

The Narrative Route of the Shadow  
*Synopadós* i.e. what follows at the same time — was a word used by the Greeks for the nature of the shadow, which from its very etymology shows its capacity for announcing a living contradiction. The figure of The Man following his Shadow is thus a contradiction in terms, a hyperbolic oxymoron (literally: sharp beneath apparent stupidity, from *oxýs* sharp and *móros* stupid — the etymology is uncertain), since, contrary to what the image leads us to see and the word "follow" leads us to understand, the character in question follows what comes after him, thus creating a visual metaphor to show a temporal paradox. In this way the straight, consecutive, causal route is interrupted forming a *Sense friction*, which introduces a fantastic figure element into a rigid, progressive concatenation, a curve in sense.

Surely it has always been the task of the shadow to create a bridge between the verticality of being awake and the horizontality of sleep by means of the obliqueness of movement of their metaphorical referents. Both the idea of moving forward following an "inclination" (or "following one's own inclination") and that of following a route made up of connected contrasts, as a constant, mold a discontinuous itinerary which extends and suspends moments, causing them to exist outside logical order, on the basis of the stimulations of fantasy and feeling. Here lies Andrea Granchi's major original contribution to the interpretation of the phenomenology of the shadow - the referent of his entire narrative route as an artist, giving him the opportunity to multiply and extend a potentiality *ad infinitum*, to the point of its reaching complete creative autonomy.

His interest in a grammar of the shadow together with the analysis of the movement of the human body dates from 1970. He manipulated collages, photographic assem-

blages transferred to canvas and experimented with film, a medium to which Granchi made a crucial contribution. This activity led him to put aside painting for some time. He had received the usual training in this medium, to which a strong family tradition of craftsmanship had allowed him natural access. Nevertheless, he continued with drawing as a completion of his research into a special dimension of recording, commenting on and tracing the visual adventure.

Archway with Shadow and Lowlying Drop-curtains herald Lowlying Drawing of 1972, where the breaking through of a shadow side-scene, erect like a Drop-curtain on the perpendicular is transferred onto the diagonal in a receding perspective of the sheet of paper, emphasising the framing of light in the dark pastel outline.

A "hero" who "is unable to stand up straight, as though his ability to keep his balance were totally confused" opens, together with the film *Exploration is Romantic*, the artist's first investigation of movement. "The path he follows is unmotivated, lacking the sense of a goal and the logic typical of correct and orderly movement; if anything it is his own lack of balance, his own bewilderment that is directing him". Another film must be mentioned at this point: *The Young Wreck* (another oxymoron, recalling swing, traditionally mortally depressed-highly exultant) which together with the previous one develops a kind of heroic-pathetic (grotesque), "imbalance in movement". The story goes ahead on the screen at the same time as a transcribed text following a visual diagram of the sound commentary.

#### The Technological Eye

Subsequently Granchi's interest moved from the surface line of the story to the interior of the formative process of images, meeting, in

the alternation between light and shadow, their life in depth. In the catalogue of the international exhibition he organized in 1979, *Cine Qua Non*, he sums up in his text *The Idée Fixe of Movement* his cinema experience, which is fundamental for understanding his subsequent work as a painter. For the idea of the immobility of movement Granchi owes a special debt to that archaic, fascinating form of entertainment known as the "magic lantern". Here not only is movement the reflection of fixed images, but the dynamics of light and shadow alternates, at regular, "fixed" intervals, which rotate around the immobility of the figures. Movement here is par excellence modulated through the interval between black and white and in turn reaches the state of being fixed through its own performance.

Granchi was also surely influenced by the fascination of a movable, travelling kind of show (see his *Miniature Theatres and Drop-curtains*), (a journey), capable of establishing a dialogue between different places and audiences on an ephemeral, secret basis (the relationship between society and the individual), as by the relationship between technology and the exploration of one's own Ego, a cinema representation and awareness of one's own body. "Emotions thought of as being only fleeting ones, leave marks that a whole life cannot strike out" wrote Robertson, the inventor of the *Fantascopes*! This is therefore also the case with the nature of "memory", analogous to the structure of film. The eye, as Giampiero Brunetta recalls, is not substantially a purely perceptive instrument, but a creator of other realities and "the connection between the universe and the plurality of its dimensions". If the dialectics between light and shadow was to be present, even ideologically and symbolically, in the painting to come, as the epidermis of the story, it was never to forget the transcription of infinitesimal, interior

events which take place beyond the surface with a quite different persistence. We have a kind of extraordinary coincidence between recit (story) and écrit (writing), following the dynamic and perfectly current (or modern) law of the incessant and also reciprocal overlap of one reality with another.

These are temptations which Granchi developed with simultaneous homage to the historical Futurist avantgarde and to the soteric symbolist universe in works like *Conqueror of the Night*, *Victories of Light* and *Light Chaser*.

While the man with his back to us at the same time points to Sky and Earth recalling a Cabalistic figure representing the Infinite Being, or En-Sof, signs are released following the dynamics of the irradiation of light, widening and contracting the vision with the pupil. Concerning the state of being fixed, it was a contemporary writer, Paul Valéry, interpreter of Leonardo in his Introduction to Leonardo's Method, who, in a dialogue of 1934 entitled *The Idée Fixe* and *Two Men in the Sea*, brilliantly described how here is nothing more mobile than what we normally call "idée fixe", which is presented to our conscience with more and more obstinate returns, with a special frequency. The phenomenon is easily comparable to the optic dynamics so explicitly used by Granchi.

The Return and Multiplication of Shadow Just like the "imbalance of movement" of the "hero" in *Exploration* is Romantic and of *The Young Wreck*, *The Man Following his Shadow* is, as it were, flung forward, attracted in a hallucinatory dizziness by a falling movement, placing himself almost parallel with the ground. His "widened" steps seem to allude to our night excursions or to an attempt to leave the ground to rise up in flight, something which fills episodes of our dreams.

*The Shadow*, this revenant, or ghost par

excellence, returns after ten years to develop the same theme. In one of the first works in the cycle, the late romantic system of the picture makes visible the modulation of the shadow vis-à-vis the ground, made up of reliefs and subsidences. In the drawing of 1982, on the other hand, the dark silhouette lengthening along the ground is covered by a light frequency that cuts it up into sections corresponding to the relief of the previous picture. What is in itself a double, meets, at the opposite pole, its own double, in transparency, acquiring in the urge to split itself up, an opportunity to multiply as well, something which it had not known up to then. Whether one must recognize in this a sign of the integration of the Shadow which, not only psychoanalysis, but the modern symbolic, including that of mathematics and science, are finally reaching, is uncertain. If this were the case, however, this integration would depend on a further, unheard of, capacity to glance at and divide the perceptive threshold of the shadow, making it even more efficacious thanks to a dynamism which would allow it to gain uncommon possibilities for transformation, such as only an eye with extra special faculties of observation could have or modern technology could reveal.

Apart from the characteristic of being cut up into strips by light, in Granchi the shadow has the special feature of being placed in close parallel with the ground so as to create angles of incidence and diffraction with light allowing extraordinary test hypotheses. One should not forget, besides, that our presence in our bodies is split up into areas of considerably variable density, a fact of which the eye with its greater speed is immediately aware.

To create disorder with an initial throw of the dice, symmetries, divisions or all too obvious "inclinations", *The Man with Two Separate Destinies*, already in 1982, took

on an absurdly inexpressible expression, placing himself as an equalizer on the outermost threshold between the "slope" of Sense and Nonsense.

In a cavernous, desert natural landscape, between the shadows coming from him, the crossroads which the character has reached, now turned towards us, like an actor on the proscenium, clearly expresses a new Trinitarian, trifurcate dilemma, the condition of maximum poise between possibilities: double pretence, double meaning, double interpretation, at the limits of probability, urging thought on to a triple somersault, on pain of losing its capacity to act. A way of checkmating all logical, rational attitudes, so as to reveal, allusively, a sentimental-affective condition which easily lends itself to the ridiculous as much as to the sublime, swinging from one pole to the other (but being aware of it at the same time) or an uncertain historical condition between the dominance of the past and the ambiguous dawning of the future.

The shadow towering behind the man who is climbing up onto a rock, creates an angle between its own vertical and the horizontal, which in its transitory, characteristic substance offers a weak anchorage to the undermining perplexities of the individual, while, on the line of minimum friction, the smaller one joins the human vertical, forming a right angle.

This key figure from the last century and the beginning of the present one, in philosophy, painting, literature and psychoanalysis, was from that point repropounded by Granchi, no longer as a personification of identity, an alter ego, interlocutor and background of reason, but as a reflection of self-generated phenomena in total independence of action. The coloured images and the films that in *Enchanted Rooms* (1980) and in *The Creator* (1981) were projected onto white plaster masks attached to a wall, extend the adven-

ture of the shadow, which being coloured, takes on frames of mind and declaims them like an actor, while the stream of incidents and events flows on. The antropomorphic fragments have the nature of "planets" and "islands" over which the film of colour is spread initiating, thanks to the projection, the germinating proliferation of new figures, capable of imitating an on going metamorphosis of Nature in Artifice. A show of magnificent *Ars Combinatoria*, half way between the ephemeral and plastic art, which responds with the transparence of thicknesses to the tridimensionalization of support.

Returning in painting to the idea of "enchanted" and "boxed" visions with *Secret Collections*, Granchi could then thematically suggest, as in *The Place of the Hundred Shadows*, a dialogue between the shadow and objects, thanks to the complete dissociation of the relationship between them. The mineral nature of stones and shells nurses within its bosom the memory of organic mutation, which reverberates from it in a human form. On the other hand, in *Shadows of Different Trees* Man objects to the series and symmetry in couplings that assigns the allegoric mask of a human face to Nature, breaking the chain with the bizarre unnaturalness of his behaviour tendentially projected into an infinite dimension. A reflection of the "theory of sets", which through the correspondence between two sets, changes the following elements of one into the following elements of the other.

#### The Human Fable of the "Sublime" Landscape

Sublime, or "that which rises up", made up of "süb" and "limus", precisely "that which climbs up obliquely", but also from "süb" and "limen" or "limes", indicating more specifically, in this case, "threshold", the "limit" from which and beyond which, it

rises up. The preposition "süb", "under", is transformed according to the value of place and time so as to swing, especially in the second case, between the meaning "immediately before" and "immediately after". "Limus" is also, however, "slime", "mud" which is defined "across", "oblique", since ancient thresholds (limits) were made of soil and placed "across" in the sense of constituting a border which "crosses" and is "oblique" (ob-livis, rivers also indicated naturel limits).

The historical "Sublime" in painting between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, takes off from a high mental flight where the eye, though trying out heights and depths is not at all disturbed. It believes that it will find the focal curve of a large lens. Granchi's "sublime" is, on the other hand, of the "close to the ground" type — another of the artist's paradoxes. However he lends himself to the creation of real corvées of vision, from "lowlying" soon to become "radial". The halo ray is frequent in his compositions, as in great Romantic painting from Friederich to Turner or the American Luminarists. It lends itself to the idea of an essential and total universe but is often cut up into gradients of light. Granchi's "sublime" vision thus "rises up" "obliquely" according to the etymon, since it stays close to the ploughing of signs, but is able in their multiplication to create an infinite route from near to far and vice-versa, subliminally. From this diagonal interval offsetting, rising up consists more of the scales of empty spaces — white — than blocks of colour, provoking not only that ecstatic effect which is the "immobility of movement" (like holding one's breath), but also freeing further shadows and ghost like effects from the radiality of inclinations. The reference to a passage from Etienne Pivert de Sénancourt, where "the trunk of a young fir-tree (...) moves around the Earth; it moves immobile

among all these worlds", explains the slow steps of Nature, which the artist's hand, working in the round tries to imitate, attempting to reproduce the doing and undoing of Time in vision. That the lower world is a reflection of the upper one is a very ancient belief. The inclination to parallelism established between high and low by chasing after one's own shadow is a way of moving attention from a banal, physical, corporeal condition towards a dimension that goes beyond the sensorial experience, being just under, or over, the threshold of the eye, of our watchful and receptive animal apparatus. Starting downwards and moving his gaze along the inclined plane of the ground, like a bird ready to fly, the man is doing something not unlike running a stick along a railing; he is creating friction, from which it is likely that he will be conscious of "matter". He pushes his way ahead so insensitively on the road that, from chasing after his own shadow, in the form of the landscape.

The journey over the landscape is, then, the creative effect of the integration which has taken place in the shadowy part of its own conscience through a dream, nostalgia. This is the other hidden meaning that, obliquely crosses Granchi's work — his concept of creation as an initiation experience, carried out through the total search for "self". From the "imbalance of movement" of his previous research, we can perhaps now speak about a "bat's flight" with its blind gait, studded with sudden falls. The night time lights of certain landscapes, with scattered flashes of light like flakes of foam, or a cascade of fireworks, but also those sudden swerves and eddies from which we feel the sheer drop of emptiness, of non-linear curves and movements, with climbs and unexpected descents, in the forward movement a simultaneous disappearance of the underlying forms. The outlines of the wrinkled, crumb-

ly land in Granchi's landscapes are writings or signs of time as he himself notices in a fragment of his Note books. It is precisely the action of time noticeably transforming geology, corroding surfaces, building up or taking away, that flattens out progressively the borders between architecture and nature, between city and landscape encouraging that reinterpretation of Mannerism which could not escape his disposition for paradox and hyperbole, causing imagination and Nature to coincide through a show of artifice reached with the wisest means, even if they appear banal.

Those petrified faces, those hypertrophic beads scattered over the ground are also remains of time, mortal remains, surface deceptions; they lend themselves to various interpretations: personality masks cast aside as the walk goes ahead, personifications of sleep which slackens the vigilance of the intellect without interrupting vital germination, genial awareness of Nature, which at the end of her infinite work, reforms everything in the likeness of the most perfect of human instruments. In *The Walker with a Curved Shadow* (1988) the mountain giant that resembles the Apennine by Giambologna is moulding a head from the muddy water surrounding him. On his head he wears a crown of trees — a sign of the fusion of intellect and Nature, of the incessant work of the time which connects terminal points, the head and feet, each time beginning again. The head is the beginning and the end as the central motor. The slow spiral movement of Nature goes ahead cutting excess measures, the utmost points, too high summits. The line of the infinite is, then, a constellation of heads placed on the curve of the horizon.

The Robber of Heads, inspired by an illustration by Doré for *Don Quixote*, in his hurling himself at a gallop towards an unknown objective, dragging the macabre

booty of two heads behind him (they are the only fragments of colour in a black and white landscape) is perhaps the most emphatic head and tails of the race of time, which generates images.

As a centre of the enigma the head reappears in the *Uncertainty of Being* (1980), which recalls the text *Theory of Uncertainty on the indirect movement of lights and shadows*, projected onto immobile objects and finds. It repropose a sinusoidal curve around the motif of a single face, taken up again in the concentric spiral of the Satellites.

In the focus of his vision which is the landscape, not only does the artist attempt to recover the whole potentiality of the mind, but also wishes to recreate the oscillatory mechanism of real thought, accepting as in the adventure of a journey, chance situations, accidents and improvisations; a journey into Art which is the daughter of Art, and for this reason only suggest illusions, ghosts, flashes of light and as such simulates feelings and actions, dictated by a special taste for dressing up, trash, falsification and contamination, rhetorical tricks or perhaps, the greatest pretence, one's own shadow, an existence that is one's own dream, lived with the pathos of an operetta, but with rigorous, technical scansion-instrumentations, with a watchful methodology along the undulating line of Time.

The captious utterance *The Form of an Idea with the cycle Variations of a Stout Thinker sums up Granchi's working "d'après le motif"*, using models from the Academy and working on them following the musical law of the variation on a theme. Each image blends into the other as a variant thought out, transfigured and made to fly, in such a way that, starting from a form the idea in transparence is reached. The Form is the variant, frequency modulation, the vibration of the Idea, which remains impartially invisible and "absent". As to Fights,

the confrontation between two polarities, between warm and cold colours, *Geometry and Arcadia* institutes the best dynamics of a thought that is still the predominant experience of Granchi, so much so as to encourage, rather than weak academism, a new critical interpretation of the Academy, a coincidence between Art and Criticism, a finite product and its infinite line of development, placing him with a light and ironic spirit away from the temptations of the rearguard and regaining for him, in his painting as well, the role of the ancient experimenter, confirming with a last overlap this sentence which Bacon attributes to King Solomon: "All novelty is but oblivion".

20th July 1989

My special thanks are due to Andrea Granchi for his extensive cooperation and the information he gave me during the writing of this introduction. The following texts were consulted:

L. Sinisgalli, *Furor Mathematicus*, Ed. Della Cometa, Rome 1982.

G.P. Brunetta, *I sentieri luminosi*, in *Le lanterne magiche*, Ed. Marsilio, Venice 1988.

P.A. Rovatti, *Riflessioni sull'ombra*, in "Aut-Aut", Genuary-April 1989.

J.L. Borges, *L'Aleph*, Ed. Feltrinelli, Milan 1989.