

## THE MEMORY WRITTEN IN IMAGES. FROM AN ENIGMATIC PRESS-CUTTING TO A NEW DOCUMENTARY FILM ON FUTURISM.

On 1978 Marco Rossi Lecce who was then a thirty-two up-and-coming young artist inquiring into his family matters, found between the documents brought to Rome on the Twenties from his grandmother, the marquise Bianca Erba Pino Lecce, a piece of pink paper with the names of futurists. Between these, the printer Carlo Erba dead during the war on 1917: he was his great-uncle and namesake nephew of the famous chemist promoter of the pharmaceutical company “Carlo Erba” in Milan. This piece of paper appears to be the extract of an article signed by Tommaso Marinetti named *Quinte e scene della campagna del Battaglione lombardo Volontari Ciclisti sul lago di Garda e sull’Altissimo*, published in January-February 1916, in two issues, on the *Sport Gazette*<sup>1</sup>. The text, so far never quoted in the modern historiography, is a great detailed summary of the exploits made by the 8th Lombard Battalion Platoon between May and November 1915, recruiting, together with Marinetti, a big number of artists linked to the Futurism movement and to the group *New Trends*<sup>2</sup>: Umberto Boccioni, Luigi Russolo, Mario Sironi, Antonio Sant’Elia, Carlo Erba, Anselmo Bucci, Achille Funi, Ugo Piatti. This is the first document about the experience of the futurists during the war, an experience which is finally known. Especially because these months passed together – at first during the military exercises into the moor of Gallarate, then behind the lines and to the front -, were representing for them an important and terrible experience testing their youth arrogance and enthusiasm. New research intents took shape on their mind, while the war was changing from an irredentist ideology to an existential event for a generation of young people determined to set up against the destruction and the death, an “ongoing vitality” which intent was to conquer the world to re-create it, starting from the inner life of the single man. From here, the need felt by Marco Rossi Lecce and by the critic Enrico Crispolti (who first collaborates to the reconstruction of the figure of Carlo Erba), to understand better what the age of futurism had meant in terms of life, arts and youth in spite of the fact that the movement had followed ideas completely different or opposite to the ones of the 1968, apart from the rebellion against the bourgeois respectability. A rebellion that, in neither of the two movements is able to transform itself in a thought revolution; in the first case it is falling back to the suicide support to the first world war that will bring the so called “back to order” of art and society; in the second case to the terrorism of the Seventies, able to cancel even the possibility of a really “different” identity. From here, the decision to interview the main characters and witnesses of those events, involving the artist Agostino Milanese as sound engineer and Maurizio Carrassi as cameraman, and using a modern mean for those days as the videotape which brought a new technological sub genre way of thinking. This need was coming from the cultural mood of a decade in which many experiments and self

productions had been created. At the 37<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale on 1976 the videotape has been celebrated, in effect, as the ideal mean to show live the reality, the rebellion, the political messages, the different excitement moods; on 1977 the subject of a seminar held at the new A.S.A.C. (Historical Archive of Contemporary Arts) offices in Venice, was the use and the interpretation of the audiovisual communication. And it is widely present, as a structural event of the present-day, at the Biennale on 1980, dedicated to The Art of the Seventies. Besides the documentary function which the videotape allows, with its versatility and its narrative and conversational potentials, the memory written on moving images turns out to be the most appropriate instrument to address the research, in a programmatic dynamic way, towards a past which intention is to open itself to the interpretation and the meaning of a plural and present history where art, youth rebellion and modern multimedia civilization are intertwining one another. On December 1979 in Milan, Rossi Lecce meets the ex-volunteer V.C.A., Gino Francioli, and the sculptor Marco Bisi, son of the writer Giannetto Bisi and of the painter Adriana Bisi Fabbri, cousin of Boccioni; at the same time Crispolti is interviewing the aeropainter Tullio Crali, exceptional interpreter of Marinetti's declamations. The recordings are not only throwing light on unknown events of futurism, but they also show us some important scoops such as the incredible recovery of Boccioni's sculpture *Sviluppo di una bottiglia nello spazio* (1912), which is giving a new view on the inner links between the futurist research and the research of the years after the Second World War; the live story of the capture of Dosso Casina and the breaking up of V.C.A. group; the sole visual and talking show of two onomatopoeic poems by Marinetti: *Morte della mula di batteria* and the famous *Zang Tumb Tumb*, inspired by the siege of Adrianopoli on 1912 during Turkish-Bulgarian war. In 1980 the research is extending to other characters; the art critic Giuseppe Sprovieri a militant supporter of the futurism on 1913-14 through the activity of his art galleries in Rome and Naples; Giannina Censi, who at the beginning of the Thirties had been the ideal interpreter of the *Manifesto della Danza Futurista* (edited by Marinetti on 1917) and who teaches to her students in Savona – within them Silvana Barbarini dancer and choreographer- how to reproduce with the dance Marinetti's poems and the 50 pictures of Fortunato Depero and Enrico Prampolini, finally splitting in this way, the movement from the music event. According to Marco Rossi Lecce and Enrico Crispolti the project should have continued with video interviews to Arnaldo Ginna, author of the film *Vita Futurista*, to Primo Corti, Ivo Pannaggi, the aeropainter Barbara (pen-name of Olga Biglieri Scurto) and others, but the logistic and organizational difficulties of the project, the lack of economical resources and may be the inevitable change of the situation are not allowing this. We are in 1980. The imagination lost her power and it is time no more to investigate about themselves through the discovery of the "other". The unsolved mystery of Ustica, the Bologna massacre and the "40. 000 March" in Turin mark the turn of events towards

a new “return to order” where the research for the wellbeing is giving way to the social claims, to the rely on the individual feeling of survival or on the power of relationships of families and clans. for many years the main problems have been the preservation of the hot material and the possibility to access to it. Only in 2008, thanks to the researches made from Alberto Grifi about the restoration methods of the video tapes, it has been possible to access again to all the tapes at the Carlo Erba Archive in Rome and to start a new adventure with the contribution of the Rome Councillorship for Communication: make a real documentary film. Of the 5 hours of the original material shot, the most interesting pieces have been selected and they have been completed with archive material collected by Marco Rossi Lecce and with new shots and interview – to Rossi Lecce himself, to Enrico Crispolti, Silvana Barbarini and Luigi Sansone<sup>3</sup>- so that it was possible to put together a coral and involving report of a period of our recent history, too often known superficially or through the simplifications of one or another politic party. So on February 2009 we create *Sulle tracce del futurismo*, whose title is already evoking the spirit of adventure animating that first project born on 1979 and now used by the directors Maurizio Carrassi and Fabio Solimini as a kind of “future memorandum”: that is, a plot where you can write up a story full of time cross-references in order to understand the scope of continuity and discontinuity processes, still linking this past to the unconscious of the contemporary man. The original shot pieces not yet used are dealing mainly with the theater, musical and acting experiences of the futurism and they would deserve to be developed in a second documentary film, as they have many links with the following history of the . But this is another story that has to be written. Sometimes youth dreams have a good memory.

NOTE:

1. The whole story was brought to light by Enrico Crispolti in *Zang Tumb Tuum. I Futuristi vanno alla guerra. Giochi, burle e travestimenti dei futuristi del Battaglione Ciclisti*, “*Bolaffiarte*”, no. 79, a. IX, May 1978, pp. 9-15. From the studies made by Rossi Lecce the project of an exhibition signed together with Enrico Crispolti is coming out, with the intention to reconstruct the chronicle of the futurist war experience. The project was never accomplished

2. The group founded on 1914 in Milan by Erba, Sant’Elia, Funi, Leonardo Dudreville and others, made an exhibition for the first time on May 1914 by the Artistic Family in Milan. They were carrying on an avant-garde research near to the futurism, but with the intention to go over the propositions of simultaneity and dynamic interpenetration.

3. Luigi Sansone reconstructed the history of the sculptures of Umberto Boccioni in the book *Umberto Boccioni. La rivoluzione della scultura*, by W. Feierabend (Silvana, Cisanello Balsamo 2006) and he dedicated two exhibitions to the theme of the futurists during the war: *Il Battaglione Lombardo dei Volontari Ciclisti Automobilisti e i Futuristi nella battaglia di Dosso Casina*, organised on 2007 by the Banca Popolare di Milano in collaboration with the Museum Permanente di Milano and the Civiche Raccolte d’Arte di Milano, and *I futuristi a Dosso Casina*, for the Museum of Riva del Garda on 2008.