

BROSSA AND PONÇ CLINCHED BY, AND WITH, PINS

The realities were very serious from the outset. One, Joan Brossa, wanted to be a writer of the Catalan reality seen and projected from the obduracy of the everyday. His father was a man who forged fiction (a theatre stagehand at neighbourhood centres): his mother disappeared by the trapdoor. He, the boy, on returning from the Civil War with the stigma of a wound in his eye which would leave its mark – without objectively marking him – was very aware, throughout his life, of the need to know the instruments you are handling. For he felt he was a poet, and wanted to know the language in depth and write it correctly. Mr. Artur Balot – the teacher of Catalan over the radio, with Miliu¹ (both repressed by Franco-ism, during the forties and forever more) – would help. And the teacher undertook, that the uneasy soldier, returning stigmatised but alive from the front, wrote the robust sonnets recommended to him by the Surrealist poet J.V. Foix (at that time also culturally ostracized which he would concoct daily to dominate the structure and idiomatic diction of Catalan) For the ideological and ideographic contents it was admitted that each could put their own; not surprisingly we would come to realise – thanks to the *D'Ací i d'Allà* of December 1934 –we were, moreover, ultra-historicist, Dadaist and Surrealist).

A friend of his, the one writing this, furnished the disquiet, betwixt a sensitivity for the real world and the subsequent thought needed to gain the knowledge – the capturing of an idea – for something more than just living. We didn't graze with the herd, even though they wanted to make us. Brossa was so realistic and objective that before then – while he was a soldier of the republican army, collaborating with writings of advice and encouragement for the barrack walls and for the front –he passed from writing his name Brosa, with one sole s, to writing it with two: Brossa. It was a huge step and a conscious one. With the orthographic change he converted his surname in to what he wanted his literary work to be –within, obviously, a formal resolution -: fundamentally, the chaff² of life. If we focus on one of his first collections to be published, the title *Em va fer Joan Brossa*³, the content is nothing other than the rudiments of the commonplace: a total realism that, as such, becomes poetic; everything there is formally correct, but the material, the substance of the content of that material formalism, is strictly the reality of everyone's daily life. Even when it wants to be fantastical, *Dragolí*, the fantasies are phantasmagorical, cast from reality, mutated into magic by the simple fact of writing. If we delve into this, we find, already in

those early years, all the visual poems and poetic objects that life would show him, which he, with his action of visual transmutation would objectivise, converting chaff into poetry and poetry into admired chaff.

One just has to look, as the synthesis and literary embodiment of this conceptualisation of the creative act, at the *Tres poemes purs*⁴ that he published in the sole edition of *ALGOL* (towards the end of 1946). Brossa writes that he found them in some advertising pamphlets and a newspaper column. What was poetic was reality itself, converted into a literary work thanks solely to the sensitive and visual grace of the one who realised that, there, in those fragments of life, lay both poetry and reality. The writing, discovered by the eye, passed to become poetry. Later on, the words would become objects and objects would become sensitive mental resonances (not necessarily associated with experiences, in the understanding that art, creation – for Brossa was totally convinced of this – is formalism).

A temperament and character of the dimensions of Brossa was almost destined to come across someone like Joan Ponç, who came down from the clouds – because there they didn't want him and because all things considered they didn't give him much satisfaction nor tell him anything – and amused himself, with the affection he felt for drawing and colours, and Cézanne (the one who wanted to trap, in and with colour, the emotion of a plastic sensibility) wanting to imitate him. Yes, Cézanne enabled him to construct but left him dissatisfied because in the trajectory of this transcription that strange drama, that is the experience of the intimate commotions of the spirit disappeared. When he coincided with Brossa, thanks to the fortuity of northern expressionism, he felt rapidly drawn to the symbiosis between art and poetry, evidenced by the creative making of the poet of the stigmatised eye. Brossa's objectivity – brutal reality and creativity conjoined – showed him that formalism can bellow, capture, and expose, the pain of life at the same time. It wasn't necessary to hide any of the subtleties of the spirit, as form, mind, sensitivity and project (are) are the same thing. Ponç abandoned the succedaneum that the Fauve Rouault – on meeting us – had shown him and headed decidedly for the pathways of psychic automatism with no formal fears. It arose from within his body, mind and feelings were what arose, while the realistic, geometric or fantastical formalism adapted to the tremors and gestural

¹ Artur Balot i Bigues (Peralada, Alt Empordà – Barcelona, 1959). Graduated with a degree in philosophy from the University of Barcelona and worked in the offices for the correction of original documents within the Generalitat. From 1932 to 1936 he maintained a broadcast of conversations popularising Catalan grammar on Radio Barcelona (Les converses de Miliu (Conversations with Miliu)) that were also published. In the forties, despite many difficulties, he resumed his pedagogical endeavours and continued to teach until he died.

² NT Brossa is the Catalan term for dead brushwood, chaff or rubbish

³ Joan Brossa made me

⁴ Three pure poems

impulses that drove him on each occasion. The Dadaism implicit in this creative attitude and an outlandish character allowed him to create and live regardless of established taboos, reversing social symbols to his own benefit.

Nevertheless the collision was brutal. One doesn't pass from constructivism to subjectivity without a by your leave. One of the first corrections Ponç self-imposed was that of paying heed to the creative linguistic purism championed by the besieged Foix. The formal correction – idiomatic in this case (like Brossa before him) was that of changing the s of his surname for the c with a cedilla (it wasn't an orthographical error so much as a historical degradation of Poncius). The friend Aulèstia, sculptor and horoscopist, had warned us that a name, although apparently random, also structures sensibility, the mind and the eye, in the understanding that a person is a total identity. Everything is casual and random, but it is curious that both, Brossa and Ponç, end up intervening in their own denomination.

Let's comment a little more about the reality of these vital contents transcribed and transferred into plastic forms. Brossa mentally, visually, and later, materially compiled what he found in the world and elevated it to the category of poetry: formalism – even on the stage – making out of the gross and/or harsh everyday visual, mental and/or tactile excellences of reality. Ponç simply observing and listening to his surroundings (the unease and anxiety of the personal and familiar anima and the force of vital dynamics) realised subsequently that he had to abandon the endeavour to structure a Cezannesque paradise and transit rapidly through that spasmodic world of linear schemata and mystical expressionistic colourings (Rouault and, notwithstanding, driven by the reading of the coherent spiritual incoherencies of Unamuno and the dramatic comedies of Aristophanes). And, given the contact with Brossa he connected, as a means of creativity, with the Surrealist principle of taking of possession of the everyday and/or transcendent unconscious without control or repressive censorship. He opted for the creative imperative of spontaneous gestural, for certain stimuli, driven by a personal or social, satirical, sarcastic and phantasmagorical oneirism, achieved through the mockery of fixed schema or express creation. A twisted world attained through the expression of self-sufficient images.

Brossa and Ponç right from the beginning felt very much in tune in their perceptive, creative and projected intentionalities. From 1947 until Ponç's trip to Brazil in 1954, he and Brossa enjoyed a close, almost similar, world of expression although each with his own level of creation. They realised combinations of text and images oscillating between a crude realism, phantasmagoria and an arbitrary and heterodox meta-symbolism, suffused with a free arbitrary transcription of drawing, painting and incisive words, with no other control than that of oneiric or sarcastic spontaneity, wrapped up in a strident or smooth lyricism depending on whether it was about exciting attention towards the surprisingly unseen, unusual or incoherent, bordering on the limits of the irrational. Ponç illustrated with decorative borders Brossa's poems and instantaneously the poet sowed a retinue of hypnagogic words under those plastic caprices. It looked not unlike a popular notebook illustrated with scenes of unusual experiences. The words of Brossa are realist, plucked from the ambit of the labourer or craftsman, but the syntax that binds them together transforms them into poems of pure oneirism.

Anti-social Dadaist expressionism, captured in the literary aspect as much as in the visual, by a series of forms or words with no other framework than that of visual and mental surprise.

Initially that literary and visual scenography was labelled as "magic realism" or "diabolical imagery". Finally, it was recognised as that of the DAU AL SET.

An extremely personal aesthetic flux, which through sentimental projection, transmuted everything into comic or eerie images that were born from the shadows of the night fantastic illuminated, each in the solitude of their individual creative cubicle, by a single electric light bulb (like a candle). The ironic empathy between the internal, almost biological, flux and the gestural but steely fixation, determined the final work.

Joan Prats, the misshapen, snobbish hatter, a friend of Miró, with his intuitive understanding, oversaw the scene and gave it his blessing.

Arnau Puig, philosopher and art critic

Addendum: The Fabra dictionary, with which Brossa was very familiar, defines "Brossa" in the following manner: a collection of leaves, twigs and other organic debris, scattered in heaps, etc. Fig.: ... in reasoning, etc., what is useless, superfluous. // Rubbish.