

THE MILAN

Gintaras Didžiapetris, Elena Narbutaitė, Jonas Žakaitis

JONAS:

A little bit like Freud, who used to hurriedly write down his dreams first thing after waking up in order to be able to think about them afterwards, I am now writing to both of you, Elena and Gintaras, in an attempt to piece together the conversation we had last night in Turin. Some things we talked about still keep my brain cranking, I think there was something interesting there, something worth writing down, but of course it might be difficult now to retrace the path of thought we shared. The wine, grappas and whiskies we had, our tired bodies after the whole day of walking, all the things we've seen and talked about throughout our trip—all that makes this conversation of ours part of a much thicker reality. So maybe nothing I will try to remember now will make sense, but I'll try nevertheless and I hope that you can both get back to me quickly and fill in the gaps.

And so I remember that we were standing at the entrance to an Irish pub (how come we ended up in an Irish pub in Turin?) and for some reason I went off talking about the cathedral of Milan. I was saying that when I first saw it I kept staring at it bewildered for an hour or so. The funny thing is that I quickly understood that the cathedral was not meant to be looked at, or rather it was largely indifferent to the human gaze. The sides of its facade were thick with the tiniest sculptures, some of them so high up that standing on the ground you could only see a vague outline, but you knew that hanging up there these minute sculptures were perfectly exact and made perfect sense within that huge petrified Gothic universe. If there ever was an eye that could zoom in on the cathedral in its fullness and in complete detail it was the God's eye, not a human eye. Then in a

single flash I understood the fundamental difference that makes it almost impossible to fully grasp the scope of the cathedral now: modern buildings always internalize human perception into their very structure, they are built in such a way that every element would make 'human sense', i.e. could be seen, experienced, used. In that sense all modern buildings are anthropomorphic—they are structured by human reason and experience and are meant to be absorbed by the latter. Whereas that Gothic cathedral was way beyond any individual human life and consciousness. It's enough to know that its construction lasted six hundred years. 600 years divided by an average life span probably equals to ½ of the cathedral's entrances.

Then as far as I remember Gintaras said that he had a very similar experience when looking at Greek art and architecture. He talked about how Greek art in its time was something very different from visual experience, or any kind of experience for that matter. Greek art, Gintaras said, was more like belief—a very basic belief that by making a figure of a god or by sculpting a column something can be activated in the world, something real can happen. This belief involved a great deal of knowledge and skill, but at the same time it was drenched with uncertainty and exceeded any given consciousness.

ELENA:

I remember that your reminiscences about the cathedral of Milan brought us back to the question of belief, something Gintaras was talking about the day before.

Then you said something about Heidegger and Western culture being based on the gap of the darkness. We were also talking about the Greeks (a culture where gods looked like humans, a belief which I thought resulted from lots of physical exercise) and then I remembered my experiences as a child watching the cartoon version of the Prometheus myth. This incredible feeling that gods looked like humans and lived almost on the same level, just a bit higher on the mountain, so easy to reach, but when you would go there something would happen to you, all this raised a lot of questions for me I remember.

And then I think you came up again with this idea of an abyss at the base of Western culture and it took us to the question of politics, to Pascal and Montaigne and then to Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, where the devil is real, a real figure and a regime.

GINTARAS:

My perspective was to think of objects as images primarily of human beliefs—it is clear that once you put this hyperrealistic horse up there on the frieze of a Greek temple, the marble becomes something else to a regular citizen—a sign rather than a horse that is as real as it is in the real world. The citizen, walking on a hazy morning, can just presume how accurately rendered the figure is up there. Beliefs, it seems, were made from beliefs, not marble. We talked that in our times, in most cases, the situation is reversed—artists are making things to be looked at from up close (in the way that Greek art is also displayed now in the world's museums), from a 'perfect' point of view, that itself was constructed.

Then I was trying to imagine the very first second, the very first glimpse of culture as man-made version of the world. A moment when, possibly after finishing the construction of the first temple, an architect is heading to build another one, someplace else. What is she thinking, does she recognise that what she is doing is actually becoming a language, a constructed relation to everything outside, real or told to be real?

Then I was also talking about infinite movement—any gesture multiplying its meanings and always going outside of its original intention or anyone's control. A tool made of stone leaves a rock with a void, which is itself more or less productive to something/someone else. A decision and its implications that are impossible to describe and measure. And it takes a lot of effort to turn this infinity into the ecology or art, for example.

Something similar can be ascribed to a diagram that is made to explain any mechanism or process—by itself the process appears to operate in the way the diagram has described it (take, for example diagrammatic description of economic development), but such orderly description is in touch with other diagrams and interior points within itself, mapping co-existences and co-developments. A diagram appears simple only when it is discerned from a network of diagrams.

Basically, like this text that I'm trying to write very fast, with more gaps than memories, social activities appear to be historical or they appear to have a narrative—beginning, middle and culmination—but once they are in touch with other activities (and they always are) these narratives conclude only *diagrammatically*, but they keep having effect on many different developments around them.

Coming back to this idea of a very basic activity (using intellect), it is hard to think about anything without having a culture. Archaeology is an amazing enterprise that is caught in this very problem—being at once in all places and times of a human intellect.

ELENA:

I haven't been reading much for a while now. Only sometimes and very loosely. Books started making me anxious. I know it's a passing thing and I feel jealous seeing other people read. But I fill the spans of my reading time with walks now. Not the kind of walks that have a clear direction, but walks that lead me to various treasures. Shopping is big part of it, or at least having the knowledge of the possibility of buying something. So it is related to the wallet. And that's another reason why I like collecting coins and having pants, skirts or dresses with pockets. Having a bag is a big part of every walk too. And if there isn't one around, then the most exciting thing is to invent it. This process of invention reminds me of legs and hands, uses of the body, the whole lot of things you can do with yourself as an instrument, as a carriage and a runner.

When you look up-close at the cloths of high quality you can see where the intelligence of nature lies.

A good bag with reasonably sized belts, not too long, not too short.

A good bag with super tiny belts, and a very light and long one.

A good bag with belts that are neither tiny, nor too wide, and one that is round and fits between the right ribs easily becoming a part of every different anatomy.

Often the quality of one or another thing develops through time. Though there are many ways to look at it and to decide what the quality of a coat, for instance, really is. Coats adapt to various walks and senses of comforts. For practical people—a coat that doesn't crumple up. For those who need a different experience from their outfit and things that surround them—maybe a kind of coat to just hang on their bag. For those who live in the streets—warm and good looking coats. And for those who live in castles as large as streets—well, it would be even hard to guess.

