So Distant, almost Close

Agostino De Rosa

"Verily within me,
within the chamber of my thought, Truth,
neither Hebrew, nor Greek, nor Latin, nor barbarian,
without the organs of voice and tongue,
without the sound of syllables, would say:
'He speaks the truth'"

Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 11, 3, 5

Introduction

It was with some hesitation that I initially accepted the invitation extended to me by my friend and colleague Francesca Fatta to reflect on the theme of *Drawing: distances, languages, technologies* during the opening of the Study Day organized by UID (Italian Union for Drawing) and held online on September 18, 2020. The three (actually four) terms evoked in the title of the Seminar correspond to the same number of existential and experiential categories that, never as in these months of pandemic, have taken on ambiguous and contradictory meanings, previously unimaginable. The physical (but not social) distancing has forced us to reflect on how important proximity is for the human race and how by now this can/should be expressed not only through in-person contact, but also mediated by other communicative structures, all focused on the visual, but unable to solicit in us a satisfactory overall response of mirror neurons, and to act in the synesthetic field on all our senses. Thus, the inadequacy and limitations emerge of a technology that we thought we could dominate, but that we discover, instead, to be dominating our working days and our relationships, now remote and opaque in that mentioned algid distance. However, many have pointed

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out how the pandemic has once again placed language at the center of the communicative scene, in its multiple articulations, semantic and segnic, becoming the only *locus* to which we entrust our thoughts and desires, now disembodied. I have, therefore, attempted to start from this very last lemma, 'language,' to offer my friends and colleagues my point of view on the question of Drawing, moving on to my personal interpretation of the idea of distance, private and global at the same time, and finally closing with an example of technological archeology which, it seems to me, could resolve the *aporias* raised by the dismal times in which we live.

Languages

Those who teach subjects related to the field of Drawing know very well the importance of the evolutionary study of linguistic forms, capable of subsuming in an icastic and paradigmatic way how the name given to things has historically been translated into calligrams, in ideogrammatic languages, and into phonemes, in the alphabetic ones. I would therefore like to share with you the analysis of a few ideograms taken from Japanese, showing how the graphic elements that connote them open a sign universe that is already a drawing, a graphic hypostatization of actions and behaviors, but also a symbol of the anthropology reflected in that language. Immediately afterwards, I will attempt to deal with a word belonging to a phonetic language, which, however, seems to play in vain in these days of global uncertainty, and which will lead us to the next chapter of this narrative.
Let's start with the two *kanji* (certainly of Chinese origin and used in Japanese writing in conjunction with the hiragana and *katakana* syllabaries) that indicate, respectively, the action of 'seeing' and that of 'hearing,' that is, two of the actions, along with 'speaking,' that we have most exercised in the lockdown period. The ideogram '**見**' (fig. 1) indicating 'to see' in *on'yomi* reading, of Chinese derivation, is read 'ken' [1]: it is composed of two lower strokes, executed with the same number of brushstrokes drawn with a quick and sure gesture by the master calligrapher, to synthetically represent the motor action of the legs (originally a man) in walking; and the ideogram '**目**' (*moku*) indicating the eye, placed in the upper part of the *kanji*. This calligram summarizes the whole Far Eastern poetics of seeing (and therefore of representing), characterized

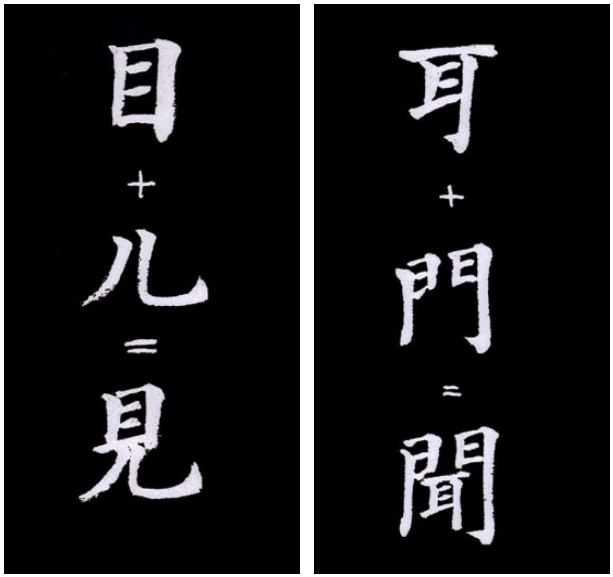


Fig. 1. The Japanese kanji **見***, 'to see', and its ideogrammatic articulation.*

Fig. 2. The Japanese kanji **聞***, 'to listen', and its ideogrammatic articulation.*

by a continuous and unstoppable dynamism of the observer, by his/her incessant kinematism that probes space in an ambulatory manner, without perspective depth, but rather actively concentrated in overcoming the material objectivity of things, lifting the veil of Maya that hides them from our understanding, and revealing their intimate archetypal essence. The difference with the established way of seeing space, typical of Renaissance painting but, in general, of the whole Western scopic approach to knowledge, is obvious: compared to the motionless and cyclopean European ocularcentrism, in Japan 'to see' is to move one's body to discover a non-homogeneous and anisotropic space, in a process of consubstantiality between human eye and divine eye. The *kanji* for the verb 'to hear,' **聞** (*kiku*) (fig. 2), on the other hand, is conceptually articulated in the opposite way, being composed of the calligram of the ear, **耳** (*mimi*), inserted below the symmetrical calligrams indicating twin portals (**門**), thus suggesting that the listener places or centers his ear at or

within the frame of the empty space between the pair of doors in order to hear the sound coming from the area beyond the threshold: 'hearing' thus becomes a static as well as passive action in that scriptural and anthropological context, in consonance with the non-melodic, rhythmic, and just-intoned structure of Japanese music. In the West, on the other hand, 'hearing' is a dynamic and active action, as demonstrated by the articulated and 'perspective' structure of continental music, in being based on the idea of 'movement' and temperament. The two examples cited above show how ideogrammatic language is conveyed by signs capable of containing an expressive world, I would say *in exergo* an anthropology, which describes a world. But an alphabetic language close to us has similar capabilities: classical Greek. A word that precisely in these recent months has placed us in continuous check is 'truth' constituting –together with the related adjectives (verism, realism, etc.)– a controversial aspect of the Western gnoseological process, as it is historically returned to us by the myth of the cave, offered by Plato (428/427-348/347 B.C.) at the beginning of Book VII of *The Republic* [2] (*Πολιτεία*, 390-360 B.C.).

The most subtle interpreter of the Platonic allegory was certainly Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), who dedicated to this chthonian myth his course held in Freiburg between 1931 and 1932, then incorporated it into the volume *The Essence of Truth* [see Heidegger 1997], published later, in 1942. Without going into an exegesis of the Heideggerian text [3], I would like to emphasize here how the German philosopher indicates precisely in the concept of 'truth' the central driving force of his text, recognizing the myth of the cave as the greatest contribution of the Greek philosopher to Western knowledge. Commonly understood as conversion 'in the light of knowledge' the term 'truth' (in German "*Wahrheit*"), in relation to Plato's myth, is offered by Heidegger through two semantic, by no means homophonic, versions: first as *ἀλήθεια* (*alétheia*) (fig. 3), a Greek word that can be translated as 'truth,' but that is composed of the prefix '*ἀ*' (privative alpha, 'not') and the verb '*ληθεύειν*' ('to unveil, disclose, reveal'), indicating what is emancipated from oblivion, *λήθη* (*lèthe*, something that emerges into view but was concealed until now. Under this critical light, *ἀλήθεια* can be translated as 'unveiling' (or 'disclosure'), 'that which is not hidden,' in German, *Unverborgenheit*: in other words, truth is given through a denial of what is hidden. In its most intimate semantic nucleus, truth therefore conceals a negation: not an assertive lexical particle, as one might expect, but a negative one: "its expression is *privative*" [De Rosa 2021, p. 33: italics are used in the original text]. As if to say that truth implies its own negation. This semantic ambivalence, exquisitely Greek, evidently conflicts with the analogous Latin term 'veritas,' much more stolid and granitic, devoid of ambiguity, and characterized by an exclusively positive meaning, modeled on the idea of similarity. According to the interpretation provided by Heidegger, the notion of truth as 'disclosure' has nothing to do with the idea of truth as 'conformity' or 'concordance.' For the German philosopher, Plato considered this revealing action of truth in its most intimate workings, presupposing the experience of the veiledness of the entity, of the anguish that the awareness of its presence exerts on man, as necessary for him to yearn for the unveiling of what was previously hidden: truth is born from this dialectic, as the myth of the cave exemplifies in an adamantine manner. For Heidegger, it was Heraclitus (535-475 B.C.) the first philosopher to clarify how "Nature loves to conceal Itself" [fragment DK 22 B 123, Eraclito 1980, p. 19], thus identifying in this refined attitude the expression of a voluntary opacity to the visibility of the entity: "In this statement by Heraclitus finds expression that fundamental experience *with which*, *in which* and *from which* one began to look into the essence of truth as a dis-veiling of the entity" [Eraclito 1980, p. 36; Mecacci 2006, pp. 164 et seq.: italics are used in the original text.] It is precisely the Platonic myth, according to Heidegger, that diverts the negative path of the Greek notion of truth, directing it towards the concept of *ὀρθότης* (*orthótes*, *adaequatio* in Latin), the correctness of the *logos*-supported vision, which is further dealt with in another famous book written by

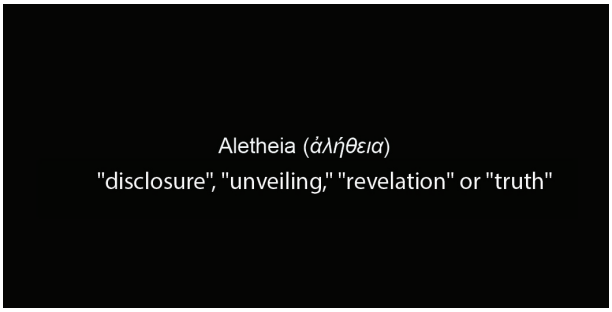


Fig. 3. The word ἀλήθεια (alétheia) and its possible translations.

the German philosopher, *Plato's Doctrine of Truth*, published in 1942 but actually dating back to 1930-1932 [Heidegger 1987]. Plato explains its function and the relationship of dependence on *ἀλήθεια* [4] in the dialogue entitled *Cratylus* [Plato 2003], which again sees Socrates as protagonist. This is an eminently anthropic action, which emerges when one attempts to give a name to things: this association is therefore arbitrary, and would indicate how idea and thing are made to correspond, according to a process reducing being to an object of man's evaluation, for Heidegger the premise of the contemporary primacy of subjectivity and the eclipse of being. Despite the criticism aroused by the Heideggerian hypothesis of a pre- and post-Platonic truth in classical philosophical thought –one thinks, for instance, of the criticism [5] raised by the classical philologist Paul Friedländer (1882-1968)– truth as denial remains a fascinating hypothesis rich in speculative insights, which indicate that even in what one believes to see there is a part hidden from our gaze: a "blind spot," or a place where being exercises selective blindness. The theme of revelatory "sight" is therefore dominant in Book VII of *The Republic*, first with a critical reflection on the deception of seeing (on the part of the prisoners), then on the blindness perpetrated by the retinal overexposure to the light of the torch or of the sun (on the part of the philosopher who escaped from the cave); blindness only partially recovered by the return to the phenomenal world, since the destiny will still be, for the philosopher freed from his chains, that of re-entering the cave and its obscured luminosity: an eternal return to darkness that, however, can take on another meaning, if analyzed with a different critical approach.

Distances

Among the many images that figuratively render this Platonic archetype, the one that seems most interesting to evoke here is the version executed in 1604 by the Dutch engraver and painter Jan Pietersz Saenredam (1565-1607), entitled *Antrum Platonicum* [see Hirschmann 1915] (fig. 4) and today preserved at The British Museum in London. The engraving [6], printed by Hendrik Hondius (1573-1650), was a copy of a painting (1598) which is now lost [7], by Cornelisz Cornelis, called Cornelis van Haarlem [see McGee 1991] (1562-1638), and was commissioned by the Dutch humanist Hendrik Laurensz Spiegel (1549-1612) [see Verwey 1919; Buisman 1935; Orenstein 1995; Veldman 1990], who wanted a faithful restitution, in iconographic terms, of his Catholic interpretation of the Platonic myth, as he had developed it in the poem *Hertspiegel* (*The Mirror of the Heart* or *Spiegel's Heart*). The image was offered by Spiegel [8] as a tribute to his nephew, the physician Pieter Paaw (1564-1617), professor of medicine at the University of Leiden, famous anatomist and founder, with Jacobus Bontius (1592-1631), of the botanical garden of that university, and bore, on the upper margin, the following quotation, in capital letters, from the *Gospel of St. John*: "LVX VENIT IN MVNDV[M] ET DILEXERVNT HOMINES MAGIS TENEBRAS QVAM LVCEM. IO. 3. 19" [9].
The lower border presented, instead, distributed over three columns (separated by elegant projections of conical helixes), a long epigram describing the image, presumably signed by Spiegel himself [10].
Although incomplete, *Hertspiegel* was published posthumously in 1614 with seven of the nine books originally intended, each dedicated to one of the Greek muses. *Book III*, introduced by the image of Melpomene [11], the muse of tragedy, is the book in which the author again proposed, in a Catholic interpretation, the myth of the cave imagined as a cavity similar in shape to the human heart, where men, though free to move about (and not chained, as in *The Republic*) consciously decide to remain in the darkness staring at the shadows cast by a lantern suspended in front of them, rather than going towards the exit of the cave to attain that true knowledge provided, in this case, by the light of Christ. The multiplicity of subjects (mostly male) represented by Saenredam was meant to allude, with all evidence, to the human race in its entirety: there are different kinds of people (peasants, orientals, some belonging to professional guilds and occupied in diverse trades, soldiers, clerics, some wearing turbans and others togas) engaged in a heated discussion. On top of the wall, behind them, one does not see the miniatures described by Plato, but rather statues [12] representing several capital vices (greed, lust, envy) and theological virtues (faith, hope and charity) [13]. Only a few men on this side of the wall choose to turn their gaze towards the artificial light: the wise men depicted on the left, with their gaze focused on the light source; but even they are deceived, being convinced that this is the true light and that they have already attained the true knowledge of the world to which, however, they turn their backs: they are, according to Spiegel, pseudo-philosophers (we recognize the presence among them of a magician with a typical

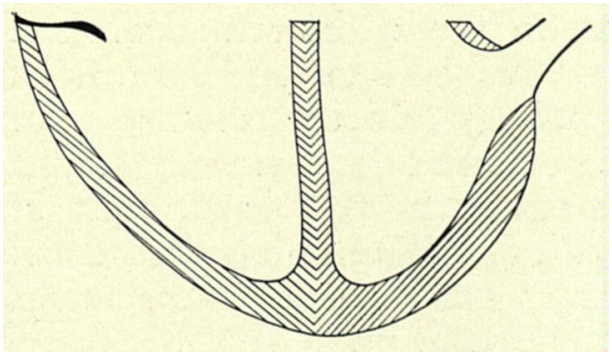
Fig. 4. Jan Pietersz Saenredam (1565-1607), Antrum Platonicum, 1604. Fondo Calcografico Antico e Moderno from Fondazione Biblioteca Morcelli Pinacoteca Repossi (Brescia), inventory number 100502.

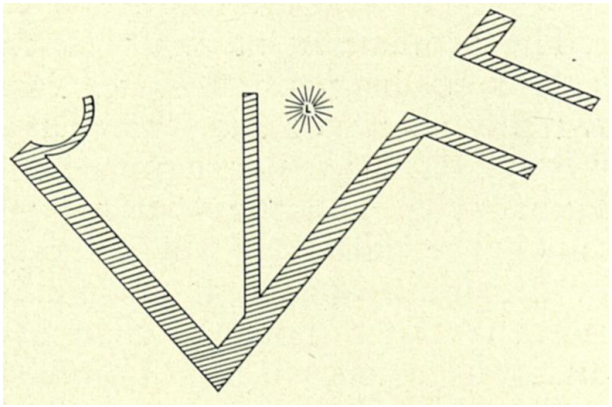
truncated-cone hat). Only a small group dares to leave the cave to attain the truth provided by the knowledge of Christ: these are the three men depicted outside the tunnel, who renounce the world and convert (the meaning of "*convert*" is precisely "to turn completely around"). Still faithful to the Platonic tradition, this is the description of those who, now aware of what the truth is, try to make the occupants of the cave, still victims of ignorance, share in it. However, the former are looked upon with distrust and fear, as depicted in the episode that takes place below, in the center of the image. The discrepancies between the Platonic tradition and Spiegel's version can perhaps be attributed to the interference of a similar theme, developed by Aristotle, and brought to us through a quotation given by Cicero in *De natura Deorum* [14]. From the reading of the text, some details emerge that show a greater closeness of the chthonic scenography imagined by Spiegel and depicted by Saenredam to the Aristotelian cavern, more than to the Platonic one: first of all, the lack of chains forcing the prisoners to stare obtusely at the projected shadows, but also the nature of the statues placed on top of the wall that divides the cavern depicted in the engraving into two ideal halves. These, but also other themes, suggest that the image of the "*Speloncke Platonis*" was not necessarily intended as an illustration for the third book of the *Hertspiegel* –where the myth is described– given its large size (27.2 x 44 cm) in comparison to the smaller size of the printed edition of the poem, which was published, up to its fourth edition, without any interspersed illustrations: only in the 1694 version does the image of the *Antrum Platonicum* appear accompanying the text, in a version engraved by Joseph Mulder based on Saenredam's original. Albert Cornelis de Jong [de Jong 1930] points out that there is another configurative element in the represented space which distances the engraving from the contents of the poem: the fact that Spiegel repeatedly claimed that the cave of the myth should resemble, as we have already said, a human heart [15], without ever giving rise in the engraved image to this desire. John Baptist Knipping supposes that perhaps this resistance was due to an intrinsic inability of the engraver or, better, to Spiegel's reluctance to be guilty of *ὕβρις* with respect to Platonic orthodoxy. However, the neurologist Pierre J. Vinken [16] believes that this resonance between the rhetorical space of the engraving and the structure of the heart is obvious, if referred to the image that the anatomy of the time had already defined for this organ. In particular, Spiegel himself could have had access to the canonical representation that the heart had assumed in the first half of the seventeenth century, thanks to his direct relationship with his nephew and dedicatee of the engraving, the previously mentioned Pieter Paaw, who had studied at many European medical institutions, including the University of Padua, under the guidance of Hieronymus Fabricius or Girolamo Fabrizi d'Acquapendente (1533-1619), where he had had the opportunity to consult both the *Tabulae anatomicae* (1600, now preserved in the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice) of his teacher and the famous *De humani corporis fabrica* (Basel 1543) of Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564). In particular, Paaw also had a profound knowledge of Vesalius' *Epitome*, a work divided into six chapters that constituted a sort of summary of the *Fabrica*, for the use of medical students. Paaw himself curated an edition of the *Epitome* with numerous autograph glosses where, in the fourth book, it was possible to find a very detailed description of the human heart compared, in its form, to a pine nut flattened in front and behind, consisting of two alveoli or internal chambers. In particular, for the author "the atrioventricular valves are situated between the vena cava and the pulmonary veins on one side, and the ventricles, respectively right and left, on the other. The atria are indistinguishable from the great veins that converge there. The right and left ventricles have separate connections to the pulmonary artery ('vein arteries') and the aorta, respectively. The innermost structure of the heart consists of a muscular wall, thicker on both the left and the right, and a septum that exhibits 'cavities' (perforations)" [Vinken 1960, pp. 133, 134]. This is an image of the heart that differs little from that already provided in the second century by Galen (129-201 ca.) and that, without interruption, had survived unchanged up to the threshold of the seventeenth century, except for the fact that Paaw insisted on the absence of holes in the septum that separates the heart into two parts. According to Vinken [Vinken 1960, p. 135] this configuration must have been acquired by Paaw during his stay in Padua, on the basis of the studies of Realdo Colombo (1515-1559 ca.) concerning pulmonary circulation (or small circulation) which outlined the basis of the modern notion of blood circulatio discovered by William Harvey (1578-1657) a few years later [Harvey 1628]. It was therefore potentially this anatomical image of the heart that Paaw could have transmitted to his uncle Hendrik Laurensz Spiegel, who would then develop a literary image reflected in

Saenredam's engraving: "to illustrate his interpretation of Plato's allegory, Spiegel needed a diagram of the heart, one side of which had to be left open, so that the observer could see the inside of the organ from above. To this end, he omitted its base" [Vinken 1960, p. 135]. Vinken then outlines a section of the heart muscle whose base has been elided along the line connecting the wall of the aorta to that of the right atrium (formerly thought to be part of the vena cava), and, of course, without perforations of the interventricular septum, whose existence had already been refuted by Galen. Starting from the graphic reconstruction performed by Horance Lance Flint [Flint 1921] of Galenic cardiac circulation, Vinken compares this scheme (figs. 5a, 5b) to a plan of the Platonic antrum delineated by Saenredam, noting remarkable formal similarities. The *Antrum Platonicum*, delineated by Spiegel and Saenredam, thus maintained the same dual spatial and symbolic articulation of the Galenic heart, characterized as it was by a more 'popular' area (where the figures observing the shadows projected onto the bottom of the cave are found), corresponding to the right cardiac ventricle, where raw blood was supposed to arrive, and a more 'emblazoned' space (occupied by the pseudo-philosophers), which played the role of the left ventricle, where raw blood, heat and pulmonary air converged, transforming into blood endowed with vital spirit [17]. On this last space shone the flame of the suspended torch, *analogon* of the *pneuma zoticon* (*πνεύμα ζωτικόν*) of Aristotelian matrix, whose source, for Galen as well, was to be found in the heart, seat of the passions [18]. Thus, the engraving of Saenredam seems to tell us that there exists a place that we believed to be distant, very distant, and that instead is close, very close. We have understood this by studying a remote, very remote cave: so remote that it seems to have been at the beginning of everything, even of our civilization. We thought it was in another nation, in a distant country, under age-old cliffs, inside caves where the Eleusinian Mysteries were perhaps celebrated, in the dark, in caverns without light, because those who frequented them had to dwell in the shadows, like goldfinches, who are kept in the dark to make their song (desperate because of their blindness) even more melodious. Then we discovered that this cavern was a heart, so not as distant as we thought, on the contrary: so close that we never realized we had always had it near us. As in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter* [19], it was right before our eyes, in plain sight, but we had never

Fig. 5a. Pierre J. Vinken (1960), schematic image of the heart hypothesized by Galen, modified from the description provided by Pieter Paaw.

Fig. 5b. Pierre J. Vinken (1960), planimetric restitution of the Antrum Platonicum after Saenredam.





noticed it. Perhaps this could be better said by explaining that someone had put it on display precisely in that way so that we would not notice that it was right there, in understanding that an apparently innocent drawing, illustrating a mythical allegory, actually hides a map of our lives, visible only when we have given up seeing it, making us blind.

Technologies

I don't know how much good the experience of the pandemic has done us: my impression is that it has intensified the egoism of those who were already egoistic before it broke out, and that it has dug a deep furrow of separateness, of 'remoteness' from the world in the most sensitive among us. I have the constant feeling of being on the edge of something, and my disorientation (already at perturbing levels in pre-pandemic times), but especially that of those around me, is tangible, disturbing. I have to thank a dear friend who, precisely during the lockdown, called my attention to a hauntingly beautiful film, *The Whispering Star* (*Hiso hiso boshi*, ひそひそ, 2015) by Japanese director Sion Sono, which seems to restore this sense of remoteness that I could not name nor describe plastically. The answer, as is often the case, comes from the East, which is not only a geographical East, but also an East of the mind. In the film, humanity has been drastically reduced in the universe due to some unspecified environmental disaster: eighty percent of the population is now composed of androids, and humans are a residual, endangered species. Machine ID 722 Yoko Suzuki (fig. 6) is an android (played by Megumi Kagurazaka, the director's wife and muse), on board Rental Spaceship Z (fig. 7), an improbable spaceship modeled after a traditional house, uprooted from its earthly foundations and equipped with thrusters. Thanks to 67 MAH Em, the vintage onboard computer (as vintage are all the interior furnishing details, from the kettle to the Bunsen burners to the dripping faucet), Yoko travels from one star system to another, delivering packages to surviving humans: inside them are simple items like a hat, a pencil, clothes, the fragment of a film. For her job, Yoko reaches many desolate planets, cities, and beaches (figs. 8, 9). She doesn't understand why humans do not choose teleportation, as though materially receiving objects could imply an inescapable emotional element. Whispering Star is one of the planets reached by Yoko: there, any noise over 30 decibels could kill the inhabitants. So the android tiptoes to the recipient's address to deliver a package with mysterious contents. Here Yoko walks along a long, winding corridor, between thin shoji panels, behind which we can glimpse the daily life of the local inhabitants, now projected in the form of shadows (fig. 10): a Platonic cave of a remote future, in my interpretation. The settings chosen by the director are the post-apocalyptic ones of Fukushima Prefecture, after the accident at the Ōkuma nuclear power plant caused mainly by the Tōhoku earthquake of March 11, 2011, and even some of the actors were chosen among the inhabitants of that tormented region. The film is shot in a poignant black and white, the only moment of color being reserved for the landing of the spacecraft on the planet Earth. I'll be silent here, and I hope you enjoy this moment in solitude, even if it lasts only a few seconds: you can't help but be moved by it. "This is a film about memory," says Sion Sono in the accompanying director's notes. "A prayer for people around the world whose lives are threatened every day." The director seems to warn us, back in 2015, that the destiny towards which the world would seem to be running is that the whole universe would be reduced to the dystopian situation of Fukushima.

What, however, has resonated strongly in my imagination is the delivery of those almost empty packages, filled only with tenuous memories, summarized in the fragment of an object, apparently residual but essential for survival, perhaps only mnesic, of those who receive it. Objects of a now-remote technology, but full of residues of a past full of memories. I think that many of us received those packages in the days of the lockdown, and I'm certainly not alluding to those delivered by Amazon: maybe some of us will try to decipher their contents in the future, but most of us have left them aside and will leave them closed *ad libitum*, out of fear.

I too, on November 7, 2019, made use of a residual technology, similar to the one described by Sion Sono: I was in Tel Aviv, Israel, for a teaching staff meeting, when at six in the morning (dawn in Italy), I received the news of the death of Anna Sgrosso, my teacher and lifelong friend, whom many of you knew. To say what her presence has represented in my life, both academic and private, is too complex to sum up in a few lines. Especially in my private life, I would say. I met her in 1989, so we had known each other for 40 years, years in which I learned to love her. It wasn't difficult: she was a woman full of humanity and kindness, despite the fact that some may have perceived her as edgy and difficult. But she wasn't like that at all: those who really knew her,

Fig. 6. Sion Sono, The Whispering Star (Hiso hiso boshi, ひそひそ, 2015). Frame.
Fig. 7. Sion Sono, The Whispering Star (Hiso hiso boshi, ひそひそ, 2015). Frame.
Fig. 8. Sion Sono, The Whispering Star (Hiso hiso boshi, ひそひそ, 2015). Frame.
Fig. 9. Sion Sono, The Whispering Star (Hiso hiso boshi, ひそひそ 2015). Frame.

Fig. 10. Sion Sono, The Whispering Star (Hiso hiso boshi, ひそひそ 2015). Frame.

know what she was capable of with a smile, a hug or just with the comfort of her wisdom, lavished with full hands in times of need. The last year of her life was tiring for her, and also for those who stood by her side. Both Andrea Giordano and I were close to her as much as possible, together with her family, and I must say that even in that final phase of her existence, Anna was unique and great: gentle and likeable, ready to joke even in very critical moments. Impossible not to adore her: that's it, more than loving her, I adored her. It was impossible to do without her. Once I told her what, in the novel *A Passage to India* by the British writer Edward Morgan Forster, one of the main characters, Doctor Godbole, told Mrs. Moore, an elderly English lady who had come to India for the celebration of a romantic encounter, in that remote land, of one of her protégés, Miss Adela Quested, which would never take place. Meeting her alone in the moonlight in a Hindu temple, Doctor Godbole told her, "You are an ancient soul." This is what Anna was: an ancient soul who gave us love and wisdom. On that fateful day, when my Israeli colleagues had planned for me to visit Jerusalem, I would have liked to have been somewhere else, but it was impossible to get back to Italy in time to pay my last respects to Anna. I am not a believer, but I suppose I have spiritual inclinations, at least it seems so to me, at times. And therefore the only thing I could do that day was to leave a small note between the cracks of

Fig. 11. The Kotel (Western Wall), Jerusalem, Israel. November 2019. Photo by Andrea Muddolon.

the Kotel, the millenary wall and the holiest site in Judaism (fig. 11), thinking that Anna, perhaps, would not have minded and that perhaps my message would have reached her: it contained a drawing, a prayer, I mean, that has no need of words.

Notes

[1] Regarding the drawing of this as well as other *kanji*, see: Ben She.Yi Ming 1997. See also: Knudsen 2018; Murase, Barnet, Burto 2002; Sato 2014.

[2] See Plato 2007. On the chronology of *The Republic*, see: Thesleff 1982. On the theme of the Platonic cave, see also: Badiou 2013; Herman 2013; Collobert, Destrée, Gonzalez 2012; Vegetti 1999. An interesting treatment of the theme of the Platonic cave in relation to contemporary art is developed in the doctoral dissertations Giammarioli 2007-2008.

[3] A comprehensive analysis of the Platonic text, of the Heideggerian text in relation to the theme of seeing/not seeing, see my De Rosa 2021.

[4] On this subject, see Borody 1980, in particular, the paragraph: *Orthotes Eclipses Aletheia*, pp. 61 & foll.

[5] See Friedländer 2014. For students of Heidegger, the term *alétheia* would be one of those Greek words of non-Indo-European origin. Thus, the initial *alpha* would not be privative at all, hence negating *lethe* (oblivion or forgetfulness), but, if anything, a durative prefix, which emphasizes it. More generally, on the question of Heidegger and language, see Travers 2019.

[6] The copy of the engraving consulted for writing this essay is the one conserved in the Fondo Calcografico Antico e Moderno of the Fondazione Biblioteca Morcelli Pinacoteca Repossi in Brescia, inv. no. 100502. On the history of the engraving, see Vinken 1960, pp. 125-142.

[7] We learn of this from van Mander, K. (1604). *Den Grondt der Edel vry Schilder-const...* In K. van Mander, *Schilder-Boeck*. Amsterdam: Jacob Pietersz Wachter, VII, 45, fol. 32 verso, 33.

[8] Vinken 1960, p. 129, states that in all likelihood a copy of the engraving of the "*Speloncke Platonis*" was also in his possession, namely at his house on the outskirts of Amsterdam, in the district of Meerhuizen.

[9] The full quotation would read: "*Hoc est autem iudicium: Lux venit in mundum, et dilexerunt homines magis tenebras quam lucem; erant enim eorum mala opera*". In the *CEI Bibbia* there is following translation [in Italian]: "*E il giudizio è questo: la luce è venuta nel mondo, ma gli uomini hanno amato più le tenebre che la luce, perché le loro opere erano malvagie*": Conferenza

Episcopale Italiana (Ed.). (2008). *La Sacra Bibbia. UELCI. Versione ufficiale della Cei*. Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, p. 1465.

[10] ["Most men, immersed in darkness / constantly wallow and perish in vain pursuit. / See how the gaze lingers on the shadows of objects, / so that all love and admire the images of objects, // and fools are deceived by the vain images of things. / Some men, more than others, under the pure light / separated from the stupid crowd discover the insults and make direct and balanced judgments / of the shadows of things: // They can recognize the projected darkness of error, / the true and good things, and strive to bring / others from the dark night to the clear light, / because these do not love the light and their intellect is very deficient." see Burucúa, J. E. (2017). Transcendences in the Italian Renaissance. Regarding a Wood Panel by Jacopo del Sellaio and a Miniature by Reginaldus Metropolitanus. In G. Melville, C. Ruta, (Eds.). *Experiencing the Beyond: Intercultural Approaches*. Boston/Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, pp. 159 & foll.

[11] "Melpomene, 'she who sings,' the Muse of tragedy, wearing a tragic mask, the club of Heracles or a sword; she normally has her head surrounded by vine leaves and wears *coturni*, the typical footwear of tragic actors": see Ferrari, A. (2018). *Dizionario di mitologia greca e latina*. Torino: UTET, p. 481. See also: Betti, S. (1836). *Sulla Musa Melpomene dissertazione detta alla Pontifica Accademia Romana di Archeologia*. Roma: Tipografia della R.C.A.

[12] According to Pierre J. Vinken (see Vinken 1960, no. 19, pp. 136-137) the last four figures would be less easily identifiable iconologically. The first of these four figures would appear to be wearing a jester's hat, holding a flail-like object, perhaps personifying *stultitia* (foolishness). The following figures represent falsity and pride, capital vices often evoked in the *Hertspiegel*. The last figure holding a star could be identified with ambition. The fact that the vices and virtues illustrated in Saenredam's print do not correspond exactly to those mentioned in the second book of the *Hertspiegel* leads critics to believe that the image was not meant to be inserted into the text. According to Vinken, the figures crowning the wall refer to the types of vices and virtues described in the so-called *Tabula Cebetis*, a treatise on human life by the Theban philosopher Cebetus, who lived in the first century B.C., and particularly in its iconographic version (1592), engraved by Jacob Matham based on an original by Hendrick Goltzius and now preserved at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam: see Vinken 1960, pp. 137 ff. See also Weddigen 2003.

[13] The citation from St. John, at the top of the print, and the choice to include statues of the theological virtues and some capital vices are a clear indication that the Catholic Spiegel offers, through Saenredam, a Christian interpretation of the Platonic myth, where ignorance is the non-knowledge of Christ.

[14] Marco Tullio Cicerone. *De natura deorum*, II 37, 95-97. This is the first of Cicero's three theological works, written in 44 B.C. and consisting of three books: see Bos, A. P. (1991). *Teologia cosmica e metacosmica. Per una nuova interpretazione dei dialoghi perduti di Aristotele*. Milano: Vita e Pensiero, pp. 295 & foll. On the relationship between Plato and Aristotle, see: Herman 2013.

[15] The same position is also held by Knipping 1939-1940.

[16] See Vinken 1960, pp. 133 & foll. The hypothesis was later expanded in Vinken 1999.

[17] In classical antiquity it was believed that blood was generated by the heart, while yellow bile in the liver, black bile in the spleen and phlegm in the brain. See, on this subject: Nuland, S. B. (1988). *Storia della medicina. Dagli antichi greci ai trapianti d'organo*. Milano: Mondadori,.

[18] See also: Latronico, N. (1955). *Il cuore nella storia della medicina*. Milano: A. Recordati, 1955.

[19] See Poe, E. A. (1998). *La lettera rubata*. Parma: Franco Maria Ricci.

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