

Greta Schödl

The extraordinary story of Greta Schödl's artistic experience spans almost seventy years through a century, the past century, that marked great social, scientific and cultural changes.

The young Greta, a student at the Academy of Applied Arts in Vienna and winner of the *Akademiepreis* prize for the best pupil of the Academy in 1953, brings with her a wide and varied culture and is able to express herself artistically through a variety of techniques, from mosaic to tapisserie, from drawing to graphics, from illustration to painting and performance.

And she is a woman. A woman and an artist, from a young age.

A common thread links Greta's entire artistic life and all her works: the constant quest to understand herself and the world, to search for what is beyond the skin of things, to express the feelings, dreams, and emotions that make us feel alive, in nature and in everyday life, to grasp the meaning of her and our unique and singular identity.

There is a kind of joy, of childlike pleasure and amazement, in Greta's witnessing of her existence in the world through her writing, in that identity imprint that runs across the surface(s) of the object, marked by drops of gold leaf, like an enchanted path.

Childlike astonishment is, according to Elémire Zolla, the happy state of childhood. It is the original attitude, the first feeling a child experiences when it becomes aware of its physical being, when it feels a smell, a warmth coming from its body, and is astonished. Taking his cue from this concept, the Turinese aesthetician Franzini placed infantile amazement at the origin of the aesthetic attitude: aesthetic thought has, therefore, as its starting point, as an archetype, original amazement.

Just as happens, in oriental cultures, with the experience of ecstasy or Zen, which, by bringing us back to our original astonishment, go so far as to annul the consciousness of the ego and being, an experience of the annulment of consciousness similar to that which is also achieved through ritual - such as ritual dance or shamanic dance.

In Greta Schödl's works, we seem to hear the call of a sort of symbolic, ancestral rituality, almost a shamanic dance to which her signs with an ancient flavour (the use of Gothic in her writing) seem to refer. In their almost obsessive repetition, they operate a sort of annulment of the world of things in order to see it again with virgin eyes and rediscover the original lost amazement in the aesthetic dimension and in the rituality of the gesture.

Space and time, for Greta, are here and now, sensitive evidence of her being and her inexhaustible possibility of *feeling*.

In the Dictionary of the Italian Language, the word *possibility* is defined as “a condition or quality of what is possible”. In Greta Schödl's artistic poetics, the surface - of paper, canvas, marble - is a place of happenings, of outcroppings, of disappearances; it is a place where something can happen, where the artist's action is given as a possibility.

The essence of human beings, Heidegger said, is not among things, it does not dwell with things, but is at the *possibility* that things give themselves.

A constant research and experimentation of *possibilities* is the foundation of Greta Schödl's work, the possibility of time to establish itself, in signs and traces, in their repetition on paper or canvas, in the acoustic resonances that seem to expand in space, in the flow of the sign - continuous, temporal - dominated by a poetic rhythm that leads the mind beyond the surface, beyond the gesture.

The artist's eye, Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote, “is an instrument that moves itself, a means that invents its own ends, the eye is that which has been touched by a certain impact with the world, and returns it to the visible by means of the marks made by the hand.”

“My research is on the sign” – Greta said in a recent interview – The sign, the gesture is very personal. Each line traces our entire experience, like a fingerprint or a wrinkle on the skin. The meaning and perception of the word are subjective and unique for everyone.¹

The sign as a moment of existential verification, thought that becomes a trace, and the artist's hand, like a seismograph, transmits on paper the internal sensations, emotions, memories, the story hidden under the surface of the world: elements that, from intermediaries between the idea and the sign, become a filter for the image and the mental path is transformed into a manual tracing, a place of reflection, of thought freed by the mind that dilates space and time, cancelling the boundaries of the defined (physical) field of the surface.

Sign is not meant as a purely instinctive or instinctual gesture, but a thought-out form, a pure instrument of research into the depth of feeling and at the same time an affirmation of living, of participating in the world.

Between the perception of a sensation or emotion and its formal translation into a sign, there is a *passage* in the consciousness that changes its nature; in the very instant of perception, that sensation becomes *memory* and it is the latter that passes on, filtering it, the stimulus to the hand that traces the sign; memory is thus the place of decantation of the perceptual stimuli of the phenomenal world.

The idea of memory is a central element of Greta's poetics, since the choice of materials on which she weaves her web of word-signs. A random choice, says the artist, but in reality artefacts extracted – this one by chance – from her private world: old sheets from her grandmother's bed, hemp and linen from her wedding trousseau, pages from botanical books, maps, papers, leaves, pieces of marble, excerpts of letters, all bearing the memory of past existence that the artist, combining them with her writing, brings back into the flow of life.

The space in which she works is therefore never an abstract dimension, it is not - to quote the words of Maurice Merleau-Ponty again – “a network of relations between objects, as a witness of my vision would see it, or a geometer who would reconstruct it by flying over it, but it is a space considered from me as a point or degree zero.” Starting, then, from the life, being and beingness of the artist in the immanence of reality, and at the same time in the space-time suspension of creative action.

The spatial dimension, the place of the creative happening, then, dilates and multiplies, as in a musical score, in secret and extremely calibrated formal relationships that empty the word of its semantic meaning to make it a continuous flow of signs, so to speak, preverbal and common to all and to all cultures, going back to the alphabetical origin of language as the first instrument of perception and communication elaborated by men.

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¹ Marco Arrigoni, *Greta Schödl and the discovery of sign and rituality*, HarpetBazaar 13/07/2020