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## Contemporary Italian Thought (Substance 53)

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popular culture directed specifically at women. . . . By analyzing the problems raised by female pleasure, rather than by repressing or refusing to acknowledge its existence, it may be possible to transform or deflect it" (xii). These essays compare favorably with the chapters on "Polemics" and "Feminist Film Theory" in *Women and the Cinema*, edited by Karyn Kay and Gerald Peary (Dutton, 1977). They also expand upon complex issues, such as the reification of women in cinema, raised by Patrizia Carrano in *Malafemmina: La donna nel cinema italiano* (Guaraldi, 1977). *Off Screen* belongs in the library of anyone interested in film theory, particularly as created by Italian women in response to their experience of the cinema.

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**Contemporary Italian Thought**  
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Something French seeps through the editing and presentation of "Contemporary Italian Thought" in *SubStance 53*—until one gets to the articles, which have a wonderful way of "speaking" to each other, as immigrants in foreign spaces, telling of the distance in sharing "that" language.

"That" language comes through in the affinities between the articles of Vattimo/Cacciari (9,72), Agamben/Rella (23,32), Cacciari/Agamben (68,23), Vattimo/Agamben (17,23), Rella/Cacciari (35,71), and Rella/Vattimo (29,11). These examples, which I will return to, make up a strategy of an Italian cultural discourse which is a form of "reconcili-

ation," though without establishing, settling, or accepting. Keala Jane Jewell's Introduction (5-6) rushes to quote Cacciari on a "form of political thought which would not be based on the model of reconciliation," and allows this to typify Italian cultural discourse, adding that it also "might be read in conjunction with the articles" (6, my emphasis). Well, at least for these particular articles, the "might" of non-reconciliation is still stronger than should be used for the reading of the articles.

It is appropriate to begin with the article by Jewell—"Pasolini: Deconstructing the Roman Palimpsest"—since she introduced the selections and translated three articles from the Italian. Jewell's article harbors a difference in that it does not participate in the "value of the residual" it wishes to present: the palimpsest. Representing the poems of Pasolini as palimpsests is visually thought provoking; yet "deconstructing" them has little to do with those delicate surfaces, unsolidified at the slightest touch of language's rougher games. When the "contaminatio" has entered poet and polemicist, it has also trespassed the person, and it becomes that twisting reflection of the "more human" than human which seeks to recoil its surface from the winds of textuality. Textuality is the horrid realism of conceptual capture, and it was against this that a "residual" was hoped for, a residual which is understood in *Passione e ideologia*, and felt in the Friulan lyric verses. Jewell's article is nonetheless well documented, while engaged in a "view from afar" of the leavings of a lived peripherality.

Beverly Allen's "The Telos, Trope and Topos of Italian Terrorism" "textualizes" its subject as a high powered rifle magnified by its scope. Yet such magnification does not distinguish the "differences" objectified by its own viewing, and renders different things equally

prominent in its focus. "The Telos, Trope, and Topos" are literary/rhetorical devices, while "Italian Terrorism" is neither: i) "the most literary of all political actions" (38) nor ii) participant in the communication of "a message" (38). Allen's article has a serious scope to it, yet I would recommend that she reread Aenesidemus of Knossos (*Sextus Empiricus, Pyrrhoneses Hypotyposes* 1, 36ff.), Baudrillard (*Simulacra and Simulations*, 1983; *Forget Foucault & Forget Baudrillard*, 1987), and Virilio (*L'Esthétique de la Disparition*, 1980; *Speed and Politics*, 1986), and notice the emptying range.

Bianca Maria Frabotta's "The Apotheosis of the Voice in Alberto Moravia's *Vita interiore*" could have benefited from Allen's textual structure, and Allen's textual structure could have benefited from a subject such as Moravia's *Vita interiore*. Frabotta's introduction to Moravia's structuring of *Vita interiore* is wonderfully weaved out of the notion of a spent terrorism: unexhumed archetype of the negative utopia of an assumed first person's representation, irony, and critique of Evil. What remains, which Frabotta does not supply us with, is the notion that terrorism is now a rimy, uninhabited genre within the interiors of "un dialogo," a struggle with the "locum tenens" of what can be called postmodern consciousness. Desideria, the Voice, the "I," and author and writing (52) face off to each other's "modeling" of themselves in a Baudrillardian ritual, which "Non è più fra un soggetto e l'altro, è la differenziazione interna dello stesso soggetto" (It is no longer between one subject and another, it is the internal differentiating of the self-same subject) (Baudrillard, *L'Altro visto da sé*, Edizioni Costa e Nolan, 1987: 30). Moreover, according to Kristeva, whether "[t]he theory of Discourse [and narrative productivity itself] prevails . . . over desire's *écriture*" (53) is unlikely, since it must contend with

"metonymic slippage [which is allowed the subject] by the current forces of production" (*Revolution in Poetic Language*, 1984: 178). Nonetheless, Frabotta has presented a strong piece which sends the reader searching between a protective fractalized interiority (discourse) and the blinding and deafening spaces of a possible (pure) reception.

The remaining articles are extremely provocative and conscious of their "spectacle" in theorizing *from within* the "locum tenens." The innate grace and crucial aspect of contemporary Italian philosophy could have been better understood if the articles had been presented in an order that revealed this unfolding. The affinities that surface between the last main articles are what will strike the reader into "Italian cultural discourse." Vattimo exposes Nietzsche's Aphorism 125 of *The Gay Science*—"the end of the epoch of surpassing, of the epoch of being thought of as novum, or novelty" (9)—as the rumble of a coming "Verwindung," while Cacciari carefully weaves Pasolini: "i no plans parse che chel mond a no'l torna pi/ma plans parse che il so torna al e finit" (I do not cry because that world will never return/but because its returning is over) (72); from the inability, revealed in Agamben, of "language push[ing] back, like a presupposition . . . the very knowability of the entity which is revealed in it" (23), to the all-capacious looming horizon of Rella's "melancholy."

A quick summary of these main articles is no substitute for the experience gained by reading them, especially if one can view a "reading" through the example of Jean-Michel Rey's reading of Nietzsche in *L'Enjeu des signes: Lectures de Nietzsche* (Les Editions du Seuil, 1971). Such a "crossing on the diagonal" is how these main articles are already presented to us.

Vattimo's Nietzsche-Heideggerian "Verwindung" is a life-yielded her-

meneutics, conscious of the threshold of its own convalescence. This graceful movement of passage in Vattimo's thought is the doubling of its own virtual recovery of proximity. In other words, Vattimo's article "Verwindung: Nihilism and the Postmodern in Philosophy" is among those thoughts (also seen in Agamben, Rella, Cacciari) able to bear the gravity of transformations from within the fabric of their own language and "course of events" (15).

Agamben's article, "The Thing Itself," also shares Vattimo's *verwindend* "essence" of thought (17) in stating that "Language sup-poses and hides that which it brings to light in the very act of bringing it to light" (23), which eventually leads to a *Darstellung* of language through writing from "gramma" (27). Such an exposition is another form of "proximity" approaching the delicate ephemerality of nihilism, which none of these articles avoids. Even Agamben's populated philological-philosophic prospect leaves one as involved as Rella's subtly placed ruins.

Rella's "Melancholy and the Labyrinthine World of Things" is a mesa that surfaces in the surveys of Vattimo, Agamben, and Cacciari. Rella's "different, and unknown order in which even the smallest of items is rescued from disappearance or inessentiality" (29) is close to Vattimo's notion of "thinking of the proximity," with "errors," or the "interpretations and cultural constructions inherited from humankind's past" (11). Rella's "barely traced paths of the possible" move from "surpassing the reconstructive moment" to "the love for decomposition" (35) and sketch for us a lingering mirage of modernity.

Cacciari's article "Pasolini Provincial?" is an exercise in the beveled surfaces of language as dialect, ranging from the "impossible presence" of the body in Pasolini (70), "lost in the suffering its parting produces" (71)—akin to Rella's "precious object" gathered which "leaves the ruins intact" (35)—to

"the [Friulan] language of memory and absence [which] instead of defining an object . . . delimits a loss" (68). Cacciari's view of language is similar to Agamben's "weakness" of logos (23) in language's call, which is "always full of 'Away!'" (Rilke, *Duino Elegies* no. 7, 88).

Vattimo's "event," Cacciari's "dialect," and Agamben's "sup-posedness" share the gestures of Rella's surveying of "unknown terrain": a spontaneously fractaled "differentia" which realize that to "stand as barriers" (76), as Hayden White wonders, in response to Perniola's notion of *differentia*, is to continue to maintain the ruins of politics; and to request "l'atto" of "concomitance" of "weak thought" as Reiner Schürmann requests, smacks of old Gentilian moralism. I would refer the reader to the review of the 1983 Symposium "The Unperfect Actor: The Critique of Ideology and Hermeneutics in Contemporary Italian Thought" (74-76) as an example of how some critics (Renate Holub in this case) are still caught in ontologism (technologically advanced perhaps) and yet proceed from that to hope of "immediate" knowledge, whereas the Italian philosophers mentioned (along with editors Carravetta and T. Harrison) are finished digging within these "sepolcri." The criticism of Holub to "The Unperfect Actor" and its editors can be seen as a strange resurrection of "virtue" and fierce patriotism of mind.

There is "that" certain space of Italian Philosophy which has escaped the editors of *SubStance*. The Introduction by Jewell, the review of Renate Holub, and the unnoticed unfolding of a "locum tenens" within the order of the articles, form a space in which the articles fit uncomfortably. It is this "reverse" imported spacing that restricts the peculiar geometry of Italian thought so that it appears French.

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