

"JOSE PEDRO CROFT: State proof"

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While watching Jose Pedro Croft sand the copper plate, erasing grooves previously traversed, I got jumped by a single question: of all those margins that were momentarily abandoned, or ignored by the artist; of all the framework which, on the other hand, is integrated in a new wave of attacks, only defined by the action of the ink on paper and the newly inflicted wounds on the copper: what part of the movements of the artist is due to necessity, what part is due to the arbitrariness and the whim, while both being the result of a combination between instinct and methodic elaboration? This question does not impose to me since it can result in a greater or lesser value of the work of art, and most definitely, on a supposed authenticity due to the effort and the lyricism, but because, of what we can manage to understand from all of this, would derive into us, the audience, a more precise approximation of what George Steiner called the "grammars of creation". It is about trying to understand the extent to which the margins of the plate and the grooves that outline it are a metaphor of our own freedom boundaries. This is if that freedom is only a result of a polished execution of the artist, and thus of the artist's good knowledge of his art's grammar, or rather, if he is the guide that, in the movement of his mind, collects the distant echoes of a creation, of the only creation from which the sceneries of the artificial separate us.

I have before my eyes a series of what the engravers call "state proof": the multiple trials to which the artist submits the copper plate, the multiple trials to which the press roll submits the paint-soaked paper. And once again a question pops up: what are the multiplicities of his actions due to? 'What is the reason for the dissatisfaction of the artist, which, time and time again, like in the ancient texts, says to himself: "this isn't it, this isn't it" and, in the long hours of the workshop, starts all over again. What is the relation between the two questions: margin and creative freedom, on one hand, and "state proof" on the other? Can there be a work of art that avoids the "state proof"? What is it a proof of? Of something supposed to be definitive? Perhaps a pretension, the search for a conclusion or perfection of the action about the things in this world? I do not think that the artist, just like the philosopher and the poet, can aspire to anything more than the trial: the state proof. All of his life is a patient reading of creation's gestures, from the movement of the skies, the movements of nature and the states in which it drops and abandons its beings; a watchful eye on the mysterious animals that, with their restless come-and-go, leave us even closer to the field of interpretation; and the life of the artist is also an elaborate combination of gestures, glances and the states of joy, compassion, pain and indifference that us, humans, cast on a daily basis. Yes, a state proof that trials the state of creation, that takes hold of life as a sole movement, as a faithful dynamic of future, in which what happens differs not from the same happening. This absence of difference between what is the work of art and what makes it present constitutes one of the greatest challenges of all interpretation, since it can only move alongside the changes and amendments on the tissue of a text or on the unit of the work of art, as fragmented and incomplete it might be. The free flow of the happening is what Croft's state proof intends to grasp. However, the state proof is nothing more than the metaphor that helps us to try, if not a comprehension, at least the shape of the thoughts to which the work of art invites us. And it happens that the state proof puts to the proof the intelligence of who observes them on their complex serializations. The state proof is not designed to unveil emotions, feelings; it can, certainly, put us in a state of perplexity, yet its function may rather seem to be of convincing us that the planes of visible reality can be dangerous woods for those who traverse them without fear nor trembling. Croft's work penetrates the trials of creation because it lingers on the state proof permanently. A state proof, not in terms of the image that can in a certain moment be said definitive, but instead, in terms of the limits of our versatility to imagine the travels of the "dry-point" or of the "mezzotint". Inside our mind, where the way logic is organized exerts a

great dominion, these travels follow paths marked by the possibilities of reality. However, the volumes that are created by Croft's proofs put reality's own state to the proof by taking forward a possibility further beyond of what is apparently real. If the sight follows the growing of the voids on the pentagonal figures, an opening with no possible relation to the previous steps is produced and, still, our perception is installed on a double ground. Reality as reality and the possible as an improvement of reality. Probably, on the language of the plastic arts only the sculpture has taken similar creative proofs with such boldness. Croft's engravings are sculptor's engravings: in them, the spaces open and close each time the breathing follows the systoles and diastoles of our involving heart rate.

We begin to wonder about the reason to that entire proof deployment, about dedicating life following the abstract spaces, the separated spaces, essentials to creation, gesture by gesture. True art gives image to abstraction, for it does not surrender before the disillusion of the anthropomorphic, it does not rupture the boundaries of the human being for the sole pleasure of destruction: it is not an antihumanistic art. It is an art that does not want to idolatrize the human nor searches for the courtliness of the gesture, but instead forces a gaze filled with hope of a perception of the forthcoming. In this sense, true art has prophetic vocation, it could not be otherwise, since it searches in the workshop of disperse shapes for the confidence that will eventually unite them in a possibility that extends to their realization.

However, if art has the ability of intuiting the forthcoming, in what measure is still appropriate to talk about freedom and the boundaries of what is possible? I mean that, if the forthcoming, perceived as an almost definitive result of a proof fresh out of the press, is cloistered in a certain moment of all the artistic process, then the world shows itself before our eyes like a book in which everything is written in a definitive way. It seems to me that Croft's work with its state proofs is a very unique testimony about renouncing the definitive creation. Even further, it seems that, in its continuous state of proof, it hopefully resides in a creation in constant creation, keeping the work going and going: shaping curves never before seen, wrinkling the textures up as a protest for reasons not clear nor distinct, cutting into copper like the miner that gets lower and lower beneath the earth, as in making continuous the sacred conversation of the creating word in its always necessary update.

Once again I turn my eyes to the state proofs on the floor. At a distance, sorted in a precise order in which the artist placed them, in front of me, they too constitute a unit. The unit of something with meaning. And here hope breaks through. After several visits to the workshop, I doubt even less that his art is gloomy. Could not have been any other way. All true art is truthful because it assumes its own state of fall, to, only after that, elevate itself to glory. The meaning is acquired before the way the unit is organized: there we have the grammar. Everything has a time and a space, a morphology and a syntax, but the language that is described in the referred grammar, although it is entirely made of proof, can only be captured, can only be understood if the unit sounds in a harmonic tone. So, every little death that every state proof draws ex negativo, makes us imagine a corner out of those impossible coffins. Croft's geometries are impossible from an irreversible conception of the opening space. The artist refuses to refer to a proof as closed if the state of things does not point to new openings. None of its drawings weighs like a corpse over the land. Yes, they are coffins, but they all point to the flight, to the transparency they aspire to, they all have vocation for the heights. Even where they are most dark, it is possible to sense the whites, and even see them, open by the drypoint.

An example of the absence of a difference between the event and the happening, which I have addressed before, is on the piece "Untitled, 2013" (it immediately speaks to us about its gloomy looks, as we see, standing on a tripod, a sarcophagus like coffin. We tend to think it is a plastic conclusion, on a tridimensional space, of those series of engravings that, in its sole imperceptible variation, remind us of its past as state proof. What truly singular difference can we find between the gloomy silhouetted engravings and the coffin that is raised over the metal stand? On one hand, the difference is marked by the shapes and by its apparent limited expression on the planes of the copper plate, and in the open space where the coffin seems to have been expelled by the engraving, on the other. The differences may only be formal. However, there is something unsaid in all that. Or rather, there is

something unsaid in what was said. Quoting Wittgenstein, there is something not expressed on what was expressed. Not that there is not a difference between the expressed and the inexpressible, but both moments share a single language space. Something similar happens between engraving and sculpture. In the first we see the end, the result, the conclusion of many hours and gestures of incision on metal. In all that there is a continuous struggle to give expression to what escapes the form, even when it can be solely expressed by it. On the interval between the gesture coming from the will to assess and the gesture that nulls and erases, that denies, we get immediately and miraculously offered a spatial product, in our case the coffin, the sarcophagus. The sculpture is unhinged from the sheet and the paper, and flew until it landed on its stand. It is as if, while the artist thought himself hustled by the hard task of writing and scraping against the plate, a thought of his had flown, had escaped from his mind to come and land before our surprised gaze. The work on the engraving is similar to a negative lane: there is asceticism, denial, repetition of the denying will. The sculpture is not an affirmative lane independent from the negative, but it comes from it. The affirmation alleged by the volume is the result of many previous denials in the mind, in the sheet, in the paper. The white coffin is the unexpected, the inexpressible silence on paper, made now a torn presence of that silence, of that nothing and its obscurity. However it would be an error to think that, in its essential reality, it is different from the one expressed on the engraving. Now, the sculpture, the object in front of us, is not pure affirmation, since it also contains those silences and denials. Let us say that the engraving shows the surface of the silence behind it, while the sculpture shows that silence and that absence behind the engraved planes. It is as if they had freed themselves from the prison of the silent language, as if they had come from a violated abyss. The artist used to say to me that the lid of the coffin is like a sail, like the sail of a boat, and yes, it is true: because the coffin in the engraving that was only death and darkness before, rose from its marasmus and now sails, open, in front of us.

The sculpture though, stands on a four-legged support of which one leg is missing. But it holds. There is an extraordinary lyricism in this piece: it is a canticle to grace before gravity. Not only the lids that held darkness and misery were opened and thrown to the air, but also now the sculpture grants us the possibility to transgress the visible as only visible. There is no illusion or misleading effect in this piece, since it does not intend to entertain with balancing games. It speaks to us from the most deep, since it comes from the night, of those dangerous woods, and speaks to us about what is open, of the skies in which resides that "wind of the absolute in the sails of the concept" of Walter Benjamin. And just like in the thinker, in these skies also blows a wind that speaks to us of a past of ruin and ingenuously frees us from the fear of the future, yet it is a wind that speaks to us about the open spaces, a wind that filtered like a summer current between the blazed and stifled dwellings of our lives.

The sculpture's flight, its lightness, in relation with the density and thickness of the engravings, also shows what I would like to call the "reversibility of the immediate". Meaning, if the sculpture, as a moment of freedom, of freeing, emerges from the middle of the plate's sea of ink, and supposes the affirmative moment in relation to the negative of the engraving, in a certain way the sculpture can be seen as the other side, the occult side of the plate, now made visible. It is of course its reverse, and such movement can only be immediate, since it has already been said that there is no distance between the event and the very act of happening, or between the visible and the invisible, the expressible and the inexpressible. Immediate, consequently, since nothing intervenes between both moments, between both movements, between the engraving needle on the plate and the raising of the sculpture in the space. For that, there is not the possibility of correction by the artist in such action. Such is because the emergence of the sculpture is fruit of a previous freedom which is subsequent to the will of the artist. However, it is him that makes it possible, it is him, though not aware of it, who extracts from the density of the engraving, as if it was a residue, the surprising novelty of the raising. For that, there is no elevation before the destruction of the previous state, there is no creation before sacrifice, as we know already by the old myths of creation, there is no new life that does not come from the consumed life.

Between the engravings and the sculptures, we notice the clipped papers on the walls. One would say that in its plot of voids is inscribed the secret of that very reversibility to which Croft submits the reality of spaces. They are the expression of the dangerous woods and, at the same time, the guides of the voids willing to rise from its prostration and be cast outside the paper. The chance of the plot revealing us in a single plane the danger and the salvation convinces us that nothing happens separately. However, the union of the movements, the union of the gestures, the silences and the words, all this is subject to the pressure from a course of discipline, which active lane constitutes a delivery act, an ethical moment. So, taking the labyrinths of darkness that every mind shelters to the open spaces, and in which the majority of times it entangles, assumes a way out, the opening of a window to bring the phantoms of the night to the light of noon. In this way the artist uncovers himself, before the baffled looks of others, but little is his nudity worth if we cannot see the voids by the lines, the empty by the full.

Let us return once more to that reversal moment in which the emergence of a sculpture consists. When the observer does not expect a mere aesthetic pleasure from the work of art anymore and, in its place, perplexedly awaits an appeal from the work of art in front of him, with which a space of intersubjectivity is expected to be opened, then, and only then, the spectator may freely shape his spirit in order to understand the work's deepest structures. However, the structure is nothing by itself if it does not find the opportunity of becoming exteriorized, fulfilled in the space and, occasionally, in its diverse variations in time. The possibility of bumping into a stand that converts it into an object, be it paper, be it wood or metal, makes it expressive and communicative. The elevation of the dark and deep abyss in the artist's mind and its physical expression in an objective reality describes the reversal process of the irreversible, unspeakable and inexpressible. It should be reminded, however, that the outer object did not disconnect from that inner, silent structure, instead the former makes the latter truly silent in the moment of its expression. Thereby, at the same time, the artist recovers the fundamental motives of creation from the immense abysses of silence that inhabit the world, from the creating act and, for that, can, in a way, be considered a co-creator. With that it does not acquire a category superior to any creature that is recognized as a created being. However, it certainly found in creation the instrument of its life and meaning.

What are the necessary criteria to answer the first questions that we have put: need, whim, freedom? Because it has to have any criteria at all to keep on working on a piece, to keep on writing, talking, living. A criterion, or, the meaning of the decision that intends to confront its own artistic task, since it suffers from crisis, i.e. a separation between the dimension that walks freely and a will that wanted to subject the insane race of the mind to the leash. If the critical analysis is no good to find the necessary grammar for that so unbearable freedom, facing the work of art in a season that no longer appeals to our senses is completely useless. Hans Belting says that we no longer attend museums to have an aesthetical experience, but to understand something about the human being. There is certainly an anthropological motivation in the interest for the work of art and in the processes of artistic creation. However, the sculptor, the engraver, the drawer, does not aspire to more than to come across the rarest feelings, feelings of his and of those that will astonishingly contemplate his results. The human experience is always surprising, wonderful and distressful at the same time. And this ambiguity of ours to which the work of art confronts us is something that is and should remain present in all the authentic work. So, effectively it is still possible nowadays to keep talking about art authenticity. Authenticity, if we believe that certainly, art is not an autonomous discourse, but, as Rothko used to say, "it is an anecdote of the spirit". It is possible to believe that there is truly a work of art where there is will to participate and not retrenchment; where there is capacity for predication, i.e. where there is the will to transmit what has been learned to the abyss of the mind or to the peaks of vision.

It is from this confidence in the ways that delineate the authentic — not because it is something that sustains itself, but because by searching a reflection about itself it needs exteriorization—that Croft's work faces the slow processes of constitution and rising of its work. It is a continuous state proof, since it puts the continuity of the creation to the proof

and so it remains forever in creation. In Croft's work there is no point asking ourselves about figuration or abstraction, since, in it, the reversible dimension responds to the figure that shadows the irreversible or negative part of the mind. Hence the authenticity of its ambiguity: there is subjective reference and also a journey to the objective. We cannot talk anymore about the return to the new subjectivity that caused the rising of the work of art and its emergence to sculpture, since it is a return to silence that, rightly so, is over, finished in a new way, inside the artist, inside the observer and inside the invisible world, that resulted from the joining of both.

The true state proof is not a transitory proof. Certainly that the artist will find one or other copy more successful, but such does not imply that the state in which these are born is immediately impoverished by a latest and more complete work. It is called state, though being of proof, because in it nothing is proven unless the state itself. There is not a foreign object that rests or resides on the state and should travel to another state. It is the state itself that proves that there is no more state than the one that puts itself to the proof. Puts its state to the proof, yes, because there is nothing more that is more susceptible of being put to proof. If we say that nothing unusual is proven on that state, it is because what is truly proven is the state of the artist: this transient state in which the work of art emerges, such fragile and insecure state, in which the work erects itself to travel to another state, outside of its dark, dense and hollow matrix. The state proof is always one of a nocturnal state. In it all is passion, suffering and pacing of time. It is the space of welcoming, of the uterus from where the work should born, although its appearance is not unfamiliar to obscurity and to the silence from where it comes, except in relation to the tension between the obverse and the reverse of the work.

The work of art is a state proof of the true life, of the life spiritually born over and over again. It is the proof that the only transitory thing is life understood as a being. The work of art, however, offers the ontological dimension of life by placing the being on its most risky pace: the one that is unchained from the irreversible, from silence, from the opaque density of the void, to become the aircraft that is Croft's sculpture. An open coffin with a lid that has been forced open and turned into a sail. This is the quest to which the work of art points when it sacrifices the metals, the paper, the wood, the clay, the marble. In that course, which opens like the line that the artist slits on the copper, on both sides, like gravestones, like white canvases, are the testimonies born from that seemingly unending darkness. Croft's work of art has a scatological element, because the state proof means that way, but also has an inevitably apocalyptical element, since it insists in opening windows — like in its paper plots over the walls — and from them allows us to imagine the new life, allows us to gaze into the unit of all the complexity of the woods and the labyrinths of the soul. His work is not transparent — how could art have such pretension? — but it marks us the scope of transparency, the place on which we protrude to see, in a unified version, the obverse and reverse of life.

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