

The title of this intermedia work by Keith Rowe is unusually long: “THE URGE TO SEE EVERYTHING LEADS TO THE FRUSTRATION OF NOT SEEING ANYTHING, OF ALWAYS BEEING DRIVEN ON TO THE NEXT THING WITHOUT ABSORBING THE LAST.” Altogether 123 characters. The unusual length suggested me an idea to try to make my speech unusually short, what of course isn’t an easy enterprise in this case. Keith stole his title from Adrian Searle’s review of the “Masters of Chaos” exhibition that was on display at the Musée du Quai Branly, Paris in summer 2012. Searle’s text continues: “It is a flight that becomes ever more urgent, ever more futile. If it is an encounter with anything, it is with competing urges: the voice on the shoulder jockeying me on, and a desire for it all to stop. It is an encounter with the chaos of the world.”

And so, I offer you 2 versions of my reflection – short one, captured in 117 characters, and longer one, titled “WiP = work in progress, words in passage”.

Version 1:

THE ATTEMPTS TO CATCH ANY SOUNDS IN PASSAGE ARE HOPELESS AND TO FORCE THESE WALLS TO REVEAL WHAT THEY WITTNESSED TO COULD BE QUITE DANGEROUS.

Version 2:

Having used Searle’s profound thought as a text ready-made, as a conceptual tool, Keith Rowe invited us to the phenomenological flow that connects non-recurring PAST with uncatchable FUTURE. Adherent of the philosophy of ephemerality and processuality invited us to the passage. So, welcome in the passage. We gaze and listen here. We see guitar but not hear guitar. What is wrong with our perception? Nothing, just language on our shoulders jockeying us to understand what’s going on here in the passage. We read the artist’s wise statements and try to find meaningful connections between them and the masters of painting whose names we see written at his drawings – Fra Angelico, Duccio, Fra Filippo Lippi, Evan Uglow, and others. Does it mean that the PAST overtook us for a while and gave us a chance finally to chain its irreversible events in right order and context? And what about the FUTURE? Will it slow down, wait for us, or even give us headstart to foresee it? For sure not. No need for other repetitions. Enjoy the transient PRESENCE and listen to the secrets of the mute walls. But never trust the medium and mediator! The revealed truths are only interpretations manipulated by language (inner voice). Inner voice is confused in the world of simulacra and repetitions. Don’t trust him anymore!

I was honoured when Keith confessed that he was conceiving his installation for Tonspur with my “Hermes’ Ear” ongoing project in mind. “Hermes passed by,” the Ancient Greeks used to say in a moment when a live conversation was suddenly interrupted with a penetrative, ear-attracting silence. As if the master of magic words was responsible also for a meaningful dumbness. So, let me talk about Hermes. Mostly he is known as the inventor of musical instruments – lyre (*phorminx*) and flute (*syrinx*), but very soon he exchanged them for the “more useful” things – cattle, magic wand and the art of divination by mantic dice. That’s why not him but his older brother Apollo became the official God of music. Thanks to the

twelfth Olympian deity, in Europe the history of music started with a big trick. Another reason to throw down its hegemony!

But Hermes is supposed to be also the inventor of language and the first known intermediary (in the Deleuzian meaning of the word). He provided the textual metabolism between the profane and sacral sphere, between night and day, between the hidden (*crypto-*) and revealed (*epi-*), between presented and represented, between consciousness and subconsciousness. The capricious temperament of the God of fertility, tricky messenger of the Olympian Gods, guide of the souls on the way to Tartarus and the humans through mundane troubles, patron of the shepherds, wanderers, thieves and night vagabonds, used to cause big problems for his authoritarian bosses on Olympus. The contradictory syncretism of the Hellenic view of the world really could not have a more appropriate representative.

Hermes therefore seems to be the perfect embodiment of the thesis *anything goes*, having fulfilled it consistently in the more conservative conditions compared to the liberalism of our postmodern situation. Many doctrines usurped Hermes in the course of history; he underwent many reincarnations and more or less lucky reinterpretations. Many phenomena derive their names from Hermes; the adherents of traditional hermetic discipline and the still prospering hermeneutic tradition avow to him, as well as the confessors of magic, the esoteric and mysticism. Alternatively, Hermes can be seen as an ancestor of the methods of deconstruction. His permanent shifting between the discursive and non-discursive media, between utterance and writing as well as between image and sound, deconstructs the possibility of pure medium and pure text. His non-metaphorical presence in the text emphasizes the visual, acoustic and haptic traces and in so doing, subverts the illusions about the purity of any medium. Actually, all media are mixed and all arts composite because they combine various codes, conventions, channels and ways of perception and interpretation. *Techné hermeneutiké* gains from this eternal syncretism.

Hermes was simply the Other and he was predetermined to this otherness by his trickster identity. He represented the alternative to any convention and, as a doorkeeper (*Pylaios*), he consistently heeded that no alternative should resort to convention. Is it therefore strange that the Hermesian metaphors are again resuscitated in the era when the discourse of the humanities increasingly glances surreptitiously towards the non-discursive languages and, on the contrary, the arts seem to become discursive? Not so, because the serious things cannot be further presented in a serious manner and the omnipotent plurality can be articulated only at the cost of ‘merciful’ tricks. This strategy was sanctified by Hermes, as well. No doubt, that Keith Rowe belongs to the Hermes club. For him “to be in between” is a permanent status.

P.S.: Btw, the names of Renaissance painters are mentioned here because of their visual and architectural treatment of arc (in reference to this passage) and Evan Uglow because he was probably the slowest painter in the known history of painting.

Jozef Cseres, Wien, 25. 11. 2018