



Il Vento degli Oggetti. Con Enzo Mari
alla ricerca di reperti del
contemporaneo nei deserti californiani

The Wind of Objects A journey with Enzo Mari
in the Californian desert in search
of the remains of the contemporary world

foto di / photos by Giovanna Silva





Nel maggio 2007 Gianluigi Ricuperati e Giovanna Silva hanno visitato i deserti della California e del Nevada in compagnia di Enzo Mari. L'idea era attraversare in auto lo spazio che separa Los Angeles e Las Vegas e fermarsi ogni tanto a raccogliere oggetti e immaginarne le storie.

In May 2007 Gianluigi Ricuperati e Giovanna Silva went on a journey around the deserts of California and Nevada with Enzo Mari. The idea was to drive across the space that separates Los Angeles and Las Vegas, and stop every so often to pick up found objects and imagine their stories.



Gianluigi Ricuperati

Ogni volta che viene messo al mondo un oggetto ci dovrebbe essere del vento – prima di quell’oggetto, dopo quell’oggetto, attorno alla storia che lo definisce, nella conduttura invisibile che lega le molecole alle idee, e perché siano entrambe necessarie e libere.

Quel che segue è una costellazione di ciò che rimane di quel viaggio, lo spettro di un’esperienza, un atto di esistenza: qualcosa che è successo, in una certa data, in un certo quadrante nella mappa del tempo, a una certa latitudine, sotto l’effetto di un certo vento, e due domande: come dimostrare l’accaduto? Come raccontarlo?

Eccolo. Ha il passo attento e insieme indifferente. Passa sul profilo di una collina artificiale, scompare dietro l’orlo che definisce una collina di rifiuti. Dietro la sua schiena sfrecciano le automobili. Stringhe autostradali. I cartelloni dei casinò. Facce di puttane e tavoli verdi erosi dal tempo. Lo guardo da lontano – energico, furente, in bilico sul crinale obliquo. Mi chiedo cosa stia facendo. Mi chiedo cosa sto facendo. Mi chiedo cosa succederebbe. Sento la difficoltà di scrivere del vero soggetto per cui siamo venuti fin qui. Il vero soggetto è la competizione degli ego e dell’età. Il vero soggetto è la competizione con la morte. È una passeggiata nel nulla – da una parte c’è quest’uomo dall’intelligenza acuminata e ossessiva –, impossibile farlo smettere di parlare, impossibile dire la propria, impossibile non restare meravigliati quando proprio al culmine della difficoltà a seguirlo esce una locuzione perfetta, un accoppiamento poco giudizioso di sostantivo e aggettivo. Sotto i nostri piedi potrebbero esserci serpenti a sonagli, mentre lui racconta di un paio di scarpe fatte di pelle di serpente, abbandonate lungo una strada in Liguria, tanti anni fa. Enzo Mari è un martello pneumatico che poco prima di spaccare la terra scopre un nervo di cose preziose – e per questo la lascia intatta.

Siamo a venti centimetri dall’inizio di un’immensa colonia militare di proprietà dell’esercito statunitense. *Non ci sono telecamere di sorveglianza*. Potrebbero esserci *satelliti*. Ho guidato per tre ore e mezza. Tolgo e metto continuamente CD nell’autoradio. Lui è fuori dal pick-up, le mani immerse un circolo di immondizia da pic-nic. Lattine, tavolini di plastica, utensili della digestione e del divertimento – una scarpa. La raccoglie, la osserva, la infila in una saccoccia. Da un momento all’altro potrebbe arrivare un *patrol* dell’esercito a invitarci ad andarcene. Gli oggetti che raccogliamo sono mutati, distrutti, cambiati. Sono oggetti menomati. Penso che dietro questa rete si estenda un territorio segreto in cui si testano armi segrete. Penso che le armi provochino menomazione. Anche il tempo e la vecchiaia provocano menomazioni. Nell’italiano arcaico *menoma* equivale a *minima*. Lo osservo muoversi in modo breve ed economico. Minima azione. Mi guardo intorno. Questo posto è fatto per mettere paura. In inglese moderno coraggioso si dice anche così: *fearless*. Mi viene in mente che un giorno ho sentito Werner Herzog dire che “ha superato lo stato in cui uno ha paura, qualsiasi paura”, e ricordo che ho pensato: *mente*.

Nella *mia* mente, la scena successiva funziona così: lo scrittore, la fotografa e il maestro degli oggetti vengono prelevati da una squadra di *stealth soldiers* biotecnologici. Nella scena effettivamente accaduta un aereo militare atterra lento e improvviso, a poche decine di metri da noi, bellissimo e oscuro, simile a un insetto generato da una riunione tra il futuro e la preistoria.

Il deserto è un posto in cui non ti chiedi cosa sta succedendo – anche se hai il sospetto che stia succedendo qualcosa: anche se hai la certezza che non sarai comunque in grado di riconoscerlo – non ti dai pena. Forse il motivo per cui siamo venuti qua con lui è per avere qualcuno capace di *domandarsi cosa sta succedendo* anche in un luogo del genere. E questo significa investigare. Toccare le superfici degli spazi per far incontrare le proprie dita con oggetti significativi: oggetti probatori del passato storico: dimostrazioni che *qualcosa è successo*. Lo inquadro nella Death Valley, il suo cappello panama bianco nel cinemascope immoto di questa cintura lunare. Parla di America, di Capitale, di umanità – di esseri umani sospesi nella bolla finanziaria in cui è sospeso l’Occidente (una bolla fragile). La penultima canzone di quel grande disco sull’America, sul Capitale e sull’umanità che è *Remain in Light* dei Talking Heads, s’intitola *Listening Wind* – parla di un ragazzo indiano che progetta un attentato contro qualche cosa. Il vento ascolta. L’europeo avanza raccogliendo sassi preistorici. *Mi lasci finire*. Sono attentati verbali, nel silenzio impossibile. *Questo paese è basato sulla violenza del denaro*. Non ci sono altri uomini per decine e decine di chilometri. *Quello che vorrei è ragionare sull’uomo*. Non è giorno da turismo. *Ragionare sull’uomo ma farlo qui*. *Costruire una scuola qui*. Non sono frasi da turismo. Sono testi espliciti, come gli *sticker* applicati sulle copertine degli album Hip-Hop per avvertire del linguaggio poco carino. Questo è silenzio con testi espliciti.

Enzo Mari non passa mai più di mezz’ora di chiacchiere senza una matita e un foglio davanti, e tutto sommato i frammenti di oggetti abbandonati nel deserto hanno qualcosa di compiuto e interminabile, accenni di ponti che possono mettere in comunicazione l’artificiale e il naturale, il tecnico e il simbolico. Poi ho scoperto che Mari gli oggetti smarriti per terra li raccoglie da tutta la vita. Ma solo dopo averglielo proposto, solo dopo avergli innescato la curiosità per una ricerca sul campo, sull’orlo della terra, magari tenendo in mano un manualetto pubblicato dall’Arizona-Sonora Desert Press, *A Field Guide to Desert Holes*, che indaga tutte le tipologie di buchi praticati dalla miriade di insospettabili animali che popolano questa parte

del mondo, buchi in cui cacciare e farsi cacciare, attraverso cui nascondersi e far perdere le tracce: forme disparatissime che talvolta segnano il passo dell’evoluzione di intere specie.

“Una volta ero nel deserto del Sinai e ho trovato una cosa simile a questa”. E prende a disegnare due elementi rettangolari con un arco che li sovrasta, appaiati e simmetrici. “L’ho raccolto, l’ho portato a casa, ho fatto delle ricerche. Ho scoperto che era un pezzo di un carro armato israeliano. Era tanti anni fa. Così un giorno, mentre ero lì che facevo altro, ho pensato di incidere delle linee su ciascuna delle due placche. Linee orizzontali. In poco tempo avevo ottenuto due minuscole Tavole della Legge”.

What follows is a constellation of the remains of that journey – the pictures taken by the photographer, the words written down by the writer. In the middle, in between the two, there is the spectre of an experience, an act of existence: something that happened, on a certain date, in a certain quadrant of the map of time, at a certain latitude, under the effect of a certain wind, and two questions: how do you demonstrate what happened? how do you tell the story?

There he is. He is walking carefully yet indifferently. He is passing along the edge of an artificial hill, disappearing behind the side of a pile of rubbish. Behind him, cars whizz by. Strips of freeway. Billboards advertising casinos. Faces of whores and green tables worn away by time. I look at him from a distance – he is energetic and furious, balancing on that sloping ridge. I wonder what he is doing. I wonder what I am doing. I wonder what is going to happen. I find it difficult to write about the real reason why we came here. The real reason is the competition between egos and ages. The real subject is the competition with death. It is a walk into nothingness – on the one hand there is this man with a keen, obsessive intelligence –, it is impossible to get him to stop talking, impossible to get a word in edgeways, impossible not to be amazed when you reach the hardest part to follow and he comes out with a perfect expression, a slightly dodgy combination of noun and adjective. Somewhere under our feet there might be rattlesnakes, and he talks about a pair of snakeskin shoes, left lying on a road in Liguria, many years ago. Enzo Mari is like a pneumatic drill, which hits a cluster of precious things just as it is about to break into the ground – and decides to leave it intact.

We are about twenty centimetres away from the beginning of a huge military colony belonging to the US Army. *There are no surveillance cameras*. There might be *satellites*. I have been driving for three and a half hours. I do nothing but put CDs into the player and take them out again. He is outside the pick-up, his hands buried in a circle of picnic trash. Cans, plastic tables, the utensils of food and fun – a shoe. He picks it up, looks at it, pockets it. An army patrol could turn up at any time and ask us to leave. The objects we are collecting have been altered, transformed, destroyed. They are objects that have been debased. I think that behind this wire fence there’s a secret territory where they test secret weapons. I think that these weapons cause debasement. Time and old age cause debasement too. The Italian word is *menomazione*, from the archaic term *menoma* meaning minimal. I watch his small, economical movements. Minimal action. I look around. This place is intended to instil fear into you. A more modern term for courageous is *fearless*. That reminds me of once hearing Werner Herzog talking about “overcoming the state in which one feels fear, any fear”, then, thinking about the mind, I visualised a scene that followed in my mind’s eye: the writer, the photographer and the object-observer are taken away by a squadron of bio-technological *stealth soldiers*.

Silence with Explicit Lyrics

Enzo Mari never spends more than half an hour chatting without pencil and paper, and after all the fragments of objects abandoned in the desert have something complete and interminable about them, hinting at bridges that can bring the artificial into contact with the natural, the technical and the symbolic. I later discovered that Mari has been collecting abandoned objects all his life. But only after suggesting he should, only after arousing in him a curiosity for field work down at ground level, perhaps holding a manual published by the Arizona-Sonora Desert Press, *A Field Guide to Desert Holes*, which investigates all the different types of holes made by the countless unexpected animals that populate this part of the world, holes to hide in or to be forced to hide in, in which to disappear without trace: a whole range of different forms that sometimes mark out the evolutionary development of entire species. “I was once in the Sinai desert and I found something similar to this.” And he starts to draw two basic rectangles with an arch over them, a pair of symmetrical shapes.

“I picked it up, took it home and eventually found out that it was part of an Israeli tank. That was many years ago. So one day, when I was there doing something else, I decided to etch lines into each of the two plates. Horizontal lines. I had soon created two tiny Tables of the Law.”

In the scene that actually did take place a military aircraft suddenly landed, slowly, a dozen or so yards away from us, a beautiful dark plane that looked like an insect generated by the coming together of future and prehistoric times.

The desert is a place where you do not wonder what is happening – even though you might suspect that something is happening, and yet are sure that you would not be in a position to recognise it anyway – you do not worry about it. Perhaps the real reason we have come here is to have someone who is capable of *wondering what is happening* even in a place like this. And this means investigating. Touching the surface of spaces to bring your fingers into contact with objects that have significance: objects that carry proof of the historical past: demonstrations that *something has happened*. I look at him in Death Valley, his white panama hat set against the motionless cinemascope of this slice of lunar landscape that fell to earth. He talks of America, of Capital, of humanity – of human beings suspended in the financial bubble in which the West is suspended (a delicate bubble). The penultimate song on that great album about America, Capital and humanity that is *Remain in Light* by Talking Heads, is entitled *Listening Wind* – it is about an Indian boy planning an attack against something. The wind listens. The European advances collecting prehistoric stones. *Let me finish*. They are verbal attacks, in the impossible silence. *This country is based on the violence of money*. There are no other men for miles and miles. *What I'd like to do is reflect on mankind*. This is no time for tourism. *Reflect on mankind but do it here*. *Build a school here*. These are not terms from tourism. They are explicit lyrics, like the parental advisory stickers on the covers of Hip-Hop albums. This is silence with explicit lyrics.

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Il viaggio è stato reso possibile grazie all'aiuto di Yoox, che nel suo sito propone anche in esclusiva una videointervista in cui Enzo Mari racconta il suo rapporto con l'aspetto e la forma degli oggetti trovati nel corso della sua avventura, portandoci ad un livello più profondo di riflessione sulla nostra società contemporanea.

This journey was made possible with the help of Yoox, whose website also offers an exclusive video interview in which Enzo Mari talks about his relationship with the appearance and form of objects he came across on his journey, taking us to a deeper level of reflection about our contemporary society.

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