

Launch of *Metabolism*, Museo di Paestum, 28 June 2018

First of all, I would like to thank Gabriel for the invitation to present this little study of *il tuffatore* in the context of the 50th anniversary of the discovery of *La tomba del tuffatore*. I also want to thank his staff for making the practical arrangements for this visit.

In Australia we talk about 'sacred places.' These are sites of ancestral pilgrimage where the gods are known to reside. Where there are caves, there may be rock paintings, strangely located in the dark. They are approached with care; usually, an offering is made. *Metabolism* is an offering in this spirit.

1

First of all, I should explain the title. It is inspired by a passage in Kierkegaard's treatise *The Concept of Dread*. Discussing Plato's approach to the Eleatic objections to any doctrine of the One and the Many, Kierkegaard writes:

'The method as usual is that of experimental dialectics. It is assumed that unity is and is not, and then it is shown what the consequence will be for it and for the rest. The instant appears now to be that strange being (*atopon* - the Greek word is admirably chosen) which lies between movement and repose, without occupying any time; and to this and out of this 'the moving' passes over into rest, and 'the reposing' into movement. The instant therefore becomes the general category of transition (*metabole*); for Plato shows the instant is related in the same way to the transition from unity to plurality and from plurality to unity, from likeness to unlikeness, etc, it is the instant in which there is neither *en* nor *polla*, neither discrimination nor integration.

The Diver elucidates the nature of the Platonic instant with almost etymological rigour: *meta* + *ballein* = to throw over – receiving this as an instruction, the Diver throws himself off the diving column. He throws over rectitude, remaking himself as the figure of change.

So here we are pointed at once not only towards the *intention* of the painting but to the *paradox* of painting, the impossibility of capturing movement in an image that does not move. Or, more subtly, capturing change in a design that is, or was, immortal for two and a half millennia.

And then, to come to the topic of my essay, if we say that the image appeals to the inner eye of imagination – and not only to the outer eye of perception – how is the invisible, that which has been buried out of sight, retained in the imagination? Are we to imagine its appearance (as if it had never been lost)? Or, in coming to the interior walls of the tomb today, are we to factor in the darkness, and see whatever we see through the memory of darkness?

In my essay I talk about the challenges these questions present for the exhibition of *il tuffatore* (and, by extension, of any work of art made for the dark). How can invisibility be seen? Gabriel told me that a regional politician asked him why the tomb of the diver was not exhibited *as it was originally found!* Perhaps he had not considered the logistics of this! But there is a deeper point: to be found, the tomb had to be opened. Discovery and illumination go together.

As for the museum, it is dedicated to enlightenment. Isn't the responsibility of public education to clear away the shadows, even if this involves a disrespect for the wishes of the dead?

So one of the purposes of my essay is to draw attention to the assumptions we make about looking – as if looking were an innocent activity when, in fact, as in the conservation and exhibition of *il tuffatore*, it is a conscious act of constructing a viewpoint.

Further, the viewpoint constructed will express an idea about good looking or ideal revelation: steady levels of lighting, the design of an ideal point of view and, in our time, the importance of hyper-vision (digital animations that can help us *imagine* the original position).

In *L'immagine invisibile*, the curatorial team has explored this theme historically: in different historical periods we have imagined the invisible differently, and we have therefore assigned different meanings, religious, political, philosophical, to the images and stories that come from the Beyond (the Underworld). The invitation is to look in a historical mirror and to reflect on the way we see; for, of course, what we see there is inevitably a reflection of our interests.

2

Of course, as I have indicated, these questions were stimulated by *the diver*: it was not the interior designs of Paestum tombs in general but this particular image of *metabole* that provoked me to ask how the invisible is represented, for the image itself seemed to

embody the paradox. The image of the instant is a diver (or a dive, or both); and while I was interested in the challenge of plunging this figure into the light – in raising questions for museology and memory – like everyone else, I was also fascinated by the choice of subject.

Of course, there is extensive scholarship, textual, iconographic, stylistic and archaeological, that serves to demystify the image, that aims, like any enlightenment, to render the image less original, less mysterious, but I approached the identity of the diver differently: through a cultural history of diving (*il tufo*) – the Italian word has, perhaps significantly, a much broader meaning than its English counterpart: while *to dive* refers to a precise inversion, *tuffare/tuffarsi* encompasses any kind of plunge, expert or inexpert.

But when I looked for information about classical diving I was surprised to find that diving in the measured sense depicted in *il tuffatore* is nowhere described in what remains of Greek and Roman literature. (And, as we know, with a partial Etruscan exception, it is nowhere depicted in art.) Of course, there are plenty of leaps, headlong plunges and underwater expeditions. Even cliff-top dives are known: but artists of the dive like *il tuffatore* are unknown. Writing about the ode in which Pindar's contemporary, Bacchylides, describes Theseus's plunge to the bottom of the sea, Burnett maintains, 'The Greeks were not a swimming people, for them a dive was both a fabulous and a significant act.'

Now common sense protests that this cannot have been true; yet, apart from accounts of the sponge divers of Delos (who, after all, did not dive), the ancient Mediterranean is said to be diverless. It is almost as if the collective familiarity with an everyday activity (diving) has been buried, like shipwrecked treasure, out of sight of historical memory! (And awaits discovery and recovery.)

But here is something even stranger: you can continue your search forward, upwards through the succeeding centuries – up, indeed, to the beginnings of the 20th century when the sport of high-diving is invented – with similarly negative results. Not only are there no divers in western art: they are absent from poetry and fiction; even as philosophical or psychological figures of speech, they are absent.

Of course, as I said, there are many plungers from Lucifer downwards. But of that ambiguous class of people at home in the gap between land and sea, at ease in navigating chance and unassailed by a fear of falling: of this psychologically and environmentally integrated race we know next to nothing.

In the presence of our youthful Director I am not prepared to say when I first saw *il tuffatore*. Let's simply say that the painting was still young in those days. Afterwards I shifted residence from Italy to Australia, plunging, as it were, into the Underworld. But all the time I remembered the Upper world and its image of someone who had managed the passage between worlds so gracefully. As I navigated the turbulent environment of migration, I repeatedly returned to the Diver for guidance: his gift for managing dangerous circumstances was something I wanted to learn.

In the course of that voyage, I learnt something else. Not only was the Diver woven into my life: he was woven into the life of the times. Further, in the mirror of our interests, the legitimate reconstructions of the archaeologists and the historians could be enlarged. For instance, Mario Napoli's speculation that *il tuffatore* represents a Pythagorean conception of soul migration: doesn't Iamblichus emphasise the prominence of Pythagorean followers in Paestum? But what we know about this Pythagoras – what is rarely emphasised – is that he was a refugee from Samos who died, a refugee, in Metapontum. More generally, we know that Pythagoreans who had enjoyed political power in the cities of Magna Graecia in the early Fifth century were hounded out of those cities. We even know that in some cases a kind of reverse *apoleia* occurred – some of these exiles, through a reverse migration becoming refugees in mainland Greece!

Here, the preoccupations of our times cast light on the political and cultural circumstance in which *il tuffatore* may have been produced. Pythagoras, the shaman-philosopher of exile and, surely, the ideal refugee advocate: how is this interpretation any more speculative than the exposure of the painting itself? To see where it came from, we have to see where we are coming from; and in that dialectic a new ethics of human care is, I think, possible and necessary.

Gabriel has been kind enough to invite me to develop these ideas further at the forthcoming conference here in Paestum; so I will say nothing more here. However, it is our intention to explore these resonances of *il tuffatore* with our times in a series of symposia next year. Called 'The Future of Memory,' these events explore how what is remembered is inseparable from the way we remember: both always looked to the future and sketching an ethics of care.

In closing, I would also like to pay tribute to my good friend, Corbett Lyon, architect and a curator in his own right who, with his wife Yueji, directs his own museum in Melbourne. My thanks also to designer Yanni Florence and to the previous Director of the Paestum Museum for permission to reproduce the photographs included in the book. The Lyon Housemuseum published *Metabolism*, an act of great cultural generosity that reminds us

that the migration of the imagination is borderless when its gifts are received and returned with interest.

Thank you