

DISTANCE AND MEMORY Jonathan Molinari

Alice: "How long is forever?"
White Rabbit: "Sometimes, just a second."
(Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*)

Between writing and memory there is an intense affinity: moments, images are selected, possibilities come about (dreamed of or apprehended) that are embodied through the anxious processes of the imagination. I know what time is – Augustine wrote –, but if I am asked to explain it I cannot (*Confessions*, Book XI). My memory traces my past and my history, not only as an individual, but in a collective dimension as well. On the recollection of being Italian, rather than French or Argentinian, on the recollection of my childhood, my affections, the history of my country, my language, I do not merely build my individual identity, but I also define my belonging to a place, a specific world of relations, affections and languages. In short: my entire identity depends on images I did not intentionally choose but that my mind offers me, under the most varied guises, maybe with the purpose of adding interest to the future, I mean that dimension of time that – save various mysticisms – it is impossible to recollect.

It is worthwhile reflecting on the central relationship between remembering and forgetting. The waters of Lethe, the necessity to forget to be able to come back to life. As though forgetting were the necessary condition to give rise to new horizons: after all, the future has to be paid for with the coin of forgetfulness, otherwise it would become the endless continuation and repetition of what has already been. A first problem this exhibition about memory invites us to think about is the "use" of time, allowing that it is possible to "use" something that in fact does not belong to us. In a world that very foolishly identifies time (unrepeatable, irreversible, fleeting, highly precious) with money (and how much does an extra day of life cost?), Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote (in *The Little Prince*) "it is the time you spent for your rose that made your rose so important". Spending time is important to grow a rose, a hope, all things considered: to have something worth being remembered.

Art in general, if such an expression is feasible, may have that very purpose: poised between leisure and eternity it is able to transform a futile detail into something that penetrates memory and transforms it. It would be very dreary to live without the secret company – locked in the drawers of recollection – of certain pictures and certain books. "If I say to the moment 'Stop now! You are so beautiful!'", this after all seems to be the warning that comes to us from the workings of our memory (the quotation is from *Maxims and Reflections* by J.W. Goethe), stopping time to more intensely enjoy the magic of an encounter, a smile or a kiss. But as always Schopenhauer is right: "Memory is a whimsical and bizarre being comparable to a young girl" (Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*), and it is precisely to attempt to understand the whims of this lovable and incomprehensible girl that we need to waste time, to stop and observe, let ourselves be guided through art to a deeper vision of a time that can only be endlessly reconstructed and transformed.

According to Proust, "the better part of our memories exists outside of us, in a blatter of rain" (Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*). This is perhaps the most profound theme that connects the works shown here: the best part is the one outside of us. Outside of us because free, not stifled by our reasonings or various conditionings. Schopenhauer's young girl, whimsical and bizarre, tremendously resembles Proust's "blatter of rain". In both cases memory sketches in the reminiscence a free reality, independent of our will that selects and manipulates our past, that builds our individual and collective identity, and that is ultimately reconciled with us in the enchantment of the aesthetic play, whereby the work of art tells us that "forever" is "just a second".