

NEVERENDING

1. *Navin*

The party hosted by Navin Rawanchaikul for the presentation of his book *Navin's Sala* at The River on the 3rd of July 2008 was particularly grand. The architectural complex of The River was not yet finished and at that time only had two storeys, and yet many of the apartments which were to occupy the then inexistent upper floors had already been sold. There the Jim Thompson company sold its products designed by Navin. A mini-retrospective of Navin's work, curated by Steven Pettifor, expanded from the second floor into the other spaces. Inson Wongsam, the hero of one of Navin's most suggestive works, *Fly with Me to Another World*, 2000-2009, was amongst the numerous guests and wore, like Navin and his closest collaborators and most frequent characters, a jacket designed by Navin in homage to Jim Thompson. There were different buffets. There was a small group of Bangkok taxi drivers who had neatly parked their blue vehicles against a large sign which read HAIL A RIDE WITH NAVIN GALLERY BANGKOK.

Not only was there no centre – the work, the artist's work, the exhibition, the book, the party itself – but everything was de-centred. To western emptiness (*le vide, the void*) oriental fullness¹ responded paradigmatically: a depolarised space indefinitely saturated with centres which in the end appeared to have none, the materialisation of an isotropy which extended beyond the space of the party – The River – into the Bangkok night, and the nights of the world running after each other, like the sun, bringer of light, around the terrestrial globe, Ptolomeically speaking.

2. *Is the party over?*

Michelangelo Consani, inverting the point of view and the plane of vision, attempts an analogous operation with the time of History. The title of his event, *La festa è finita*, is like a response, displaced in space and time, to Navin's event, which was a party without a name. For Consani the party has happened, it had that name, but now it is finished: *The party's over*. It is like being in a post-, in an afterwards, standing within an event which is neither a commemoration or celebration or retrospective enquiry, *in figuris*, of something which has been, and *which was*, as much an actual manifestation of being present, of being in the present. This presentification is due to the consistency, aesthetic and discursive, of every element of the environment constructed for the occasion determined by the event, and by the cohesive altogether of the ensemble.

Every one of these elements is constructed of images both fixed and in movement, as well as a small series of objects, each of which is the product of a transformation, both of its material and its function. None of these elements is what it was at its origin, near or far though that might be. This transformation is an index of their respective presentification. We are all of our time [*Which time?*]. Moreover each element, whatever form it presents itself in and indifferently with respect to it – free circulation allowed among various available media – concerns the eleven 'guests'. All characters, without actors, from the last century, the umbilical cord still uncut: from the gangster John Herbert Dillinger (1903 – 1934) to the industrialist Henry Ford (1863 – 1947) and to the equally American maker of agricultural tractors Allis Chalmers (from 1914 al 1999), from the filmmaker Marco Ferreri (1928 – 1997) to the

¹ Similarly to certain installations by Navin's peer and countryman Surasi Kusolwong realised mostly in Europe, which however become empty in the course of the action of which they are the principal component and scene.

actor Michel Piccoli (1925, one of two of the guests still alive) and the artist Mario Schifano (1934 – 1998), from the American geophysicist for Shell Marion King Hubbert (1903 – 1989) and from the British geologist Colin Campbell (1931, the other guest still breathing) to the designer Achille Castiglioni (1918 – 2002), and finally the two pioneers of alternative agriculture, the Englishman Arthur Hollins (1915-2005) and the Japanese Masanobu Fukuoka² (1913 – 2008). The individual criminal act, industry, petroleum, cinema, art, design, and alternative means of production together draw a precise and yet unusual picture of the century we have just left behind, and they reveal a particular history which continues into our present, both nourishing and poisoning it. Not so much to hold them together because they slip away, because in fact they escape any reciprocal similarity, but to include them in a kind of sequential chain, not so much common characteristics but minimal pairings, emerging from concrete data – for example: the car used by Dillinger for his heists was a Ford; or: Ferreri made a film with the title *Dillinger is dead* (1969) in which Piccoli was the protagonist with part of it being filmed in Schifano's house – like an exquisite corpse on an unfolded page. Each of the 'guests' has contributed to the history of their century, not so much making it as being an expression of it. Their lives or career or simply persona presents internal, intrinsic contradictions, as life does for everyone. Contradictions, these unravellings, these deviations, incongruities, dead-ends, open roads or interrupted paths, do not so much constitute the essence, the quality or the value (real value?), of their experiences or of their doings or of their legacy, no matter how large or small this was, as much as they assume the connotations of individual physiognomic traits – such as, I don't know, how someone ends up having red hair, as happened with me. Nonetheless, it is on these traits that Consani's project seems to insist, reuniting them in the role of invited guests to the party, which as the title says, is over, in the same way that the valency of their work has elapsed: they have left life and have entered the paradox of history. The world of meaning which Consani attempts to enter is a world both incoherent and open, and the artist moves with the instruments of language, of myth – above all in the Barthesian³ sense of the term – and of art, in which the exchange between the symbolic and the naturalistic is constant, where the levels of meaning – objective, expressive and documentary⁴ – slip continuously one into the other, one over the other. Thus the party that is over is that which took place for centuries under that constellation of ideas, of notions, but also of the beliefs and prejudices which have illuminated so-called Western Culture, and gave place and a vision to a totalising “world dominated and possessed through and through in an instantaneous synthesis”.⁵

3. *Al Hoceima.*

² Consani's participation in the first Aichi Triennale, Nagoya, 21 August - 31 October 2010 – curated by Akira Tatehata, Masahiko Haito, Hinako Kasagi, Pier Luigi Tazzi and Jochen Volz – also refers to Fukuoka.

³ See: Roland Barthes (1915-1980), *Mythologies*, 1957.

⁴ The Hungarian-born sociologist Karl Mannheim (1893-1947), whose first teacher was Georg Lukács, published in the *Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, vol. XV (1921-1922), the article “*Zur Interpretation der 'Weltanschauung'*”, Italian translation in K.M., *Saggi sulla sociologia della conoscenza*, 1952, where he proposes the first formulation of the theory of three levels of meaning, taken up successively by numerous art historians over the years, amongst whom Erwin Panofsky.

⁵ See: Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) *The Prose of the World*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, (1973), p. 53

[Patrick had received the injunction to leave the country where he had successfully conducted his business for the last fifteen years within twenty four hours. That evening the most phantasmagorical party of his career took place, one in which everyone took part, from foreign residents like myself, to the last Spanish colonists who had decided to remain notwithstanding the maroquisación which had ruled for the last couple of years and which had decimated the community, to young bucks to local potentates. It was a hot and moonless mid-September night. I was alone.]

Pier Luigi Tazzi

Paris, January 2011.