

La collera delle lumache / The Snails' Wrath *

The snails' wrath: is it perceptible?

F. Ponge, from "Le parti pris des choses" / "Taking the side of things"

Things are there that navigate in the light, coming out of the void to take place before our eyes. We are involved in their appearing and disappearing, almost as if we were here for this very reason. The outside world needs us to observe and recount it, in order to exist.

G. Celati, from "Verso la foce" / "Towards the River's Mouth"

*I'll forget the trail I marked out
on Mount Yoshino last year,
go searching for blossoms
in directions
I've never been before.*

Saigyō, from "Poems of a mountain home"

There is a substantial difference between the observation of the landscape when made from indoors, or from a safe and aseptic distance, and being inside it, as a protagonist, or better yet, an actor among many, all acted upon by the irresistible forces that reign there: the weather, possible harshness of places and difficulty in crossing them, but also chronological time with its laws of alternating light and dark, and so on. Therefore we are often confronted with unexpected and unpredictable apparitions and phenomena when moving around in an alpine landscape. Something appears to us, coming towards us, which is not stationary for any length of time but simply passes by there very naturally, stopping there only briefly, like a flock of sheep moving around looking for fresh grass to graze, or clouds that skim across the sky leaving the ephemeral and inconsistent trace of their shadow on the ground. Or like a sound, for example a clap of thunder, which occurs suddenly, surprising and frightening us, and then immediately vanishes, barely remembered (in the same way as the lightning that precedes it, often by a few moments). We experience all these phenomena, these apparitions that are often only momentary, we don't limit ourselves to observing them from afar, and each of them is able to influence our behavior, also forcing us to change our plans, when we have them, or to change our path or destination. Perhaps we go to the mountains to escape, knowing from what or from whom but unaware of what we will find, moved by desire. Starting from a city like Turin, surrounded by the Alps, the elsewhere can be glimpsed on the horizon, it beckons as a certain, reachable destination, setting a limit, a term, otherwise invisible and uncertain if you happen to be where the mountains cannot be seen.

A place – the path to Prà plateau, along the right side of the Pellice stream, in its first part, leading up to the Pis waterfall – during the summer of 2016, for a day or two, three at the most. A group of people sets out and prepares to meet a series of epiphanic events, both 'natural', therefore uncontrollable, fleeting and elusive, and 'authorial', created by some artists/performers, equally uncontrollable, fleeting and elusive in their own way. The latter do not have a program, that is, it is not made known, and it is up to the audience, the group of walkers on the path, to identify these events, thus deciding which ones to follow and which not, while trying not to miss all the other events, the 'unscheduled' ones, which could happen nearby at the same time as the others. The role of the audience, of the visitors/walkers, is active: they are inside the landscape, in some way at its mercy, they have to make an effort, physical, mental and of their senses, in order to move within it. They have also been advised to take in all the events, which in any case would not be 'explained', especially not beforehand. Some events will be better defined as to their form, and more controlled (or rather, guided) by the author, others are

more fleeting and difficult to grasp, if not through an application and dedication over time. In this second case, the spectators act a particular form of participation in the creation (rather than *sharing*, a term that is now widespread and objectively ambiguous). While not replacing the author/creator of the work, they can influence it, comprehending it from the point of view in which they find themselves, in its revelation and becoming, starting from the originary intentions of the author.

A characterizing, and in our opinion innovative aspect of “The Snails' Wrath” project concerns precisely the role – the attitude, as well as the behavior – of the audience members, of all those who will participate in each of the 2-3 days of lengthy performance events, along the first part of the so-called ‘alternative’ path on the right orographic side of the Pellice valley, which connects the Villanova hamlet with the Prà basin. The creativity of the audience, of the spectators at any performative event, is usually strongly inhibited by the fact that they know beforehand what they will see, they know the name of the author, perhaps the title of the work, even its content, the time when it will start and perhaps even the time when everything will end. Furthermore, usually the performer and the audience of onlookers are physically divided by a distance, often marked by a difference in level. Thus our perception of an event is weakened, as we are prevented from really seeing it for what it is, especially when it comes to something new, unusual, and unheard of; we are *used*, we remain passive. Actually, we do act in some way, by continuing to think, but without being able to do without crutches or prostheses, provided in advance by those who have already told us everything, depriving us of the possibility of being surprised and amazed. We are therefore unable to expand freely, although it is certainly possible to be penetrated by the event, which can also make us ‘resonate’, but only in a passive way. Instead, if he/she were to arrive without information, at most possibly knowing the author’s name, and does not even know much about the time and place of the event, and has to go in search of it, then his/her ability to be surprised, amazed, and fascinated will be very sharpened, and one’s personal creative abilities can be activated. Because witnessing an unannounced event while it happens suddenly, and being overwhelmed by it, identifying oneself momentarily (or *canceling oneself*) is a creative act.

We are convinced that all this can happen to the audience of the participants in “The Snails’ Wrath”, given that each of them will be asked to *enter into* the landscape theater of all the events that may take place there, both the ‘authorial’ ones and the so-called natural ones, spontaneously acted out by animals and insects, by the wind in the tree branches, by the rays of light that filter through the woods, by the stream that descends into the valley relentlessly beating against the stones and boulders in its bed. In short, by the impromptu conversations between all these elements, which the members of the audience, in turn, will take part in by walking, watching, listening, smelling, and thinking.

The project is structured in the form of a path strewn with events, some of which, as mentioned, conceived and prepared, others unexpected and uncontrollable. People walk along the path accompanied by some authors – who will not necessarily perform on that day, but on another, if the project is carried out over a 2-3 day period – with whom they discover the events, and of which they are therefore partly complicit, because even simply witnessing them makes them so. In some cases (Viv Corringham, Giovanni Morbin) one or more of the audience members could become real protagonists, to all intents and purposes, talking to the author while walking with him/her, or (Pierre Berthet, or Miki Yui) assisting them in the realization of the performance. In other cases, the performer acts with an almost clandestine approach (Alessandro Quaranta, Rie Nakajima) or in any case, decentralized and ‘irregular’, and their action must be identified in the landscape. At the end of the path and the performances, everyone gathers in a given place, and then sits around a table to exchange words on the events, and this would happen on every day of the festival, in the refuge located at the entrance of the Prà basin to which the path leads, in the presence of the authors who each time are the protagonists of the performances.

Therefore the main idea of the project is the need to follow that path by decisively entering into the landscape and becoming part of it, participating in its events and changes. There will be performances and installations created by some artists, but those are not the only things that will come to our attention along the path: each wayfarer walker/spectator will be able to notice certain things, micro-events in the landscape, which he/she will be able (want) to share with oth-

ers or not. Like in the final part of the *The Artist of Disappearance*¹, in which the protagonist chooses to set off on the path, completely new for him, of matchboxes, which he always carries with him, opening them from time to time to look at the micro-landscapes he has created inside, the idea is (also) that of an art that is alien to the concept of exhibition, entertainment, and an audience, something very private and that belongs to everyone: clues found by chance or created situations, things in which to identify or confront oneself, to (re)find oneself as a unique and unrepeatable individual. Art conceived in this way is fundamental for the *happy* survival of a human being, because the identification with it, with something physically outside of us, attenuates the effects of separation from the world, experienced in a traumatic way at birth and then repeatedly relived during everyone's lifetime. For the entire duration of each day of "The Snails' Wrath", the participating spectators will be asked to activate their attention through mobility, by preparing themselves to notice events wherever they may happen along the path without knowing beforehand what will happen and where. Everything will therefore happen according to the modalities, the rules of reality, which of course, is always unpredictable and uncontrollable, out there.

The experience of "The Snails' Wrath" could be very similar to a kind of collective dream, made up of many individual dreams occurring in the same place and at the same time. And its success will depend on whether or not this dream comes true.

Carlo Fossati, 2016
(translated by Laura Culver)

artists e performers:

Alessandro Quaranta (I) www.estatic.it/en/content/alessandro-quaranta

Viv Corringham (UK) www.vivcorringham.org/shadow-walks.html

Giovanni Morbin (I) www.estatic.it/content/giovanni-morbin

Pierre Berthier (B) www.pierre.berthet.be/

Miki Yui (JP/D) www.mikiyui.com/

Rie Nakajima (JP/UK) www.rienakajima.com/index.html

Rolf Julius (D) www.estatic.it/content/rolf-julius

essential bibliography:

Alessandro Quaranta, *The changing of the guard* (video) <https://vimeo.com/147849170>

Francis Ponge, "Le partit pris de choses / Taking the side of things" (collection of poems)

Gianni Celati, "Verso la foce" "Towards the River's Mouth" (four travel journals)

Robert Walser, *Der Spaziergang / The Walk* (tale)

G.F. Kersting, *Caspar David Friedrich auf der Wanderung ins Riesengebirge* (drawing)

Alain-Fournier, "Le Grand Meaulnes" (novel)

Jean-Gabriel Albicocco, "Le Grand Meaulnes", (film)

Charles Lughton, "The Night of the Hunter" (film)

Anita Desai, *The Artist of Disappearance* (tale)

Bashō, "Oku no Hosomichi / The Narrow Road to the Deep North" (travel journal with poems)

Sonic Youth, *The Diamond Sea* (musical composition)

H.G. Clouzot, "Le salaire de la peur / The Wages of Fear" (film)

Bob Dylan, "Sad Eyed lady of the Lowlands" (song)

Laura Pugno, *Meccanismi di difesa* (video) <https://vimeo.com/62998361>

Bela Tarr, "Satantango" (film)

Miles Davis, *Pharaoh's Dance; Bitches Brew* [from "Bitches Brew"] (musical compositions)

Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, *Haha wo kouru ki, Longing for the mother* (tale)

Jacques Tati, "Playtime" (film)

*: in the original French, "la colère des escargots", from the poem *Escargots* by Francis Ponge, 1941

¹ A story by Anita Desai taken from the collection of the same name, published in 2011. I read it in the Italian translation (*L'artista della sparizione*) published by Einaudi in 2013.