

THE NON-CULTURAL MAN

If I was able to leave the paper and live without working, Tomatis writes to the Mathematician who has been living in Stockholm for some years, it's because of an inheritance from an uncle of mine, my mother's only brother, a childless widower when he died, who had no alternative to leaving us his fortune, three or four houses in good parts of town and a dollar account at the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro, Tomatis writes. He had been a pharmacist and was something of an eccentric, Tomatis writes. Even before he retired it had already been some years since he paid much attention to the drugstore: the right person and a couple of female employees worked behind the counter and my Aunt Amalia, his wife, who had studied in a secretarial school, worked the cash register. He, my uncle Carlos, whose name I also inherited, stayed home reading at the back of the patio, under the trees if the weather was good, and in his study, heated by a fireplace, on winter afternoons. I know what you're thinking after reading the last sentence: that he left me not only his name and his fortune but also some eccentricities of behavior. Why not? For some houses that are in good shape and in good neighborhoods, and a dollar account, I accept the two or three problems that form part of the package. And Tomatis writes to the Mathematician: of course I'm joking, because he and my mother loved each other a great deal, he was several years older than she was and in the whole family I was the only one he dared to speak to about what he really cared about without fear of being thought a bit crazy, he writes.

Although his philosophical interests were extremely varied throughout his life, toward the end they seemed to converge on a single object or theme, which he called, with a bit of irony, Tomatis writes to the Mathematician who has been living in Stockholm for some years, "an inner exploration in search of the non-cultural man." Sometimes he compared his activity to that of an archeologist or a geologist, and on more than one occasion I heard him say, accompanying his statement with a little contented laugh, that he was thinking about publishing a little work the title of which would be, *Manual of Inner Spelunking*. He said that the lower levels were the hardest to explore, that men could be compared with the planet on which they lived, and that as individuals they were constituted, like the earth itself, of four different levels—crust, stratum, core and seed—and that these two last, the same as occurs with the rubble on which we live (the expression is that of my uncle

Carlos), are only known to us through certain indirect effects, thanks to an auxiliary science like seismology, for example. And he added that that was just a metaphor, although the vocabulary was equally metaphorical as regards the earth, Tomatis writes to the Mathematician.

His treatise on inner spelunking was never written, Tomatis writes, but he often put its principles in practice. He was a jovial man, he writes. He walked along swaying a bit from side to side, as if always walking on tiptoe, giving him an air of being on the verge of surprising someone by appearing suddenly or playing some innocent jest. But it was a form of walking that, observed from the outside, made him seem to an outsider as if he were constantly in a state of contagious well-being, although Aunt Amalia sometimes suggested that his mild but constant euphoria could be attributed to irresponsibility. Like Gato, he liked white wine, and even in the middle of the winter he drank it very cold. His most noticeable defect—apart from not caring in the slightest about the things of this world—was that he had theories about everything, something that is fairly frequent in those who are prone to philosophy, but made worse in his case by the scientific studies he had undertaken when studying pharmacy. But he did not venture opinions or give advice, rendering this defect more bearable and less irritating: all he did, as if he were talking to himself, was to offer explanations for every event and solutions for every problem, not caring in the slightest about what his interlocutor might think, instead skipping blithely on to some other topic. But if by chance he noted that the people around him had some worry or concern, he was solicitous and generous with them.

With regard to his lucky “non-cultural man” I can say without much exaggeration that since I was the listener he had closest at hand I had to drink that cup to its dregs: in his last years it was almost his only topic of conversation. Sometimes he explained that what he was seeking when he descended into the depths of himself was not some sort of Cro-Magnon man or older hominid, whether African or Javanese, but something older still, something at the very boundary between life and the inert matter that lurks at the bottom of our selves, the surge of substance prior to form in which mere chemical reactions among the elements combined at random somehow seek out the option “life,” “animal,” “man,” “I” and so forth, the uncertain boundary where for an incalculable moment there is still no repetition of a model not yet formed, something that no doubt has left traces in each of us. One had, according to him, to pass through dangerous inner chambers, from conscious-

ness to life and from life to matter, in an interminable, difficult descent, one in which the slightest slip could send us into the darkest and deepest of abysses.

When the weather was good, Tomatis writes to the Mathematician, he would sit at the back of the patio, in the shade, in a white wooden deck chair, the back reclining slightly, so that his torso and head formed an obtuse angle with his legs extended forward; then, resting his head on the red and black striped canvas back of the chair, he would cover the palm of one hand, which rested on his lap, with the back of the other one, and after a few seconds of slow movement he would find the perfect position and lie there completely still. He seemed not even to breathe. The total stillness could last ten or fifteen minutes, and those who didn't know him would think that he was sleeping or that all of his biological functions were interrupted, but then he would suddenly open his eyes, blinking a little, turning his vague, distant gaze to everything around him, as if not seeing; then he would sit up, remaining still once more, Tomatis writes to the Mathematician, who had to go to Stockholm some years ago when the military killed his wife and he was being pursued with the same end in mind during the dictatorship, although he did not share his wife's political beliefs, but out of loyalty had only argued with her about them in private. It was Tomatis himself who, a bit fewer than thirty years before, had given him the nickname the Mathematician now used by almost everyone about him, because metaphysics and logic were not fields to which he was indifferent, although he actually studied chemical engineering.

He would sit for hours in that position, Tomatis writes to him. Sometimes watching him I imagined that, forgotten in his mortal coil, he must have been giving a very tiny double of himself a tour of his inner chambers, in quest of his missing link, the fortunate "non-cultural man." I felt as if I were watching him cross dark corridors, damp rocky ravines sloping down, deeper and deeper, to a bottom that was always out of reach, always the same distance away, no matter how far he went in hours and hours of exploration, he writes. The external world must have ceased to exist when he reached a certain depth, the "self" must have been a forgotten illusion, and consciousness itself an incoherent blurry dream, feelings, emotions and drives, imperceptible senseless convulsions, while the instincts were similar to landslides, always due to the same causes, there on a distant height, near the surface, Tomatis writes. And he carried through with this dangerous descent for the sole purpose of finally reaching the formless zone, virgin of all human contact, which nevertheless, according to my uncle, did not merely subsist in humanity, and which

would always subsist as long as there were people, but that is the very foundation, the pre-human flux that pushes man to light, exposing him for a moment to it, until finally, with the same unpredictable and blank energy, it throws him into the very heart of darkness.

And Tomatis writes to the Mathematician: on autumn and spring afternoons, and those in summertime when it wasn't too hot, he would stay there, sitting at the back of the patio, until it got dark. Some relatives affirmed that he was crazy, but those who knew him better and respected him would shrug their shoulders and say that for my Uncle Carlos the expression "search for the non-cultural man" was a euphemism for "taking a nap." With someone like him who is fond of enigmas, problems and charades, it is difficult to know for sure, Tomatis writes. But the times when I was able to observe him, his utter stillness and the aloofness of his look when he opened his eyes were a bit scary, he writes. And when he got up as soon as the first evening breeze stirred, looking with a satisfied expression to see if the bottle of white wine that he had put in the icebox before sitting down in the deck chair was sufficiently chilled, he seemed to come from farther off than merely the back of the patio, Tomatis writes to the Mathematician. From very much farther off, he writes.

Translated by Daniel Balderston