What is thus overlooked is the fact that every authentic poetic act of philosophy is always directed toward joy.

In Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture (1977) University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993

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