



PROJECT MUSE®

Santorini—A Stream of Images

Alessandro Fabrizi

Mosaic: a journal for the interdisciplinary study of literature, Volume 44, Number 1, March 2011, pp. 105-108 (Article)

Published by Mosaic, an interdisciplinary critical journal

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mos.2011.a418762>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/418762>

Santorini— A Stream of Images

ALESSANDRO FABRIZI

“... the thought as the odour of a rose.”

—T. S. Eliot, *The Metaphysical Poets*

Scattered pictures colour memories—visual and tactile images, smells and sound-

waves, and the taste of coffee at the airport.

I’m sitting at the airport of Athens in front of a display that stubbornly and constantly delays the departure of the flight to Santorini. I wonder if I will ever get there. The smell of airports; sounds of children complaining or playing.

Corrado’s voice through my cell phone. I call him to announce that I’ll be very late. Corrado is already on the island. He says, “I had the same experience, but just know that as soon as you get here you will forget about all that waiting.”

I think time is stretching, opening a huge void.

Eventually I am in Santorini, met by David and Luitgard. My red trolley bag is the first to come out on the rolling luggage band. The pace of time has changed. Very soon I am in front of a salad and a glass of red wine at the Pension Carlos.



I, a director and sometime-actor, now in training to become a designated Linklater teacher, am here with a group of philosophers and a group of actors. In the mornings, we all meet in the room of an elementary school. Kristin leads us through experiences of breath and vibrations of voice. And words. Beckett. Shakespeare.

“Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore...”

Philosophers talk about voice.

We all like to eat calamari.

A white dog reminds me dearly of a friend.

A blonde woman constantly reads from her Kindle.

Susan sings “Creep,” accompanied by Corrado on the guitar.

Now the days in Santorini evoke a dream that I had in another place and at another time (New York, 2006). In this dream I am sitting in the audience at a lecture. The chairs are gathered in front of a desk—on the right side of a much bigger space, busy with different activities. At the desk is one of my professors at university (La Sapienza, Rome). While I am watching him and listening to him speaking, the dream opens up a question: who were the teachers from whom I learned most in my years at university? In the dream, I say, “Those whose voices I remember. Those who did not read their lectures, those who spoke (maybe from some notes) their present thoughts. Those who reached me with their voices.” I name three of them. They did not read



their lectures. They had some notes. But they thought their thoughts in front of us students, and they let those thoughts find their voices.

(In the reality of waking life: whenever I went to a class where the professor was reading his or her lecture, I could not follow a word s/he was saying. And I asked myself, why didn't he or she just give us the sheets of paper so that we could read them at home? Why should we be present with our ears, why should we elaborate and digest in the moment, when the professor was not present with his or her re-enactment of thoughts in the voice?)

Acting. Teaching. Philosophizing. Acting.

Yes, we were a mixed group of actors and philosophers. What did we learn from each other?

I, as a director and sometime-actor, in those days in Santorini witnessed the enactment of thoughts—their emotion, their movement inside and out. We all saw and heard the philosophers enact their thoughts and be moved by their streams of images.

Both actors and philosophers, when speaking in front of an audience, can experience a very special time: the present—or a conscious series of present moments. In a beautiful essay, Michal Goldman writes that one of the joys of watching a good actor on stage derives from the fact that she is able to live in a “present” that we can very seldom experience in everyday life, when we are constantly identifying ourselves with worries about the past or expectations for the future. The actor, in her creating and

recreating the impulses for a string of present moments (the play), has the chance to experience a present of which we are not conscious in our daily lives. And she can live it fully. And release it fully. When this happens, the audience can enjoy that present vicariously. Could it be the same when we are watching and listening to a lecture? It happened on Santorini.

And that was a lesson for us actors. How often do actors mentally read their scripts while acting, instead of creating and recreating the thought impulses of the script? As often, I dare say, as philosophers read their texts. What was vividly useful in Santorini is that we actors could see, in a different frame, the action of the thoughts finding the breath and the vibrations of voice for what was to be expressed. Because, yes, the philosophers started to be played by their thoughts and to be in the moment as the best actors do, letting their thoughts move their breath and their breath move them. And we actors/directors were reminded of this process, of the possibility of being played by the text as a series of present thoughts that will activate and animate the organism. As smells do, as all sorts of images can. We all experienced that it is possible to feel the thought as the odour of a rose.

We also spoke a lot about freedom. Freedom *from*, freedom *for*. Freedom for: communication, social interaction, exchange of experiences and knowledge. One of the most intense roses that I've taken with me from the Santorini experience is the idea of freeing myself in order to be useful, as the bottle is useful to the water it contains so that the water can serve its purpose—to be drunk by those who are thirsty. My freedom is the bottle that I'll find for my water. What is the freedom of the actor and the freedom of the philosopher *for*? Maybe to awaken the dormant emotions and thoughts of the community they live in ... to awaken *awareness*.

One of the professors I had named in my dream once said to me, "Everybody is talking about being free, but freedom is not being free to do whatever I feel like; freedom is being aware of what I am doing. Being there."

And there was the sea.

And the green mud with which we covered our bodies.

And Greek dances, of course.

And an ancient amphitheatre very high up on a mountain. The shadows of the clouds moved so fast over the side of the mountain that it was impossible not to create an Olympus of gods.

Rob and I shared a cab on our way to the airport, going home. He to Australia, me to Rome.

At the little shop of the Santorini airport I bought a ring that I still wear.