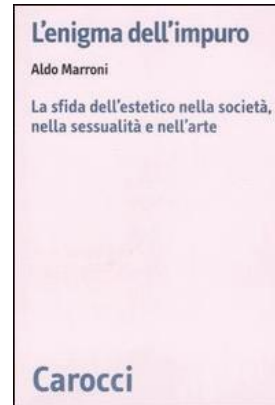


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L' enigma dell'impuro



(*L' enigma dell'impuro. La sfida dell'estetico nella società, nella sessualità e nell'arte* by Aldo Marroni, Carocci, Roma 2007. ISBN 978-88-430-4346-0. pp. 222)

In his work *L'enigma dell'impuro. La sfida dell'estetico nella società, nella sessualità e nell'arte*, Aldo Marroni sets out the methodological procedures that have led his previous analysis of culture and society to develop his view for a philosophical approach of the concept of 'the Impure'.

A quest in which there is a continuity with, and part of remarkable interest in, the function of the concept of 'the Impure' in aesthetics. Working from a contemporary understanding, Marroni's purposes are clear; he does not discuss the theories of former philosophers nor does he focus his attention on single authors but goes further, analysing the connections between 'things' that only philosophy is able to establish (*officiare*, p. 9), enhancing an aestheticized vocabulary to express the social function of the issue to which 'knowledge' is considered crucial.

Marroni's extensive revisions of the concept of 'the impure' are well debated in the present work. Based on surviving evidence his focus arises from 'embarrassing' questions: "what is, in the concept of 'the Impure', so outrageous, and why it is an object of systematic prohibition and denial? How does it modify thought? And then, what are the conceptual instruments that philosophy ought to use to understand the symbolic meaning of it?" (p. 11). In order to answer these and other questions Marroni adopts the notion of *enigma*, here meant not as synthesis, but as the *locus* in which any reversal becomes possible. The concept of *enigma* includes and opens new joint perspectives and convergent

possibilities; and it is read as a gesture of hesitation that does not solve the question but, conversely, sharpens the philosophical struggle (p. 123), exhausting it with its questions.

In this context and revisiting familiar images from Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* Marroni invokes the scene in which the dwarf reveals the peculiarity of the rigid separation, instead of junction, between two conflicting roads finally converging on the gateway above which is written 'This Moment' ('They are antithetical to one another, these roads; they directly abut on one another: – and it is here, at this gateway, that they come together. The name of the gateway is inscribed above: 'This Moment.'") Translated by Th. Common, 1891). This critical reflection leads Marroni to conceive the idea that the *enigma* is not a process, or dialectic of synthesis; accordingly the image of the threshold compels one to think and acquire the idea of the 'un-synthetic' as a moment that debar the two roads to intersect.

In this lacking of conjunction that becomes the object of philosophical reflection as 'the enigmatic and un-dialectical vestige capable of linking without identifying' (p. 15) bursts of *excess* are seen as liminal enjoyments that must be confined within the instant in which they show themselves; it is the instant in which the *excess* becomes part of the individual. But, as Marroni repeatedly emphasizes, within the *excessive impulse*, a reversal takes place, a change of position between *pure* and *impure*, between aesthetic universal beauty and the rational one, the fascination of the impulsive impure, the aesthetic floating against absolute certainties (ch. 4, pp. 97-116).

Marroni clarifies that the aesthetic looks at 'the world – not exclusively human – as something to be included in one's own interests (...) ready to compare the most extreme manifestations of contemporary social behaviour. (...) The aesthetic does not dwell in beauty, harmony and taste; in other words, in everything western rationality accepts' (p.18).

As *exemplum* for this challenge to aesthetics, Marroni reinterprets both Klossowski and Bataille's philosophical thought, exponents of different philosophical perspectives: of 'vicious philosophy' (*filosofia viziosa*) the first, and of *philosophia sexualis* the second, to quote Perniola.

Analysing Klossowski and Bataille, Marroni encourages his reader to reflect on the image of the threshold and its symbolic meaning. The alternance of expressions such as, 'If in Klossowski ... in Bataille ...' makes its theoretical opposition the place where the fluidity of modern thought plays a pivotal role, rather than dwelling on the decaying and tiring *modus operandi* of the *History* of thought. If, at first sight, to shorten the

distance between the two philosophers, we might say that on the one hand, they appear to have the same philosophical root, on the other, their different issues show two distinct attitudes: 'If in Bataille the mystical adventure follows a unique direction (...) in Klossowski we perceive as opposed movement of thought a process of valorization of the outside world and of an inclusive aesthetics that accepts the institutional and conventional level of life' (p. 23).

In this respect Nietzsche's thought clarifies the opposition between the polar extremes of the question; indeed he makes it the nucleus of the essay: "he is the exponent of aesthetics of extreme and exceptional states of mind that lead to thematize a perception that might be defined 'impure'" (p. 59). That is, Nietzsche is the only one who defines as *Krinitic* the relation between passion and its intellectual decoding of digestion, in which he realizes the shift from perception to thought. But what is digestion if it is not a separation? A withholding and refusal? If the brain has the same function as the stomach, it means what we perceive as our vital needs is kept, whilst that which might poison us is refused. But have we not, in this way, gone back to the classical aesthetic demand that reconciliates rather than is inclusive? Are we not risking the mistake, once again, of leaving outside the door unpleasant passions, those that provoke a sense of disgust? So those that remain, according to the Nietzschean metaphor, do not get mentally digested and therefore are flushed away without further reflection? Thus, aesthetics, from a classical viewpoint, allows us to discuss the concept of beauty and taste; but conversely if we are willing to compare, analysing the authors that have accepted the challenge of the aesthetic renouncing their desire to be writers on aesthetics – whereas 'the aesthetic' becomes a form of inclusion – in this case the stress posed in the *aisthesis* as sensuous experience, will unblock the *impasse* (pp. 121-5).

Establishing an implied dialogue between Klossowski and Bataille about a topic so crucial, Marroni underlines the difference between them, but at the same time he focuses his attention on 'differences' as the way to interpret the meaning of 'impure aesthetics'. If Klossowski's theory is basically linked to tradition, diametrically opposed to it is Bataille's who brings his reader to reflect on what he calls 'impossible' meant as a threshold experience (*in limine*) beyond which all is silence. The limit belongs to what is able to be spoken; conversely, to move beyond belongs to the unutterable and incommunicable spheres.

The *ex-stasis* stands on the threshold (*limen*), it is the moment of the utmost incommunicableness; it (*ex-stasis*) is a temporary pause for thought, for interior experience. The *aisthesis* is the experience through which man

obliterates the 'self', delivering it to a momentary *quid* longing for 'homecoming'; it is a nostalgic moment which embraces the experience of the limit as silence; it is the residual space, the main feature of 'a being who is in the act of...'; it is a movement that will never be translated into language, into *logos*; it is not an *extra-rational* experience, rather it is an *Ur-logic* experience meant not in a chronological or qualitative sense, but, having uniquely an evocative value, that of an experience otherwise incommunicable.

"Only by flouting the institutional level of things, is it possible to assert the 'impossible' thought" (p. 75), thus, transgression and devaluation of good taste revalue Klossowski's *agire sexualis*, that might be read as a desire for purification, to break free in order to restart the process of contamination. It consists of the refusal of the cathartic function of the tragic experience, that is, its exaltation in the impure and philosophical aesthetic theatre.

Being *purified*, the human being can act again as a spirit possessed by a demon that leads him to be re-tarnished to escape boredom and mediocrity (p. 80). It is an impure Stoic Roman *ekpyrosis* in which anything will come back unchanged and unchangeable; the human being is ready not only to make the same mistakes but he will be able to add new sins to the former ones without the consolatory certainty of a preventive remission: 'Desiring the sin and the impure, seems to be (...) the highroad to relieve the immobilizing existential boredom in order to gain a joyful view of life in which the dichotomy between truth and deception will not appear any more as in a tragic sense, but it will become an object of ridicule and it will put back any moment in which it seems to have become stable' (p. 81).