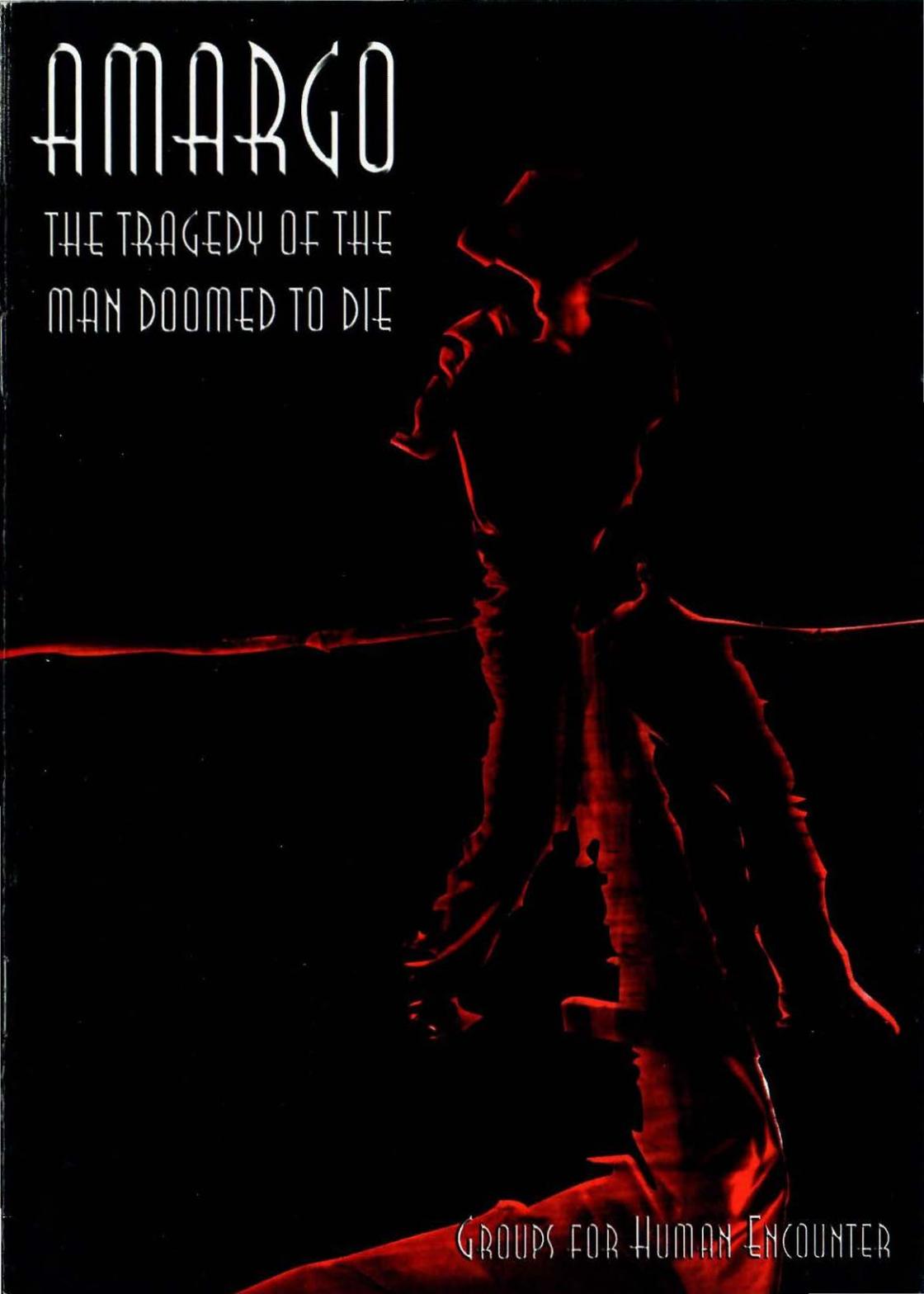




AMARGO

THE TRAGEDY OF THE
MAN DOOMED TO DIE



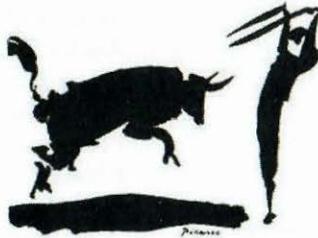
GROUPS FOR HUMAN ENCOUNTER



AMARGO

THE TRAGEDY OF THE
MAN DOOMED TO DIE

is played by



OEDIPUS

JOCASTA

TERESIAS

DEUS EX MACHINA

SAMSON

DALILA

MANOA

JAHWEH

LEAR

CORDELIA

GLOUCESTER

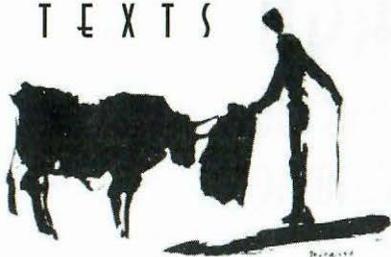
GOD

performed by
frank camilleri

Groups for Human Encounter

AMARGO

T E X T S



I, dark in light, exposed
To daily fraud, contempt,
abuse and wrong,
Within doors, or without, still
as a fool,
In power of others, never in
my own.
Scarce half I seem to live, dead
more than half.
O dark, dark, dark, amid the
blaze of noon,
Irrecoverably dark, total
eclipse
Without all hope of day!
O first-created beam, and thou
great Word,
'Let there be light, and light
was over all';
Why am I thus bereaved thy
prime decree?
The sun to me is dark
And silent as the moon.

*Samson Agonistes, 75-87,
John Milton*

...

On the twenty-fifth of June
they said to Amargo:
- Now, you may cut, if you wish,
the oleanders in your courtyard.
Paint a cross on your door
and put your name beneath it,
for hemlock and nettle
shall take root in your side
and needles of wet lime
will bite into your shoes.
It will be night, in the dark,
in the magnetic mountains
where water-oxen drink
in the reeds, dreaming.
Ask for lights and bells.
Learn to cross your hands,
to taste the cold air
of metals and of cliffs
because within two months
you'll lie down shrouded.

Santiago moved his misty
sword in the air.
Dead silence flows over
the shoulder of the curved sky.

On the twenty-fifth of June
Amargo opened his eyes,
and on the twenty-fifth of August
he lay down to close them.
Men came down the street
to look upon the doomed one
who cast a shadow
of loneliness at rest.

...

*'Ballad of One Doomed to Die',
Federico García Lorca*

Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.

He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day;

Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.

A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.

Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked.

Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation;

There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.

For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.

Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name.

He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.

With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.

Psalm 91, 3-16



For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth.

My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread.

By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin.

I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert.

I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top.

Mine enemies reproach me all the day; and they that are mad against me are sworn against me.

For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping.

Because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down.

My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass.

...

I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days: thy years are throughout all generations.

Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands.

They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as A vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed:

But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.

The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.

Psalm 102, 3-12, 25-29

To see you naked is to remember the earth.
The smooth earth, swept clean of horses.
The earth without a reed, the pure form
closed to the future: confine of silver.

To see you naked is to comprehend the desire
of the rain which seeks the feeble form,
or the fever of the sea when its immense face
cannot find the light of its cheek.

The blood will resound through the bedrooms
and arrive with flashing sword,
but you will not know where the heart
of the toad or the violet hide.

Your belly is a battle of roots,
your lips are a blurred dawn.
Under the tepid roses of the bed
the dead moan, waiting their turn.

I want the water reft from its bed,
I want the wind left without valleys.

*'Casida of the Reclining Woman',
Federico García Lorca*

I want the night left without eyes
and my heart without the flower of gold.

And the oxen to speak with great leaves
and the earthworm to perish of shadow.

And the teeth of the skull to glisten
and the yellows to overflow the silk.

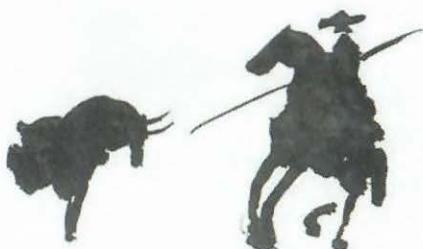
I can see the duel of the wounded night
writhing in battle with noon.

I resist a setting of green venom
and the broken arches where time suffer

But do not illumine your clear nude
like a black cactus open in the reeds.

Leave me in an anguish of dark planets,
but do not show me your cool waist.

*'Gacela of the Terrible Presence',
Federico García Lorca*



I want to sleep the dream of the apples,
to withdraw from the tumult of cemeteries,
I want to sleep the dream of that child
who wanted to cut his heart on the high seas.

I don't want to hear again that the dead do not lose their blood,
that the putrid mouth goes on asking for water.
I don't want to learn of the tortures of the grass,
nor of the moon with a serpent's mouth
that labours before dawn.

I want to sleep awhile,
awhile, a minute, a century;
but all must know that I have not died;
that there is a stable of gold on my lips;
that I am the small friend of the West wind;
that I am the immense shadow of my tears.

Cover me at dawn with a veil,
because dawn will throw fistfuls of ants at me,
and wet with hard water my shoes
so that the pincers of the scorpion slide.

For I want to sleep the dream of the apples,
to learn a lament that will cleanse me of the earth;
for I want to live with that dark child
who wanted to cut his heart on the open seas.



*'Gacela of the Dark Death',
Federico García Lorca*

The Liberation of Abandonment

'Eli, Eli, lema sabaqtani?'

Matthew 27:47

The performer's work upon himself is inhuman. The performer strives to tap the eddies and currents of that inhumanity which according to Jean-François Lyotard constitutes the human: 'the infinitely secret one [inhumanity] of which the soul is hostage'.¹ In Lyotard's rereading of Kant, this native inhumanity with which the human is born, causes 'the anguish [...] of a mind haunted by a familiar and unknown guest which is agitating it, sending it delirious but also making it think' (p. 2). The performer's work upon himself can be seen in the light of this inhumanity, i.e. as an endeavour to allude to (because it is impossible to 'present') this 'familiar' (because we sense its primeval humanity) and 'unknown' (because we have lost that 'humanity') guest that resides 'within' (p. 3).

The 'native indetermination' (pp. 4, 6) of which the soul is hostage is suppressed by what Lyotard calls another inhumanity: 'the system which is currently being consolidated under the name of development' (p. 2). The native indetermination with which the human is born is suppressed by the 'system [... which] has the consequence of causing the forgetting of what escapes it' (p. 2). The system that Lyotard refers to includes cultural norms and technological advances that 'regulate' and 'alienate' (also in the sense of 'making alien') our humanity. But suppression can never be total: that which is repressed survives as *remainder* of repression. Lyotard believes that 'traces of an indetermination' persist as absence 'within' the human. The drama that 'native indetermination' suffers at the hands of the 'determining' system is also presented in Freudian terms when Lyotard refers to 'the unknown thing "within"' (p. 3) that is 'castrated' with the advent of language (p. 5).

Genesis presents us with a similar paradigm. This is the kind of rupture, indeed of 'castration' and 'alienation', that occurs in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve achieve 'knowledge' ('education') at the loss of 'innocence' ('native indetermination' as 'organic communion with the rest of creation'). The loss of Adam and Eve's innocence marks the transformation of the status of their humanity: their former 'organic humanity with its communion with the divine' becomes 'inhuman' at its loss. The 'divine', once accessible if only by proximity, becomes 'inhuman', inaccessible. That which remains of the Fall – that schism, that loss – is a memory of Eden i.e. the presence of an absent presence.

Adam and Eve retain 'traces' of their former communion with the divine. Theologians and poets have long written of the human's pre-terrestrial angelic state of existence, a state which the infant human was still seen to partly partake of by virtue of its proximity to celestial existence. Henry Vaughan's (1621-1695) famous poem 'The Retreat' opens with these lines: 'Happy those early days! When I | Shined in my angel-infancy. | Before I understood this place | Appointed for my second race, | Or taught my soul to fancy ought /But a white, celestial thought ...'

In this scenario, Adam and Eve's post-lapsarian humanity can be located in the split matrix between the inhumanity of that which they have lost (organic communion with God and creation) and the inhumanity of the implement of loss (knowledge). In Lyotard's words: 'if the name of human can and must oscillate between native indetermination and instituted or self-instituted reason, it is the same for the name of inhuman' (p. 4).

Liotard advocates that what remains as 'politics' is the resistance to the inhuman of the system: 'And what else is left to resist with but the debt which each soul has contracted with the miserable and admirable determination from which it was born and does not cease to be born? – which is to say, with the other inhuman?' (p. 7). Lyotard words this resistance as 'writing and reading which advance backwards in the direction of the unknown thing "within"'. In other words, the human can only resist the inhumanity of the 'system' (i.e. that which reforms/castrates us as 'humans' and which makes our Fall in Eden a permanent ongoing occurrence) by the system itself. It is not a question of inventing a 'new' language, because its 'newness' would be 'more of the same'. Resistance, from Lyotard's point of view, is possible in an operative mode that inhabits the 'system' (the existing, determining rules) in a manner that 'advance[s] backwards' in the direction of our lost humanity. Vaughan echoes similar sentiments in the neoplatonic terms of return that conclude 'The Retreat': 'Some men a forward motion love, | But I by backwards steps move, | And when this dust falls to the urn | In that state I came return'.

In 'Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?', Lyotard's account of the 'postmodern' is reminiscent of, or rather anticipates, his rhetoric on advancing backwards in *The Inhuman*:

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text as such or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*. Hence the fact that work and text have the character of an *event*; hence also, they always come too late for their author, or, what amounts to the same thing, their being put into work, their realisation (*mise en oeuvre*) always begin too soon. *Post modern* would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (*post*) anterior (*modo*).²

The drive towards the infinitely secret inhuman can thus be viewed as a symptom of our 'oscillating humanity'. In 1913 Apollinaire announced that: 'More than anything, artists are men who want to become inhuman'. And in 1969 Adorno said: 'Art remains loyal to humankind uniquely through its inhumanity in regard to it' (p. 2). In this context, Eugenio Barba's description of the performer's work as 'inhuman' and Jerzy Grotowski's *via negativa* as the removal of obstacles that block our creative processes, take on added weight. Twentieth-century theatre practice that advocates the performer's work upon himself can be viewed in the light of the human's endeavour to 'advance backwards in the direction of the unknown thing "within"'.
*

The performer's work upon himself is inhuman in its quest for that which constitutes the human. Oscillating between his primitive phylogenetic memories and his sophisticated reformulated humanity, the performer's work upon himself attempts to advance backwards in the direction of our silenced humanity. The performer's mastery of technique can be seen as an endeavour to tap traces of that inhumanity which still inhabit our genetic memory. Castration can never be undone – plastic surgery may conceivably provide a

substitute for lack, but it does not provide that which is lacked. The performer works under no illusion of *making present* that inhumanity which has been lost – like Lyotard's postmodern artist, the performer 'searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable'.

The performer who works upon himself abandons his 'known' humanity in a quest for the eminently human, i.e. that which still distinguishes human beings from beasts and machines: a corporal memory marked by castration in Eden. Left to his own devices, the performer works technically upon himself by means of exercises aimed at overcoming obstacles in the design of action. The performer who works upon himself forsakes 'the solace of good forms', the nostalgia of the known, in a quest that announces the present absence of our silenced otherness.

The performer works upon himself with abandonment – a complete lack of restraint that undermines systemic regulation. Ingemar Lindh spoke of 'the amen (the so-be-it) principle' and Jerzy Grotowski of grace descending upon the performer. In order to achieve such a state of readiness, the performer would have gone through a process of shedding the layers that the human contracted from the amnesic system.

The performer who works upon himself is the abandoned performer who is called upon to be master and apprentice, director and performer at the same time. The abandoned performer is called upon to abandon the human for the sake of (his) humanity: '*Eli, Eli, lema sabaqtani?*'

The current predominant meaning of *abandon* is 'to give in to the control of, surrender to something or someone', but the original meaning of *abandon* was to 'bring under control', from the Latin *a-* ('to' or 'at') and *bandon* ('control', related to 'ban'). The abandonment of the performer who works upon himself is the quest for mastery, control. The abandoned performer attempts to reclaim and revive, in his quest for mastery, the memory which the inhuman system attempts to alienate and forget. This attempt, we have been told, is doomed to failure (castration can never be reversed), but the abandoned performer, indeed the abandoned artist who works upon himself as other, works under no illusion of making present our lost inhumanity. The abandoned performer works by 'advancing backwards', which is the very essence of research that proceeds forward by the masterful return on one's tracks, in order to manifest and allude to the unrepresentable baggage that runs in our blood. The abandoned performer returns on his tracks with the humility of the knowledge that mastery remains a matter of discovery – which is, after all, the process of liberation. The lifting of the veils that obscure humanity is not attempted in the illusory hope of discovering what lies behind, but in the belief that the process of the lifting of the veils is as close as we can get to liberation: '*Eli, Eli, lema sebaqtani?*'

Endnotes

¹ Jean-François Lyotard, 'Introduction: About the Human', in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. by G. Bennington and R. Bowbly (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), pp. 1-7 (p. 2). Subsequent references to *The Inhuman* are given in the text.

² Jean-François Lyotard, 'Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?', trans. by R. Durand, Appendix to *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 71-82 (p. 81).

An Other Humanity

- what was severed joins up again -
(...)
what is it called, your country,
behind the mountain, behind the year?
PAUL CÉLAN

Frank,

Brief flights of fancy upon reading 'The Liberation of Abandonment'. To be ignored at will. Not to be taken as a 'reply' of any kind. Rather, they are reactions of the sort that arise when one encounters a text that articulates problems (and notes the elusiveness of their solutions) that are a perennial source of - to use Ingemar's term - *disquietude*.

The 'nativity' of the inhuman, the latent humanity, and the logic of displacement

I choose to read into your text a latent struggle with an 'ethics' of performance. I don't intend the term 'ethics' to be anything other than a mnemonic for a concept that has, in our time, lost itself in retaining its old ties with the metaphysics that has been repeatedly exposed in all its naked weakness. We are, after all, in the era that Lyotard himself spoke of as being characterised by an 'incredulity towards meta-narratives'.

An ethics, then, of performing. An ethics of performing by displacement, by the exit from the pre-established categories (aesthetic, ethical, moral) of any theory of value that would itself make for the comfort of the known, the familiar. Perhaps this is itself the problem: an 'ethics' of performance implies the existence of some such familiar system of value. What remains for the artist? Perhaps to inscribe into the very term 'ethics' a logic of displacement, to say of what is 'ethical' that it is Other, that it constitutes a departure from - an abandonment of - the familiar in order to rediscover the familiar.

You articulate two senses of the word 'familiar'. There is the familiarity of comfort, the illusion of knowledge. There is also the familiarity of the strange and the unknown (but deeply personal, latent, endemic, if only as a trace), the source of discomfort. The Romance languages use the term *dis(-)agio*.¹ Discomfort. Literally: lack of action. Or better: negated action, the action of renouncement, the action of moving forever backwards from what is known. The moving back presupposes a nostalgia, a felt trace of something other (the latent inhumanity that is the profoundly human). It also entails re(-)search, the search anew. Perhaps research, in all its negativity, is indeed the converse of the kind of 'affirmative action' that has become the key characteristic of our time (that second familiarity), governed by the logic of infinite progression, without a backward glance.

This is how I understand your discourse on the inhuman. Displacing oneself to find oneself - *sposamento* - in Vattimo's turn of phrase. Not exile, or not exactly. Rather, the possibility of exit from the familiar in order to rediscover a sense of *deja ete*: I have been here before. This is why, juggling your words around, appropriating them, I discover in the 'native inhumanity' a nativity of the human. That is, a birth, every time that some point is reached where one can say to oneself: I have been here before. Thereafter, displacement ceases to be exile and becomes rediscovery.

Locality, power, enactment, exteriority

Having said all that ... I am not comfortable with the discourse of nostalgia, with the discourse of repression, the discourse of alienation. They are categories that by turns belong to the Theological, the Freudian, the Marxist. Despite their usefulness, they constitute an acknowledgement of these stories that retell, in vivid detail, the events of the human. Upon closer inspection, it transpires that the events they recount are only events insofar as they find a place in the story that is woven in the telling. But every telling implies omission.

To speak of the 'native indetermination' as 'repression' is to say that there is a power that operates top-down, that represses, be it the law of the Father in its social/psychological manifestations, or be it a state-bureaucratic apparatus that shields the 'real' from view.² Similarly, I perceive in your text the attempt to place the otherness of latent humanity in a discourse couched in phylogenesis, in a Darwinian narrative of evolution and heredity, as though phylogenesis were the road along which the work of research could travel in order to arrive at some determinable point of reference at which it could say: 'I have had my vision'.

This is not to say that the familiar metaphors (for that is what they are) of repression, loss of a prelapsarian state, genetic heritage, are invalid as points of reference for seeking an understanding of the problem. However, in seeking to find a route towards an action that is 'political', within the framework of re(-)search as defined above, and as I understand it in your text, I believe that such categories are of limited use. On the other hand, I acknowledge the risk that inheres in any attempt to create a 'new language'. I return to this point below.

I prefer the view that power, as it manifests itself in the deployment of knowledge, is strictly local. It is in this locality that I would see the possibility of political action. What is 'knowledge' in the present context?

The performer is not the first human being to discover the ethics of re(-)search. The individual who 'departs' on the backward search, the negative route, is an age-old figure in the Christian tradition. And not just the Christian tradition. But nevertheless, that this could happen *within* the Christian tradition – within a pastoral that had localised itself in the sheer dimensions of an institution that sought to permeate society at every level, is truly significant. The renouncement of the familiarity of an all-embracing institution invested with the power of the divine, to seek the solitude of self-knowledge. The Gnostics were a prime example. And they were 'heretics', in some sense of the term. The heretic is, of course, he who abandons the all-embracing, the overarching, to seek a local, inner 'truth'. Of course, there is no heretic if there is no such overarching, ever-present power. The heretic is the point of rupture in the smooth skin of this power.

For the past year or so, I have been thinking intermittently on the 'political' nature of our theatre. My question is: where does political action lie? Can re(-)search be political if it seeks to rediscover, to go backwards along the negative route, the route of *dis-agio*, while at the same time anchoring itself within a social milieu? Perhaps the germ of an answer lies in the preceding paragraphs. But the answer remains elusive.

The impossible exteriorisation, the entrapment of language

i. (fragments of a disembodied memory)

I find myself seated as a guest in my second home, in a space that, over the past two years, has acquired for me a familiarity at once comfortable and threatening. I know its every nook and cranny, I know its layout, I know intimately each dent in the parquet floor. And I know that here, in my second home, I come only to leave behind. Hence the danger. Today, my questions are, for a while, directed at someone else. He has resurfaced with a new work, after a number of years.

The first vision is sound, the low and piercing whistle. From the corner of my eye I glimpse a hat emerging on the end of a walking stick, followed, shuffle by shuffle, by the figure in black and a red cloak.

In the next thirty minutes, I keep finding elements of the familiar. The texts by Lorca. A scattering of red fragments. A chair. *Quiero dormir el sueño de las manzanas ...* It is as though I have been here before, between 1996 and 1997. It was different then, it was another search which had meandered its way to these elements: the text by Lorca, the scattering of red fragments, the chair. *Amargo* gives me back these images, reworking them into something utterly unknown to me. Beneath the images is another history, that merely uses the image for the telling of its own story. Unfinished, it can already transport me back into a territory where I can still see my own footsteps, amid the sound of footfalls of another.

I have been here before.
I don't know this place.

ii.

Even the viewer, the comfortably seated member of the audience, is faced with the task of abandonment.

iii.

It is impossible to create a new language, 'more of the same'. The only possibility is to abandon the comfort of language to seek, in the anteriority of action, something else. And yet, it is to language that we must return. The patina of the text is made necessary, by the impossibility of exteriorisation, by the very fact that the process of abandonment and rediscovery has left language behind. In order to reinscribe that history, it is necessary to redress, to give a surface.

Endnotes

¹ Cf. *agire*. 'To take action'. *Essere a suo agio*: to be in a state of ease, familiarity, to be in a state of know-ness. An oddly paradoxical etymology: it is comfort that presupposes inaction. And inaction - *disagio* - that presupposes movement.

² I have in mind the so-called 'Repressive Hypothesis', key exponents of which are, of course, the interwar and post-war theorists that operate at the juncture between psychoanalysis and Marxism (Horkheimer/Reich etc). Cf. Michel Foucault, *La Volonté de Savoir* (1976).

albert gatt

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