

Much Ado about Lists

What can we do in the face of the many missed opportunities and even more missed understandings that have mized our misses and mrs. ... ?

Claudio Sgarbi has begun a list, not a little list, but a big one, in relation to his discussion of the pathetic state of theory in architecture's handling of the matter of gender. We need to

Work out very carefully with the maximum precisions all the conditions that make the drama (tragedy, comedy, satire and farce, just to mention the canonical types) possible, verify (debunk) its destiny, simulate the reactions of the spectators, forecast the conditions of its epigony, work on its scenography, eviscerate the plot, anticipate the agony, inspect the chitterlings..... investigate with unpredictable curiosity its marginalia, not trusting too much a radical criticism (we are already too "critic" – critic in the sense of being terminally ill) that might contain the hidden logics of the same underlying structures and principles that made it possible to get to this situation.

This kind of ambition is just what is needed in times such as this. Sgarbi's list calls to mind two other famous lists, ones also produced "in times of troubles," namely ...

Leporello's Catalog, the famous list of misses and mrs. who had engaged in consensual sex, lawful or unlawful, with the obliging count, Don Giovanni (Mozart's version), who seems to understand that female desire and male desire are two different kinds of desire, brought together in the accidents or coincidences of everyday encounter, and ...

The list of things Diogenes, the "Dog Philosopher," did to prepare for the impending siege of Thebes, enumerated by that famous cataloguer of useless acts, François Rabelais.

The two lists are obviously different, separated by time and circumstance and, not least, the intended use of the listing technique. In the case of Leporello, long-suffering servant of the Don (no relation) Giovanni, the list demonstrates that the amorous count does not make distinctions usually attributed to licentious landowners. He takes "them" on, one and all, short and tall, fat and thin, beautiful and not so beautiful. He is the NGO sexual emissary who wishes to help all to their desire without asking for papers or expecting compensation. The list indicates just how globalism is involved in re-asserting subjectivity's most common denominator. "In Spain alone, one thousand and three." Because the list emphasizes the complete openness to female variability, the point is not to brag about conquests, it is to emphasize the ethical nature of list membership. It is what makes us like the Count before the famous banquet when, forced to repent by the stone guest, re: dead father of the last-seduced, he does not yield. His "NO!" are the last official words of the opera, and on this count they can sit beside Antigone's "NO!" to Creon, who offers a plea-bargain.

Diogenes is different, since it is his activity that constitutes the list imagined by Rabelais. He knows not what to do, but wants to help. He has little in the way of earthly belongings, so he decides to ACT on his shelter, his barrel, in which he normally sits at the gates of Thebes, abusing all who pass by but, at the same time, providing Thebians with their best jokes to use at dinner parties.

Sex and shelter ... architecture theory's own feminists have linked these topics and given us lists where a merger can be claimed. Space, and possibly (I would say certainly) *time* can also have gender. Claudio Sgarbi begins by suggesting that we look at the proliferation of signifiers that follows any "gendering" operation. In this sense, even the crudest, most reductionistic feminist formulas are right. Sex results in progeny of some kind. It opens the floodgates. The sex of discourse however is the reverse predicate by which an effect becomes a cause, an end becomes a beginning, a contained becomes a container. What quelled the public imagination of the Germans in the 1930s, namely the contradictory anti-Semitic view of the Jew as both rich and powerful and, at the same time, poor and deprived, can easily be ridiculed, but the fact is that such "master signifiers" work their ideological wonders for an amazingly long period, in the face of any and every fact that disproves them. Ideology works because it offers choices, and is among the first to do so for a public who has been deprived of choice for so long. What are the progeny of the engendering operation? Well, there is the good, the bad, and the ugly. Among the good are the many women's studies programs that, thanks to an unusually large supply of intelligent women and some men, are ready to be employed at low wages in most cases, able to talk about difficult issues, who have become the last Alamo of interdisciplinary studies and critical theory. The bad? At the retail level, most academics, feeling the pinch of gender-aware colleagues, are careful to not use "he, his, or him" as the first-choice personal pronoun when gender is undetermined. This would be harmless enough, and a bit overdue actually, but issues of fairness are mechanized through quotas and rotations that show just how gender-sensitive academics can be. "Pride" extends to demonstrating, through the presence of 50/50 or better gender ratios, that sex is an issue that can be solved mathematically. Back to the "guess who's coming to dinner," which is always the problem of "guess WHAT is coming to dinner."

The nightmare of the ugly is the failure to address feminism without addressing gender. The problem is not balancing the number of boys and girls, or fixing up pronoun practice. The problem is the woman. Which of course means that, as one comedian put it, the problem is not just a little part a problem of men, and the need for "White Mens Studies Programs" because the problem is about how they hold on to stuff even more when they "allow" compromise. This ugly issue is that there are very few critical handles on the matter of feminine desire; something that women cannot claim full critical access any more than men, except they at least have the experience for the job. This is to immediately curtail claims of women who *as women*, claim to have the final answer. Yes and no. They have access but not necessarily the critical theory apparatus. They are one step ahead. Instead, deployments of experience aiming to be theory have resulted in stupid assignments of moralism ("fair practices"), disastrous ideas ("equality"), and self-destructive engagements with power (more is better, no matter what the ends or the products of the system). Women getting power are getting the

bad end of the bargain.¹ They are getting precisely what will crush femininity, not just for them but for everyone. With the ugly, it is a matter of how more is needed than good intentions. Good intentions do not, on their own, break into critical theory on this matter.

Back to the two lists. There is no equality in Don Giovanni's conquests, as Leporello's catalog makes clear. There is only difference. Productively and intelligently, these differences constitute a *dissensus* without the desire for *consensus*. There is no theorizing of the polarities of womanhood to attempt a "model of the woman." There is not the least suggestion that difference gets any privilege, even in reverse order, as in the case of academic programs bending over backward to demonstrate kindness to the Global Other. Difference simply is not thematized. It is allowed to exist, and in Lacan's terms, this difference has allowed sex to happen, such as it was, at the level of the *sinthome*, not the symptom. By this we mean something that Diogenes can relate to. The symptom covers over the gap in the signifying chain. Once ideology sets up its neutralizing idiotic formula, signifiers breed like bunnies. There is peace in the land, and all power to the Führer (note the proximity of "father"). To exit this freeway, we must take the pervert's ramp. We must renounce all the predication afforded by the idiotic master signifier that, in exchange for peace, has given us a Primal Lie in place of the turbulence of *dissensus*. We must turn away from the Führer/father, we must turn towards an "artificial father" (*père version*) and psychotically choose being over speaking. This does not mean artificial autism. Rather, it is a deployment — and in some critical cases *weaponization* — of silence *within* language. Silence, in all its forms, is the place of the pervert, the idiot, the feminine. Silence is the whisper of the angel.

This is not a turn to Heidegger or Nietzsche but, rather, a turn to a *poiesis*, a "making," that is witty as opposed to instrumental — on this I agree with Pérez-Gómez. But, this is where we part ways: this turn is not towards a humanism of resolving antithetical elements, man-woman, city-country, rich-poor, etc. by finding a median, a balance point. Such a utopian goal would be nothing more than to substitute one ideology for another. Proof that humanism is such an ideological exchange deal can be found in the "utopian" postponement of its promises. "IF" only we do this or that, "THEN" a glorious resolution will be made evident.

Under the heading of "not going to happen," let me emphasize that a New Father is not the happy meals solution. The new father is in fact our father-mother, our complexly gendered engenders, namely ...

Generation itself. The *gens*. The *psyche* (this is the original meaning of the soul term). The *in-gen-ium*. The *agutezza* which is the main fuel of the *gens*. This is not to say that we are "valuing creativity." Possibly the opposite. What is meant by "generation itself," the *gens*, is an understanding of the problem of origins as if origins happened ... just now. Our problem is the problem of the "just before" and the "just after." The meaning of a painting, Sgabi has claimed, is that its accomplishment

¹ The ugly spectacle of women seeking equality is that the question is never asked, "Whose equality?" or "Equality of what?" or "Asking whom?" Asking for equality is the first accession of ideology's forced choice.

lies in the “just after,” the transformation the painting has caused to happen outside and after we turn away.

In *gens* there is sex. Lots of sex. It is sex unleashed by the inequality of the *sinthome*, taken up within language and every other medium of human exchange, once the fake dad has been kicked out of the house — that is to say, once ideology has been exposed. Difference/dissensus, not the fake consensus advertised as the goal of democracy, is a worthy aim, although the point is to get rid of utopia altogether. Face it, there is not much time left. By “lots of sex” I am not suggesting any kind of orgy behavior. Just the opposite in fact. The point of the *gens* is to see that there is already sex here, there, everywhere, in perception, thought, and the reality of the just before and just after. Notice that in the “just” of “just before” and “just after” is “just” as in “justice” — the ethical component and the “nearness” of the neighbor that is the unpleasant aspect of the accidental other: not attraction or repulsion but contingency that makes a neighbor a neighbor and not a friend or enemy. At the sinthomic level, we move beyond the fantasy that buys the subject time in dealing with the Real (better image: becomes like the enabler of a drug addict or alcoholic). The sinthome moves beyond simple awareness, which is what contrasts it radically with the hopeful non-agenda of humanists in phenomenological fleece.

The justice of “just before” and “just after” is compounded by the actions of Diogenes. Face it, they are useless. If you have read the passage before, you know that Diogenes is trying to “look busy” while his fellow citizens are running around in a panic. Such arrangements of appearance are art in action. In the midst of uselessness lies the essence of the human, which is the animal. Diogenes is banging, rolling, spinning, fitting, tarring, etc. his barrel, to no evident end. He is an animal not in a cage but fixing up the cage. He is indicating his material condition through useless activity. He is removing value by adding value. In other words, Diogenes is conducting an *inventory that aims to be complete by being aimless*. The comic circularity of this strategy should not be discounted. If we inventory something with an aim in mind we will miss the point. We will substitute our desire for our *automation of searching*. In other words, crude words, we will fuck it up. The only competent inventory takes place as a blind exercise.

I rely on statistics to prove this point. Anyone who has taken even the most elementary course on statistics knows that a “random sample” does not allow interest. It must not deviate from its assigned random order. In fact, “random” is hard enough to find. Most random number sequences can be found to exhibit some small amount of repetition. To avoid repetition is to avoid the death drive, which is a circular return to a goal that is actually a void. “To avoid a void” involves an irony that only Georges Pérec seems to have known how to exploit. The strategy is a lipogram, such as Pérec’s novel without the letter ‘e’, and the strategy is a good one. The random sample will discover the *largest amount* of what there is to discover. Any other method yields less. The point is NOT TO YIELD to the “interests” of desire but rather to be guided by “desire itself,” without interest. Now, the connection to Leporello’s catalog is exposed and clarified. The inventory and the sex list are one and the same.

This “solution” to the humanist *impasse* is not likely to meet with favor, let alone accolade, among those whose commitment to “interest” is built into university contracts as sub-clauses of concern for the “subalterns,” the Others, the dispossessed. By definition, THEY NEED OUR HELP, but the problem is that it is “by definition” that they need it. We have automatically enrolled them into ideology while we have given ourselves the perfect academic cover story. Our “alibi” is to help out. Our aim is to survive in a mediocre ideological camp for displaced persons, where *Arbeit Macht Frei* is in fact stated literally and acknowledged publically.² Academics “go where they are needed,” willingly leaving their homes and hearths for strange lands, learning new languages, dressing and eating like foreigners. They are not nomads, for nomads have a path, a rule; they are “people of the Book.” They are (usually) shameless in their willingness to embrace the Other as “challenging,” “an opportunity,” a “learning experience.” The ability to put a positive spin on forced labor is Positivism in its most archaic sense.

To endorse the inventory involves finding other inventory makers worth their salt: Bach, Plato, Piranesi, Pérec, Borges, Beethoven — wherever energy has been devoted “mathematically,” “impersonally,” “ruthlessly” — devoted to the project of completion, in face of the knowledge that completion will not happen. This inventory is not valuable in itself, just as what Diogenes did to his barrel makes no sense. The result is to show *what cannot be inventoried*. We find what we find, in the “just before” and “just after” of the found object, and in the word “found” we also mean “divinely given” (I use this in an entirely non-religious but decidedly theological sense).

Sex now, sex then, sex forever — which means also sex under the rule of chastity, which is why Diana was both a virgin and the queen of all engendering animals. Vico’s “two Diana’s” (the huntress and the dream visitor) played by the rules of the private, the secret, and the chaste. Space protects the determination of the “just before” and “just after,” whose first form was divination undertaken by shamans to determine the certainty of uncertain futures. This is the perverse view, the turn to the New Father, the father who is also the mother. Gens.

² This was the motto over the gate of Auschwitz.