

Enzo Minarelli

Romanzi nelle i

the sound of the sounds

the word of the words

polypoetical work n.11 for Abraham Abulafia

"Poetry is a soul which launches a form"

Gaston Bachelard

"Repetition is transgression"

Gilles Deleuze

"Repetition does not change anything in the object that is repeated, but it does change something into the spirit which contemplates it"

David Hume

Genesis, concept and development of a performance

I hope it not true as stated by Valery, that "the creative process is more interesting than the work itself", because in the end, as a performer I should have beaten a wrong path.

I think that the performance is instead necessary to check the finished product, also important to understand, for example, the theory of Polypoetry, or all that has preceded the live event, because there must always be a plan a priori.

In my personal case, you know, nothing is left to chance, nor any practice of improvisation runs in my own execution patterns. Before getting into the prolegomena to *Romanzi nelle i*, I am obliged to make a brief introduction.

My latest sound work *Fame* (Pogus, New York, 2012) has been conceived under an extreme technologizing approach, even if it must be pointed out immediately that the linguistic feature albeit reduced to a short segment of word or phoneme, assumed positions of great relevance respect to music or noise. All the sounds in *Fame* were filtered through a software that has altered its spectrum, so the final product is very different from that one of the departure; although I have been producing with my own voice almost all the entire sound apparatus of the CD, the listener perceives my own voice as «another one», as if it did not belong to me.

After spending years absorbed by this computational obsession, I felt deeply the need to detox, to breathe the clean, righteous air of the voice in itself, a voice freed from computer-like substitutes or technological footholds, and to meet again the primitivism of vocorality, to use a term coined by me.

In search of the sacred river Sambatiòn

For over a decade I have been cultivating interest based in the cabala, apart from my trips to Israel always for poetic reasons, I have developed a particular sensitivity towards Judaism, as I do believe it is more a philosophy than a religion, with a kind of writing not too far from poetry.

The character who has captured my attention is a XIII century rabbi, Abraham Abulafia (1240-1291); he lived an adventurous life, not yet at the age of twenty years he abandons his native Zaragoza, in northern Spain, to point to Israel where he himself intends to see the sacred river Sambatiòn; a prototype of nomad, obsessed by the sacred fury of the biblical scriptures, but also at the same time, a man who lived with Satan by side for fifteen years - he himself has confessed it - before marrying finally with God.

The prototype of permutation

It is not his life, however challenging it may have been, to have attracted me, but his very original theory of permutational study applied to nouns.

If we consider permutation as a creative act, immediately it comes to mind the poetry of Brion Gysin who in 1960 does exploit it in operational terms, although it must be added that his way of permutation was the direct result of programming a computer made by an English student, Ian Sommerville, escaped from Oxford University to take refuge at the Beat Hotel in Paris, where he met Gysin. The same observation must be made for the experience called *Tape mark I*, 1961 and *Tape mark II* 1963, by Nanni Balestrini, where the hardware makes the linguistic choice, or *Tag-Surfusion* by Jacques Donguy, in 1996.

They are, in essence, the same kind of texts, acutely called by Max Bense, «stochastic», as the machine decides for the author. Abulafia, on the other hand, draws his series of permutation, studying the language from its inside, it is the prototype of permutation, the first motionless motor, and without tricks or deceptions, he sets up manually, only with the help of pen and paper, the whole universe of permutation, organizing a constant, linguistic change through a relentless swirl of terminology. Not necessarily he begins from codified words, but often he takes fragments, syllables, groups of arbitrary monemes that he himself develops and twists exponentially, applying mathematical rules. The declared aim of his exercises is the divine ecstasy, as it will be sublimely described later in the poetry of Saint John of the Cross or Saint Teresa of Avila.

Unfortunately, he will be sidelined if not excommunicated by official Kabbalists, first, because he dares to declare that these exercises can also be practised by anyone, and not only by the initiated to cabal, second, he often uses erotic similarities to explain the divine contact, which was not a novelty if one thinks

of *The Song of Solomon*, and yet, precisely because of these two reasons he will be forced into exile [he will die alone and abandoned by everybody in the tiny island of Comino near Malta], and for centuries, his theory will systematically be obscured if not boycotted.

The incommunicable and the irrational aspects into the rationality of the language

Once found his rare manuscripts located in various Italian libraries [Estense in Modena, Marciana in Venice, University in Bologna and Vaticana in Rome], I pondered a lot such an indistinct, permutational magma, apparently incomprehensible. The first remarks to guide me along this sacred material prepared by Rabbi Abulafia, come paradoxically from two cursed poets. Through Byron's *Manfred* I am convinced that "words are breath", impalpable, unattainable, they are air, flatus, and then body; as far as they cannot be caught in their abstractness, they are real and unreal at the same time, nothing and everything; then, in front of this evident incomprehensibility, in front of this insuperability due to the absence of an obvious «meaning», another damned poet, French one this time, Lautréamont, warns us that "il n'y a rien d'incompréhensible", ["there is nothing incomprehensible"].

It is true, these permutational exercises designed by Abulafia, though they may seem to us obscure, confusing, tough and bitter, without a logical connection, they are not at all incomprehensible because they place themselves directly at the source of the language, inside a rhythmic ritual of a cosmic babbling, going back until the origins of the articulatory process.

We are transported to some extent into an impressive workshop of labyrinthine activities that, with some centuries in advance, anticipate the aesthetic experiments of German Dada, including Hausmann, Schwitters or the same Hugo Ball, also announcing the Zaum language and the typical transmental instrument invented by the Russian Futurists.

Abulafia, although moving inside a religious context, but we saw that he himself contemplated the opening to laity, to non-believers, he understands that "art becomes knowledge to the extent that it transforms the incommunicable, the irrational into the rational sense of language" ¹.

He insists on an extremely calculated approach, mathematician I would say, towards an indecipherable, linguistic cluster, extracting from it great poetry because "the true poetry begins where contents cease" [Helmut Heissenbüttel].

He is evidently convinced that already the permutational action in itself becomes poetry, it is "constructive" Valéry would say, as it combines ratio and imagination, order and fantasy, "the order

¹ Guido Gugliemi, *Letteratura come sistema e come funzione*, Turin, Einaudi, 1967, p.30.

is the pleasure of reason, but the disorder is the enchantment of the imagination" [Paul Claudel].

Triadic breathing and vocal-corporal mating

Abulafia, not content to build an enormous fresco of permutative exchange, he indicates the rules to perform it, especially he reaffirms as basic, the necessity of triadic breathing, composed by an inhalation phase, by a pause of holding the breath and by a third phase of emission of the air, practically it is the same types of breath that you can experience in yoga [puraka, recaka, kumbhaka].

Not yet satisfied, Abulafia, like a true performer or a spring polypoet, decides to couple gestures to the sounds, suggesting various movements of the head, of the hands and of the body in close relation to the issue of the breath, coming to what I consider to be the true novelty of his technique, and that personally I applied during my performance of *Romanzi nelle i*. During the live event, generally, the performer keeps his concentration towards the subject of his performing, for example, John Cage, when they reminded him that perhaps he used to stretch too much his silent pauses, he replied saying that he was too busy in organizing his performance rather than to think about the risk of failure and the endurance of the public; or the same Beuys, he used to be guided by the randomness of the moment, others are concentrated in reading, somebody else performs orally all that memorized earlier, but nobody has never thought, as Abulafia did, of pairing mentally a vowel with a specific part of the body: O with the chest and the diaphragm, A with the esophagus and the ribs, E with the throat and the vocal cords, I with the larynx, the head and the nose, U with abdominal viscera, the stomach, the liver.

In narrow terms of performance, it means that while the performer is playing the vowel, his spirit is completely absorbed by that part of the body corresponding to the vowel itself.

I do confirm that it is a unique experience, I myself had never practised it, despite my forty years of public performances. While I am developing the sections entitled, *The emotion of the vowels*, *Vowel geometry* and *The open prison of vowels*, physically my voice modules the vowel, but spiritually I am wholly focused on the part of the body according to the rules indicated by the rabbi.

Performing with such a humoral approach provoked me a special inner tension I had not yet experienced, "the science of combination is a music of pure thought, in which alphabet takes on a role of a musical scale" ²

The primitive simplicity of vocorality

²Marc-Alain Ouaknin, *La lettura infinita, Introduzione alla meditazione ebraica*, Genoa, ECIG, 1992, p.189.

Romanzi nelle i is an untranslatable title because it consists of the Italian anagram of my name and surname, in perfect Abulafia style, in its non-sense it means a lot: how many novels can be written in the *i*?

Or, how many words can be said about nothing? How many meaningless statements make sense? The term «novel» can mislead, but the idea of squeezing a novel into an *i*, is fully part of those impossibilities made possible by a vocoral experimentation.

The double subtitle, *the sound of the sounds the word of the words*, is referring to the zero degree of the sound, to the first instance of the word virginity, regressing to the time when there was no language, to the primordial status where all began.

If it is possible to pursue the writing of the book of the books as Mallarmé was dreaming, moreover I believe I can point at the sound of the sounds, the word of the words, that is the primitive simplicity of vocorality, the big bang of the linguistic explosion, the first sonic imprint.

For word, it is not to be understood the comprehensible term, but the arbitrary union of nouns after an eruption, the *clinamen*, the random fall of syllabic fragments because "we have to let the letters the chance of continuing to be read [heard], despite the existence of the words"³ according to a great insight of Rabbi Yosef Razin.

The performance *Romanzi nelle i*

I structured *Romanzi nelle i* as follows:

Introduction
The key of names

I
The emotion of the vowels

II
Vowel geometry

III
The open prison of vowels

1
The hidden eden

I
The rough voice - galgal for God

³Marc-Alain Ouaknin, *La lettura infinita*, op.cit., p.103.

II
*{The sym phony galgal for Enzo }**

2
Light of Intellect

I
YHVH Tetragrammaton the unpronounceable name

II
*YHVH Tetragrammaton the unpronounceable name
according to Abraham Abulafia*

3
*Metatron the Angel
the mystical name who appears*

4
Divorce of names

5
Satan 359

I and II part

Finale

I
Wear these words at your throat

II
The great Name, heroic, terrible, square, triangle

III
The closed garden of the poet-prophet

The entire work lasts approximately 45 minutes. In some parts I follow literally the permutations as written by Abulafia, elsewhere I myself invent them, the only words clearly

intelligible are *Dio [God]*, *Satan*, *Romanzi nelle i*, and in the last section, where I work on the pair *Poet/Prophet*, developing almost a paronomasia.

All the other language combinations are an endless, infinite field of continuous permutation where one can immediately perceive that there is the triumph of vocality, of the pure sound, the vocal prevalence, the exuberance of the signifier.

All the corporal movements (head, eyes, arms, fingers), which appear during the performance, come both from the cabalistic precepts of Abulafia, and from my choice of introducing some gestures which could make more effective the performance from an acoustic point of view.

Technically, as said above, I rely on the triadic breathing.

I paused a lot about the right intonation to be set up for each segments of the various sections. On this point, Abulafia was coy. So I remembered that "different sound instruments as the tone and its modulations, the accent of intensity and the rhythmic trend, the nuances of articulation of sounds allow us to vary in any way, quantitatively and qualitatively, the emotional value of the word. A minimal, phonetic sign is enough to make and transmit the richness of a content full of ideas, emotions and aesthetics" ⁴.

It is about, basically, an effective definition that perfectly summarizes the difference between sound poetry and linear poetry, therefore I decided to employ a large range of tonalities, just to express the emotion of sound, despite the same Abulafia, anticipating with few centuries in advance the future claims about ambiguity, suggested that "the less comprehensible these permutations are, the more power they have got" ⁵.

It seems that to communicate with God is necessary a non-language, not at all a codified language, as also Pound reminded late in his life, in poetry you must «condense», in other words, you cannot communicate the depth by a language of surface.

I am convinced that the great poetry requires as hypostasis the following dogma stated by Abulafia himself, "have faith in the name and not the human being". ⁶

{* **A little, great mystery**} ⁷

⁴Roman Jakobson, *La linguistica e la scienza dell'uomo, Selezione sul suono e sul senso*, Milan, Il Saggiatore, 1978, p.23.

⁵Abraham Abulafia, *The path of the names*, edited by David Meltzer, Berkeley-London, Trigram Tree, 1976, p.20.

⁶Abraham Abulafia, *The path of the names*, op.cit.,p.34.

⁷ The video recording, such a story is referring to, was made in the early days of January 2013; you can see it in the DVD exactly as it was recorded, the coordinates of space and time make it a unique, unrepeatable event.

In the CD, however, you can listen to a new version of *Romanzi nelle i*, just recorded for this issue, two years later the first

The brace of this section means a little, great mystery, an emblematic incident happened to me during the recording of this performance before proposing it live.

After completing the patterns of performing, memorized the gestures and the tone modules, and before starting the video recording, I decided to follow at least three of the many rules Abulafia imposes for the performance of his exercises.

The first is the absolute solitude of the performer, the second, an unknown location where no one knows what I am doing, the third, the total darkness of the night.

So, strictly adhering to these provisions, I produced a first recording. When I was checking the video at home, I realized that inexplicably, it was missing a part [in this case, *The sym phony galgal for Enzo*], even though I had been training and preparing myself to carry out the whole performance which in total does not exceed, as written above, the forty five minutes. I was unable to understand why I had omitted it, perhaps an unconscious oversight, although I seemed to have done it for real.

I decided then, to re-record two days later, and during this second time, I particularly focused on this point unexpectedly forgot the first time.

So I recorded a second time, always respecting the three rules already set out about the time, the place and the fact that nobody should have to know what I was recording.

As soon as I got home, I checked impatient the video tape, amazing! Also this time that part had not been recorded even if I was sure, absolutely sure, to have performed it.

I cannot give me a rational explanation for this lack. I gave up. It seems that an invisible hand had wanted that I did not register this piece.

I do accept this signal from beyond. I know perfectly my camera I have been using for years, and never it happened a set back like that, but then why, I wonder, out of so many sections in the polypoem, the error has always dogged on this galgal?

What is *The sym phony galgal for Enzo*? The galgal is a circular, combinatorial poem that I have applied to my name, and so far nothing strange, maybe my presumption, punished by a divine hand, consisted in performing this galgal after a galgal for God?

Am I chasing a nonsensical suggestion at the edge of ravings? Did it get me too carried away with this excess of polypoetical mysticism?

However, such a disturbing fact did happen to me for real!

Cento, Italy, January-February 2013-March 2015

{ Bibliography

one, in the early days of march 2015, for this second occasion I included the section then mysteriously skipped.

- (1) Guido Gugliemi, *Letteratura come sistema e come funzione*, Turin, Einaudi, 1967, p.30.
- (2) Marc-Alain Ouaknin, *La lettura infinita, Introduzione alla meditazione ebraica*, Genoa, ECIG, 1992, p.189.
- (3) Marc-Alain Ouaknin, *La lettura infinita*, op.cit., p.103.
- (4) Roman Jakobson, *La linguistica e la scienza dell'uomo, Selezione sul suono e sul senso*, Milan, Il Saggiatore, 1978, p.23.
- (5) Abraham Abulafia, *The path of the names*, edited by David Meltzer, Berkeley-London, Trigram Tree, 1976, p.20.
- (6) Abraham Abulafia, *The path of the names*, op.cit.,p.34. }