

Alessandra Tesi: A Story in Color, at Notre Dame in Paris...

It was important to be here together, in front of the Cathedral. There is always an elsewhere with respect to the work, made up of suggestions, intentions. It is a landscape that arises from desire, shall we talk about this? Later it no longer exists, because the work takes shape and is always different...

Well then, shall we tell this story in color?

I would like to talk to you about a triangle. The triangle joins three points: the water, the crime and the cathedral.

I imagine it in the heart of Paris, on the island, the Île de la Cité. There is water all around. The Pont-Neuf joins the island to the rest of the city. The blood of the city pulses toward the heart. On the Pont-Neuf are firemen who use their hoses to make a mass of water explode into the Seine. They are gold and silver warriors, ready to invade the world with whiteness. A utopian spray. Rockets of water toward the sky, toward the water, toward the world. Let's make Paris disappear! A dissolving, a dazzling, a spray that runs, swirling, into the drains. Let's make a battle plan to discolor the world. Today the water of the Seine is emerald green. Each color conveys its own idea. This green is hard and cutting, it is energy. The water becomes white, it is pure pressure launched into the void. With a spurt of water we cut in half the surface of the river. It ripples, gleaming, like the surface of an ocean. The mist, the white cloud is veiling everything. The landscape dwindles.

"Shall we have a white battle?"

The firemen also arrive by boat.

From the top of the firemen's ladder, unfolded in space, straight up over the water, you can see Notre Dame. There, now it too has vanished. Now the landscape is green and blue, and then it is all white. What luxury! It has become light and

pressure. The white of water, translucent. Opposite the Pont-Neuf is the Palace of Justice. The crime is there, inside. The crime has no corpse, it is a bodiless crime. It is an idea. The blood of Paris arrives there, it's red, but it is an imagined color. I stay there, inside, for a year. There is one window, from which you can see the precise end of the Pont-Neuf where the firemen's explosion of water took place. It is the window of the historic office of the Crime Squad, 36 Quai des Orfèvres, which you see in film history, always in black and white. This entire year, I played chess with the director of the "crim," near that window, looking at that same water in the Seine. There is a crime. There is the waiting, and as a backdrop there is the chessboard, an abstract landscape, an opening between black and white.

That same water, that flow of energy, gradually becomes immobile, dense water. It is no longer emerald green. During this year the water becomes like gelatin, opaque, a mass that hides. It thickens and clouds over.

There are bodies in the Seine. Suicides, homicides, parts of people whose identities have been torn to shreds. There is death in that water. It is an idea, a phantasm. We have saved a wig found on a crime scene. We immersed it in the water of the Seine and then filmed it for an hour. It is almost immobile. It is empty, empty of a body. It is a victim's actual wig, made of fake blond hair, now yellow.

She died while playing her double, her invented character, born from her desires and fears. That body doesn't exist, it is a disguise, a trick. Every evening she took two hours to make herself up, to transform herself meticulously into what she hated. A fiction, a phantasm. Reality stopped at that moment, with the crime. The crime scene is made of crystal. Two wax seals, made of red lacquer, are placed on the door. Behind that door there is no longer anything that moves. It is like a painting. Meanwhile the water of the Seine becomes increasingly slow, heavy, opaque. A jade gel. Slowly it is transformed into a fixed image. During the investigation you await

reality, you go into the past, backwards, to the other side of time, inside the void.

Someone, questioned, said: ... now I have a "blank," I am waiting for images. There is a desire, a tenacity, an enormous energy spent trying to recompose reality, there where it was broken off violently, where there is the tear that turned it to crystal. It is an agony that moves forward through pale memories and blockages. A continuous failure of memory, which disassembles reality and the identity of the victim in a thousand projections.

And so the world is dissolving still.

That blond hair. To enter so thoroughly into the hair that it becomes a field of wheat, a yellow gold landscape.

About that crime scene, one commissioner remembers the lipstick, red, so intensely red.

Every crime scene has a color. The color of an obsession, a desire, a fear. It is like entering ever further into an immobile space, like always having the same dream.

And the water of the Seine becomes black, even in broad daylight.

The water reaches Notre Dame, its foundation, again on the island. The Cathedral is immense. There is a point, in front, from where, looking at it, it becomes impossible to hold its image in a single glance.

Inside, there is the chessboard, an infinite path amid black and white. Some colored priests walk on the chessboard.

One day there is a mass. At the back there were reds, then two white-green priests arrived and finally one blue one ploughed through the entire space until he reached the front to sing. It was the voice of an angel. His blue body swelled to modulate the song. Then they began to turn again, to rotate, according to a well-defined design.

The colored priests seemed directly projected by the stained glass windows, against the checkerboard background. They seem cut out in the color of the glass. Notre

Dame makes me think of Bunuel's *E!* in black and white, with that strange religious sensibility tied to severity and madness, and at the same time of the extremely strong colors of the only color films by Fritz Lang, with that desire for artifice tied to color.

The light illuminates the stained glass and suddenly this immense structure vanishes, it becomes a dark backdrop. Only the idea of looking upward remains. Even the floor becomes a projection screen, a backdrop against which the priests are projected. It is like being inside a story made of light. The stained glass windows are a montage of immobile images, made of glass. I like the part of the image that gets lost in the space and ends up resting, transparent, on the stone.

The Cathedral closes my triangle of energy, at the threshold of reality, of a painted world.

With the Cathedral there is a total abandonment of the space, you lose your sense of gravity. I imagine the colored priests walking on the glass. I imagine a soft screen, where they can plunge their hands into the light, and then fold it up and be able to put it in a box. Thousands of small spheres. The "color" is called "frost." The translucent white of ice and the dusty patina of frost.

The true cathedral is an immense construction, where when you enter, the space vanishes, only the sensation of being inside something huge remains.

Then I think of the fountain that you showed me in Rome, with the tickle of water, immobile as a mirror. I think about that particular point, from where, looking at it, at the trickle of water, you see the earth meet the sky. The separation disappears and the landscape slides into infinity. It seems like you are at the edge of the world. A hole, toward the infinite. Apropos stories about the edge, there is another one, another white desire. At the South Pole. A blinding. It is a story about white and red. There is an expanse of dense, red gelatin. I'm thinking of the water of Poe, of

Gordon Pym, somewhere between water and blood. There is the blade of an ice-skate that cuts a groove into this translucent mass and the desire to run along the edge of the world. Once it was said that the ocean currents formed at that point because there was perhaps a hole there, at the pole. The horizon is so white and absent it brings on hallucinations. The aurora borealis? It is as if the world, unable to tolerate the total negation of the landscape, were projecting its images into the void. And so might the aurora borealis perhaps be the reflection of the breath of the world?

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore