

Differentia: Review of Italian Thought

Number 3 *Combined Issue 3-4 Spring/Autumn*

Article 14

1989

Weak Art

Pietro Bellasi

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/differentia>

Recommended Citation

Bellasi, Pietro (1989) "Weak Art," *Differentia: Review of Italian Thought*. Vol. 3 , Article 14.
Available at: <https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/differentia/vol3/iss1/14>

This document is brought to you for free and open access by Academic Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Differentia: Review of Italian Thought* by an authorized editor of Academic Commons. For more information, please contact mona.ramonetti@stonybrook.edu, hu.wang.2@stonybrook.edu.

Weak Art

Pietro Bellasi

The world has used up all its tricks. Landscapes, environments, events, writing on things have dissipated their enigmas, the last mysteries of dread and the sublime, the last furies, the last dreams of sadness and nostalgia, the exalted spells of beauty and the challenging nausea of kitsch. Mountains collapsed through entropy, deserts criss-crossed by rallies, ice-caps assaulted by warm winters, the French Revolution “regretted” by revisionists, the P.C.I. destalinized by “meliorists;” the *Weltanschauungen* imploded in the thoughts of the weak; from Lascaux washed away by human breath to the Last Supper washed away by sponsors; from the royal gardens to the Passages of Paris; from the Twin Towers to the Great Glass, to fire escapes, to monuments to the fallen, to the tins of Valda sweets, to ironmongers’ shops, to garden gnomes, to Campbell’s soup, to Timberland shoes: the surface of the world emerges everywhere reduced to a skeleton like a dried-up river.

The luminous exhilaration of the peaks and the dark horror of the abyss have been lost, and so too has been the sweetness of anger or nostalgia for what has been lost; we are left to observe the dispersed remains of reality, of what we once called “life” or “truths.” Remains like inessential “signs,” “figures,” “forms;” ornaments without support, instruments without function, rites without myth, myths without memory, time without perspective, perspectives without vanishing points, pleasure without enjoyment, denial without criticism, exorcisms without demons, terror without monsters. The distance of the object from its own concept, the space in which the “Frankfurt School” had seen the possibility of erecting a critical

theory (the depth of a having to be which made sense of and gave truthfulness to a history of liberation), has been cancelled out by the indifferent superficiality of replaceable forms, of interchangeable signifiers on the dissolution of referents.

Perhaps one should try to assemble the heterogeneity of the remains of the defeated world; to assemble incongruent fragments in games of combination according to the "beautiful" or the "ugly." A mosaic without iconography, unless it be that of the network of gaps between tesseras. Their irreconcilability, their mutual implausibility and incompatibility demand matching, inlaying and welding totally indifferent to functional or aesthetic ends, to create not symbolic forms but "symptomatic forms" of a laboratory or museum rhetoric, in any case isolated from any end in a sensible or senseless discourse. The only profound effect is interstitial, where one loses the thread of the argument and any possible trick of perspective is broken.

The split, the gap, appears everywhere: the unstable and unsure sticking together, welding and joining of mute and heterogeneous parts to form a story; detritus from long-forgotten shipwrecks drifting on a completely undifferentiated surface. The remains take form like incongruous little altars, reliquaries of the obvious, ostensories of the unresolved with a fictional and self-styled ornamentation of an unredeemed everyday. Just as in the last film by Anghelopoulos, *Landscape in the Fog*, where the nomadic actors are forced to sell their tattered rags; those same actors who in *The Performance* had found a way to match the tragedy of contemporary Greece with the lament of the ancient myths about the human condition. Here they "rehearse" (for a show that will never take place) on the squalid beach on the outskirts inhabited only by filth and the detritus of a forgotten summer; each stammers unreconstitutable fragments of a story evoked by the inertia of the unknown and which plunges into the entropy of oblivion.

The world in which the two boys find themselves searching for their inexistent father is a shipwrecked world, a world of hulks. As if on unstable slabs of pack ice, they jump from one fragment to another without ever allowing the eye to rest or to dwell on the recomposed pattern or even on the undefined mass of a great compact expanse. And they don't realize that the current is carrying the detritus much faster in the opposite direction towards unknown horizons.

By definition weak art is itinerant and nomadic, interstitial between splinters of events (where time has shattered, losing itself) and traces or final memories of structure (where a last glimmer of

duration flickers). From this point of view its tabernacles of the incongruous insist on a sort of temporal indifference (precisely among the unreconstitutable ruins of the event and the evanescent spectres of duration); time itself declares its own reversibility in the total interchangeability of vanishing points. So reality is derisory precisely due to its incongruity and not because it contains contradictions.

These are “strong” figures, real *big bangs* infinitely dense and heavy with objective reality, with consciences, with consciousness, with subjective plans, the birthplace of chains of occurrences and structural networks. Contradiction is the face of depth just as the incongruous is of the surface. Now, if a residual and de-realized world shows its “non-essence,” its dispersion, its formal dilapidation, if rhetoric reveals itself as the mask and the face of the universe of understanding, weak art slots in neatly as *meta-rhetoric* (rhetoric of rhetoric).

Rhetoric, like a Morgana witch of inexistent landscapes of depth and of an impossible coherent reconstitution of the world, provides weak structures with its figures for the “events” of the collecting and assembly of the remains, where even the “aesthetic” residues of Kitsch or those of poor art relax into the more radical forms of artifice. Putting aside an allusiveness not yet totally without a referent (metaphor, metonym, allegory), oxymoron and chiasmus preside at the assembly of the incongruous. Rhetorical art then also assumes the character of a derisory artisan skill. Suspended between the lost signs of painting and sculpture, the “objects” of weak art eat away at the institutional monumentalization of the world; a violent and desperate attempt to fit the temporary period of events into the duration of a structure. Themselves monuments and events, they act out the deadly structural vocation of eternity precisely in the logic of the incongruous.