

recensioni

Tiziana Andina, *Il problema della percezione nella filosofia di Nietzsche*. Milano, Albo Versorio, 2005. 410 pp.

A book that divides its sections like Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophico* demands careful reading. Furthermore, the book by Tiziana Andina entitled *The Problem of Perception in Nietzsche Philosophy* is prefaced by Maurizio Ferraris, who is the Director of a series of studies of The Laboratory for Ontology in Turin.

Approaching Andina's book, one realizes that it is a remarkable work, an important contribution to Nietzsche studies; this is because her scientific and philosophical knowledge leads the readers to ask previously unthought questions. One such question is whether Nietzsche is a systematic thinker or, instead, a methodic follower of Kant's architectonic. Nietzsche was a systematic thinker after all, perhaps also methodic within the limits of his philosophical sources.

Andina discusses in detail Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche, then Walter Kaufmann's and, briefly, Arthur Danto's. Particularly useful are the historical excursions that put in evidence Nietzsche's sources and intellectual interests. The gradualism with which Andina puts forth her interpretative and genealogical approach explains to what extent Nietzsche is and is not a Kantian, since he rejects as a false problem the question of the thing in itself (and the related idea of the noumenon). Andina does take a stand on

what is philosophically important by elucidating Kant's epistemology, and demonstrating that Nietzsche was an attentive reader of the neo-kantians of his time.

Andina interposes information concerning Nietzsche's life and German history, so that the readers can follow the pros and cons that eventually made Nietzsche change his theoretical stand. The author approaches Nietzsche's sources in each chapter following the problematic and the thematic of his philosophical life. Among the works he assimilated, particularly important are those by F.A. Lange, H. von Helmholtz, A.G. Baumgarten and A. Špir.

The first chapter of the book explores Nietzsche's own works and also why he left his teaching post in Basel, and from being a promising philologist he became what he was (Pindar's *dixit*). The unpublished sources that provoked fierce debates after Nietzsche's death are explored with meticulous precision by the author, who selects the most relevant ideas to introduce Nietzsche's theory on perception. The thread is relatively simple to follow: Nietzsche's theory of the will, influenced by Schopenhauer but not only by him, is explained with clarity. In addition, the question whether Nietzsche did not go beyond the aesthetic worldview is elucidated via Baumgarten's less well-known works and not only his work on aesthetics.

In the second chapter the reader finds an interesting genealogical tree of knowledge, derived from Leibniz, whereby knowledge is divided into clear and obscure ideas, then into confused and distinct ideas, furthermore

into adequate and inadequate ideas, and finally into symbolic and intuitive knowledge (p. 87). The diagram is useful to distinguish the different branches of knowledge: *Art per se* gives us a non distinct knowledge, whereas to arrive at scientific knowledge, namely, logic and epistemology, one needs to be cognizant of symbolic ideas. Clear as it is that Nietzsche was not influenced by idealist philosophy nor by spiritualism, his philosophical positions were the results of a scientific knowledge of biology. To this end, the study of physiology, mediated by the works of philosophers, becomes essential. Also essential is to clarify whether (human) knowledge is limited by experience, and if it is, why and to what extent. Andina conclusively writes that things and facts are the basis of any epistemology filtered by the sense organs of human beings (p. 93).

Andina's strong thesis is that Nietzsche is a metaphysician to the extent that he is also an ontologist, but he is also an empiricist *sui generis*. Once it has been established that the idea of the noumenon has no place in philosophy, it follows that the world of phenomena is the world of experiential truths. To this end, it is important to set aside the false problems raised by a metaphysical conception of the thing in itself. Only after a drastic analysis, Nietzsche establishes the priority of an empirical and biological hermeneutics, making perception a central theme of his philosophy. Andina's thesis gains its relevance on this point: What needs to be answered is whether Nietzsche's thought is a form of pragmatism, as it has become virtually customary nowadays in the Anglo-Saxon world,

or rather a relativist, a sensualist, and a skeptic not about reality but about what reality really is.

Once these points have been established, a hierarchy can be written down illustrating Nietzsche's epistemology and consequent aesthetics in Baumgarten's sense, which considers aesthetics in terms of truth and knowledge (p. 127).

Schematically: Nietzsche passes from philology to philosophy, from his ideas on representation and perception, to language, as it is demonstrated by his works, first *On Truth and Lie in the Extramoral sense*, *Untimely Meditations*, and subsequent unpublished notes. At first, we encounter an external object which is worked through human sensibility, then a nervous stimulus makes us rely on human understanding, afterward a symbol is formed through language. Human beings have knowledge only because there is a reality, which becomes symbolic through the mediations of metaphorical language; but knowledge cannot go beyond what is given experientially, which means that there is no metalanguage, nor explanation of "why" there are objects and a world in general. Furthermore, Andina makes an important point when she writes that Nietzsche considers consciousness as an *accidens* of representation. This idea, drawn from Leibniz, leads to the conclusion that, if for Nietzsche perception is necessary, apperception is not. One can then infer that consciousness happened by chance during evolutionary times (pp. 121-127).

In her account of Maudeleine Clark's interpretation of Nietzsche (pp. 128-130), Andina criticizes Clark's implicit acceptance of Kaufman on a

few points; granted that the *Will to power* published in the United States is not a reliable source, in defense of Kaufmann I venture to say that it is not mistaken to consider Nietzsche's philosophy as being *also* a critique of culture. This perspective cannot be denied to Nietzsche's thought, but even so his philosophical importance should remain intact.

After having established that the reality of the world cannot be ascertained, what remains to be defined is the subject. The itinerary drawn by Andina is meant to evaluate Nietzsche's theoretical coherence, perception and ontology. These steps from perception to ontology go beyond the negativist, "critical Nietzsche" to arrive at his positive philosophy discussed in the final chapter.

But before entering in that maze, it is important to indicate that what makes Nietzsche a philosopher is his belief in the instinct (or impulse) for truth; for him ontology as a science is possible but non certain, whereas semantically and beyond representation the world is mute; which is a way of saying that language, being metaphorical, is also in flux, not too differently from our human ontological knowledge. Representation stabilizes meanings, which are subsequently "translated" into language.

«We [humans] live not only knowing more as compared to mosquitoes, but also and for Nietzsche especially, knowing different things. Therefore, if our understanding and sensibility allow us to understand *a* reality, nothing assures us of the fact that such a reality is the true one. Nietzsche does not

deny that reality exists [...] instead he denies that [...] it can be known, and this not because of unwillingness or inability on the part of the individual (man or mosquito), but because of a precise ontological determination» (my emphasis, p. 126).

The third chapter, which is the longest and the most demanding to disentangle, is appropriately titled «Hypothesis for a System». It explores with well-argued logic the theories that guide Nietzsche's ontology, materialism, and the idea of the eternal recurrence. It begins with an analysis of atomism and Darwinism, it continues with the discussion of the laws of thermodynamics to show that Nietzsche is more inclined to develop the concept of force than ready to accept a straightforward materialism without qualifications. To this end, Andina quotes the most important names of physics from Newton to Louis-Auguste Blanqui, thus confirming her impressive knowledge of the history of science.

On the biological front, Andina discusses Lamarck's, Darwin's, and Buffon's theories – the most important biologists of that century; but whether Nietzsche embraced biologism remains to be seen, in point of fact, to label him with any given 'ism' raises more questions than provides answers. Then, Andina's book itinerary tackles the question whether Nietzsche embraced a teleological vitalism or mechanism; in either case conflicts are for Nietzsche at the core of human life, since the ideas of force and of the will are essential parts of his philosophy. Moreover, Nietzsche is not a monist, he is a philo-

sophical constructivist who thinks that not everything that exists can be known and not everything that we think is true can be ascertained as being true.

After having discussed Descartes, Gassendi, Locke, and Newton's theory of light and perception, Andina rightly notices that for Nietzsche representations are physical forces that coincide with the will; however, calling matter "will" raises the thorny problem of anthropomorphism. Nietzsche believes in an immaterial world where perceptions are all in relation among themselves. (p. 178). In Nietzsche's perspective, there are different levels of reality, and perception is always indirect. In the end, he accepts Helmholtz's idea of a vital force that makes Nietzsche a vitalist after all.

Andina's purpose in discussing cosmology and the principles of thermodynamics is to arrive at Nietzsche's idea of the eternal return, which for her is a plausible, metaphysical idea given these scientific premises. If nothing is created, nothing can be destroyed and the universe can well be the result of cyclical movements. Within the limit of a review it is not possible to go into all the details, as Andina does, of the cosmological theories and hypotheses that span more than one century. Whether the universe was created by a Big Bang or is eternal is still an open question, what is (paradoxically) certain is that there is no theory of mathematics or physics that is absolutely definite. The number of worlds and of universes is infinite, but energy is finite and the number of possible combinations of energy is limited, so that life recurs indefinitely; the universe, as Nietzsche

conceives it, is a closed universe where God is, at the most, an unnecessary hypothesis (pp. 251-256).

About the role of experience and of perception in particular, Andina finds similarities between Hume and Nietzsche. Psychology is a matter of behavior rather than logical necessity (pp. 199-200); for instance, empirical studies have established that humans make mistakes while perceiving ambiguous drawings. Thus, there is a hiatus between perceiving and thinking. If perception does not give us exact knowledge it is because the nature of the perceived object is far from being stable, and unstable is also human perception. To put it synthetically: Reality and perception, from the theoretical viewpoint, are problematic, but because of this, the road is open to a perspectival view of the world.

Ontologically speaking, the concepts of object and of subject have no reason to be. According to Nietzsche, humans have a selective perception, which is useful to their lives. Perceiving is clearly an activity that interprets the disconnected bundle of sensations. The subject, which is not a Cartesian substance, is aleatory, yet, the external world is secondary *vis-à-vis* the inner world of perception: To represent is to interpret, considering that the world is a projection of ours (p. 231).

The topic introduced by Andina concerning the relations subject-object and object-subject sets a limit to scientific knowledge. However, the sciences are useful as long as they are related to a subject, although there might be objects about which our perception cannot know anything. There might

be stimuli «for which we do not have an organ» (p. 290), a fact that opens the way to the hypothesis of the unconscious. But the subject also is a problematic construction, since there is no stable self or ego. Psychology as a science was born when physical stimuli and responses were quantified, when the subject became a *res*. Gone is the idea of the soul, what remains is the study of behavior that distinguishes the brain from the mind. Since we do not have a direct knowledge of our states of mind «the concepts of consciousness is in reality [...] imaginary» (p. 302). However, the subject, far from being defunct, has a logical and grammatical function.

Andina's book looks for a connection between mind and brain and finds it in the analogies between Nietzsche's thought and the cybernetics of Alan Turing and von Neumann, who can explain how consciousness is comparable to a virtual machine. The important issue is to consider how the brain solves a given problem at the right time; it is the issue of *kairós* since the brain (the software) is involved in a chaotic labyrinth of data, in which – to answer the Nietzschean question of power – no one rules since there is no central self one can speak of (p. 305). Consciousness is something acquired, not inborn, with the consequence that for humans to adapt to the environment is a vital ability due to the plasticity of the human brain. Then, problem solving (that perhaps Nietzsche considered similar to the creative act) raises the important issue of the new that surfaces as the result of self-stimulation. Yet, the old opposition nature/culture probably

remains unresolved. As to the problem of language, it is ascertained that we speak, but we are also spoken in a constant play of passivity and activity; a similar conclusion is applicable to human thought, we cannot really be certain that «we understand what we think [...] only after having reflected upon our thoughts» (p. 311). We have systems of desires, the will, and ideas that function together, but conflicts and traumas may arise so that strategies of self-control facing our experiences via different praxis become paramount.

Overall, according to Andina, Nietzsche's epistemology demands a regulative and not a constitutive use of the idea of the thing in itself and of ontology (p. 315); it follows that both logic and thinking are useful instruments more than stable acquisitions. Evolutionarily speaking, she reminds us that what is relevant is survival, therefore Nietzsche's philosophy is a philosophy of life, but her approach seems to confuse mere survival with life.

Nietzsche's philosophy is not strictly a form of pragmatism; it is too complex to be that. In fact, «Nietzsche *always* makes reference to the world of meanings and not to things» (p. 319), this is undeniably a return to the Nietzsche of cultural objects as theorized by Ferraris. There are no a priori in his viewpoint, nor is there a metadiscourse *à la* Kant. Nietzsche remains a physiologist whose approach is aesthetic in Baumgarten's sense. That Nietzsche is also a psychologist, Andina does not doubt. His philosophy can be described as a physiological aesthetics that is more systematic than it may appear at first sight. To separate truth from falsehood

and knowledge from representation is a task Nietzsche considered essential to explore, he thought that the mind goes from perception to thought and from thought to language. To understand these points Andina discusses Frege's distinction between meaning and sense and Russell's distinction of knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description; the philosophical difficulty for Nietzsche is to find the relation between the two.

Without reducing philosophy to physicalism, Nietzsche nevertheless favors a weak version of physicalism. Reality is fragmented, hence we must caution against the danger of a nihilistic view of things and subjects (p. 336).

The understanding stabilizes human thought even though the scientific outlook tells us that «matter does not exist, that time is not linear but instead cyclical, that space is finite, that causality is never real but always and only inferred» (p. 341). Nietzsche avoids the physicalist reductionism, but he remains entangled between an impoverished scientific view and his genealogical, critical philosophy. In other words: «things become what *we* have made them become» (my emphasis, p. 342). His physiological aesthetics does not thematize explicitly the distinction between ontology and metaphysics, but he could have written «Everything belonging to the domain

of phenomena exists». To conclude, Andina describes Nietzsche's philosophy as being a revisionist metaphysics. He was a skeptic and relativist concerning science, yet – I think – his robust style indicates that at times he stopped to have doubts.

On the whole, the book by Andina is most informative, precise in the choice of the texts she has selected; a small criticism could be that there is little mention of the French philosophers and interpreters of Nietzsche in the first two chapters (for instance Condillac on the five senses), but hers is an understandable choice since she mainly selects the German authors Nietzsche knew. Another remark is that the quotations from the secondary sources tend to be unnecessarily long, although the readers can well realize that they clarify specific points.

The third chapter of Andina's book is, philosophically speaking, the most arduous but also more interesting in guiding the readers to evaluate Nietzsche's philosophy and direct them to discover the intrinsic potential of his thought. Her aim is to use Nietzsche's philosophy and ideas as a heuristic device; her recurrent use of the adjective "problematic" indicates that Nietzsche opens the way to fruitful, additional philosophical excursions.

Marcella Tarozzi Goldsmith

Michele Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini. Letteratura e cultura visuale*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano 2012

L'intreccio tra parole e immagini è una proficua chiave di lettura per leggere la storia della cultura e riallacciare i nessi tra la tradizione e la contemporaneità; più in particolare l'*ékphrasis* – la descrizione delle immagini – ha svolto un ruolo centrale nell'antichità e oggi è una questione di primaria importanza per comprendere i rapporti tra letteratura e cultura visuale: questo è il presupposto fondamentale da cui parte l'analisi che Michele Cometa conduce nel suo ultimo saggio, *La scrittura delle immagini. Letteratura e cultura visuale*. Il volume si compone di due parti: una prima nella quale l'autore propone una suggestiva teoria della descrizione tessendo i fili tra le differenti modalità storiche dell'*ékphrasis* e il dibattito contemporaneo sullo statuto dell'immagine e la teoria della letteratura; la seconda in cui applica e verifica l'efficacia del metodo proposto a partire dalla fondamentale descrizione del Laocoonte (*Vedere il dolore*) e proseguendo con l'opera pittorica di Karl Friedrich Schinkel (*Lo spirituale nell'arte*), con un classico come la *Madonna Sistina* di Raffaello (*La Madonna del pensiero*), con l'esame dei miti greci di Marie Luise Kanschnitz nella pittura vascolare (*Dipingere il mito*), con l'analisi che Michel Foucault conduce a partire da *Las Meninas* di Velázquez (*Lo sguardo sull'assente*), sino a concludere con *Antichi maestri* di Thomas Bernhard (*La visione estinta*).

La tradizione dell'*ékphrasis* è senza dubbio una delle forme più interessanti per analizzare i rapporti tra la lettera-

tura e le arti visive, non solo perché è una delle forme che storicamente ha assunto la storia dell'arte ma perché consente di comprendere al meglio i rapporti esistenti tra le due forme di rappresentazione anche nella contemporaneità. Basti pensare come sulla scia del *linguistic turn* di matrice rortyana si è teorizzato un *icon turn* e un *pictorial turn* che non solo hanno dato luogo alla svolta della cultura visuale ma, sul modello del primo, consentono di porre in discussione la combinazione tra testo e immagini; inoltre lo sviluppo stesso delle pratiche artistiche del Novecento ha posto in maniera problematica questo rapporto. L'attualizzazione della tradizione dell'*ékphrasis* inoltre consente nella proposta di Cometa di ottenere tre vantaggi: ricostruire le estetiche delle arti, i modi di vedere delle differenti epoche e le relative pratiche di ricezione; comprendere le modalità di lettura e fruizione dei testi letterari; infine l'analisi di opere d'arte perdute.

Posizioni quali quella "agonale" di W.J.T. Mitchell consentono di evidenziare un nuovo e specifico modello contemporaneo di rapporto tra letteratura e arti visive: verbale e visuale pongono un vincolo che potremmo definire di armonia tra gli opposti, di tensione necessaria a rendere la complessità del reale; l'adeguatezza di tale approccio è confermata dalle acquisizioni della cultura visuale che è stata capace di superare e ridefinire i rigidi confini disciplinari a vantaggio di una nuova prospettiva che evidenzia non solo i reciproci scambi tra verbale e visuale ma che crea anche nuovi oggetti di analisi. Primo fra tutti quello di regime scopico, nozione capace di tenere insieme l'analisi dell'immagine, i dispo-

sitivi della visione e l'imprescindibile intreccio tra sguardi e corpi (dimostrando sin dall'inizio dell'argomentazione la validità del proprio metodo, Cometa accompagna la propria descrizione con un'immagine: *Il disegnatore della donna coricata* di Dürer). La complessa fenomenologia storica della nozione di *ékphrasis* viene verificata di volta in volta nei testi letterari presentati nella seconda parte del volume e consente ancora una volta di sottolineare integrazioni e coordinamenti che i due media comportano vicendevolmente per un'esauriente fruizione: da un lato dunque vi è l'intreccio tra immagini, dispositivi e sguardi che si posano sulle immagini; dall'altro invece la letteratura intesa nella maniera ampia che il Novecento ha prospettato; un radicale ripensamento insomma sia della distinzione lessinghiana tra poesia e arti figurative, sia dell'*ut pictura poësis*.

Cometa dunque organizza una complessa tassonomia dell'*ékphrasis* capace di sottolineare la dimensione dinamica di ogni descrizione, la necessità di un'articolata integrazione tra lo sguardo del fruitore, le sue aspettative percettive, le sue esperienze culturali; ma anche le eterogenee relazioni tra descrizione e realtà, sempre in bilico tra *mimesis* e invenzione. L'obiettivo è quello di insediarsi in quell'«irriducibile scarto che s'insinua tra il dicibile e il visibile o, più esattamente, tra l'indicibile che la pittura pretende di far vedere e l'invisibile che la letteratura pretende di rappresentare» (p. 52) senza tuttavia eliminare la ricchezza che tale irriducibilità comporta. Ogni *ékphrasis* (mimetica o nozionale che sia, secondo la distinzione di Hollander) è per sua stessa natura «falsificazione» di un originale, una

sua de-essenzializzazione, de-materializzazione in una forma verbale e, per converso [...] una sorta di «veridicizzazione» di un falso, di un quadro che non è mai esistito (o che è andato perduto) e che la letteratura semplicemente rende «reale» con i suoi mezzi» (p. 53) e lascia spazio a una attiva partecipazione del fruitore. Cometa sottolinea come questi deve abbandonarsi all'immaginazione, alla fantasia ed assumere un atteggiamento simile a quello necessario per partecipare alle *performance* tipiche dell'arte contemporanea: lo spettatore ecfrastico riceve uno stimolo dall'opera e lo rilancia amplificandolo andando oltre i semplici dati, arricchendo la propria fruizione per mezzo di sinestesie, integrazioni, narrazioni e interpretazioni. Un ulteriore passo in avanti nella storia e nelle fortune dell'*ékphrasis* è per Cometa un certo romanzo novecentesco (da Theodor Fontane sino a Don DeLillo passando per i «classici» Max Aub e Georges Perec) capace di sfruttare al meglio tutte le potenzialità euristiche della descrizione delle immagini e sviluppare sino in fondo tutte le sue funzioni.

La complessa teoria delineata è dunque capace di connettere testi e immagini andando ben oltre un mero rispecchiamento degli uni nelle altre e di creare un nuovo dinamico equilibrio che eccede il semplice rapporto tra opere d'arte e testi narrativi: l'*ékphrasis* è dunque una strategia in grado di evidenziare positivamente i limiti del verbale e del visuale e di fornire di conseguenza strumenti performanti per uno sguardo non autoritario sulla realtà.

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