

THIS TEXT WAS FIRST TITLED "MIMESIS ; POSTCOLONIALITY AND ROCKY" -

I RECENTLY (NOVEMBER 2019) FOUND MYSELF IN PHILADELPHIA FOR A COUPLE OF MEETINGS AND SOME ARCHIVAL RESEARCH, IT WAS A FIRST. AT THE END OF THE DAY, I DECIDED TO HEAD TO THE PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM, ALTHOUGH CLOSED - IT WAS A MONDAY ; MUSEUMS ARE CLOSED ON MONDAYS IN PHILLY. NOT ABLE TO ENJOY THE EXTRAORDINARY COLLECTION OF WORKS BY MARCEL DUCHAMP THE MUSEUM HOLDS, I DECIDED TO CONSOLE MYSELF WITH THE FAMOUS *ROCKY STATUE*, WHICH HAD BEEN AT THE CORE OF MY DISCUSSION WITH MATHIAS PFUND FOR A WHILE NOW (THE FIRST EMAIL MENTIONING IT DATES BACK FROM 3 FEBRUARY 2019).

AT ONCE TOURISTIC ATTRACTION - PEOPLE ARE OFTEN QUEUING TO GET PHOTOGRAPHED IN FRONT OF IT, TAKING THE SAME POSE AS THE SCULPTURE - AND MONUMENT TO HOLLYWOODIAN FICTION ; IT ALSO EMBODIES COMPLEX ISSUES RELATED TO ART, VALUE AND POPULAR CULTURE. INDEED, THE STATUE, WHICH SYLVESTER STALLONE HAD ORIGINALLY COMMISSIONED TO ATHLETICS SCULPTOR A. THOMAS SCHOMBERG IN 1980, TO FEATURE IN *ROCKY III*, WAS FIRST INSTALLED AT THE TOP OF THE MUSEUM'S STEPS. IT WOULD QUICKLY RUN BACK DOWN THE STAIRS - WHICH WOULD COME TO BE KNOWN, IRONICALLY, AS THE *ROCKY STEPS* - UNDER THE MUSEUM'S STAFF PRESSURE WHICH DEEMED THE SCULPTURE "UNWORTHY" OF SUCH PROMINENT DISPLAY.

AS A RESULT OF THIS "REJECTION", THE SCULPTURE TRAVELLED ACROSS THE CITY FOR MANY YEARS BETWEEN 1980 AND 2006. UNWANTED BY THE MUSEUM SENIOR MANAGEMENT, IT CAME BACK SEVERAL TIMES AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS TO SHOOT SUBSEQUENT *ROCKY* SCENES, BUT WAS ALWAYS DOWNGRADED AFTERWARDS - FOR A MORE DETAILED NARRATIVE OF THE DEBATES AND TRAVELS SURROUNDING THE STATUE, REFER TO LAURA HOLZMAN'S "A QUESTION OF STATURE : RESTORING AND IGNORING ROCKY" (2014). TO ADOPT A CLASS PERSPECTIVE ON THE MATTER, YOU COULD SAY THAT DESPITE ROCKY "MAKING IT" IN THE FILM SERIES, HE - AND WITH HIM A WHOLE PORTION OF THE POPULATION HE REPRESENTS - WAS NEVER TRULY TRIUMPHANT : HE CANNOT STAY AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS. HE CAN RAISE HIS FISTS, BUT HE WOULD HAVE TO GO DOWN FIRST. IN PHILADELPHIA, THE *ROCKY STATUE* THUS OBTAINED A DUAL AND CONFLICTING STATUS : THAT OF AN UNWANTED ARTWORK AND ONE OF THE CITY'S MOST LOVED MONUMENT.

ON 8 SEPTEMBER 2006 (30 YEARS AFTER THE FIRST *ROCKY* MOVIE), A COMPROMISE WAS FOUND : THE STATUE WOULD BE PLACED AT THE BOTTOM OF THE STAIRS, IN THE MUSEUM'S PARK (MOST PRECISELY AT THE *EAKINS OVAL*) ; THUS MAKING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STEPS AND THE STATUE MORE DIRECT, WHILE AVOIDING HAVING THE SCULPTURE AT THE TOP OF THE SO-CALLED "*ROCKY STEPS*". THIS WHOLE AFFAIR COULD BE ANALYSED AS CONTAMINATION CASE OF THE MUSEUM'S HERMETIC PURITY. A CLASS CONTAMINATION. ULTIMATELY, THAT THE STATUE ISN'T AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS ISN'T A FAILURE, SINCE THE STEPS ARE NAMED AFTER THE CHARACTER PORTRAYED BY STALLONE. IT COULD ACTUALLY BE SEEN AS REMINDER THAT STEPS WILL ALWAYS NEED TO BE CLIMBED UP FOR THE LOWER-CLASS, THE UNDERDOG : THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS "VICTORY" IN STATIVITY ; IT'S ALWAYS A MOVEMENT, VICTORY IS IN PLASTICITY.

AND THIS IS ALSO THE CASE SCULPTURALLY SPEAKING. INDEED, THE ORIGINAL SCHOMBERG'S STATUE WAS LITERALLY COPIED BY ANOTHER ARTIST, CROATIAN SCULPTOR BORIS STAPARAC, GIVING IT ANOTHER LIFE, IN A COMPLETE DIFFERENT CONTEXT. IN 2007, THE SERBIAN TOWN OF ŽITIŠTE (APPROX. 3000 INHABITANTS), IN NEED OF A FIGURE AND MONUMENT TO CHANGE ITS IMAGE - DANGEROUS, PRONE TO NATURAL DISASTERS ETC - EMBARKED IN A CONSULTATION PROCESS TO SELECT THEIR NEW HERO. RESIDENT BOJAN MARČETA WAS QUICK TO SUGGEST ROCKY BALBOA, AN IDEA THAT FOUND A RATHER POSITIVE ECHO THROUGHOUT TOWN AND CITY COUNCIL. THE ORIGINAL WISH WAS TO COMMISSION THE ORIGINAL ARTIST (SCHOMBERG), BUT THE PRODUCTION COSTS (\$1.5 MILLION) WERE TOO HIGH. IT WOULD THUS BE LOCAL ARTIST STAPARAC WHO WOULD UNDERTAKE THE PROJECT (FOR ABOUT 5000€), AFTER OBTAINING PERMISSIONS FROM SCHOMBERG STUDIOS AND MGM (THE PRODUCERS OF THE *ROCKY* FRANCHISE).

BUT I THOUGHT "TWO ROCKIES AND MORE" WAS BEST. CÉDRIC FAUQ

MULTIPLE QUESTIONS ARISE HERE : SOME ARE OF GEOPOLITICAL ORDER (WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR A TOWN BELONGING TO A COUNTRY WITH A COMPLEX AND DIVIDED NATIONAL HISTORY - SERBIA HAD JUST ACQUIRED ITS INDEPENDENCE FROM MONTENEGRO THE YEAR BEFORE, IN 2006, AND WAS ONE OF THE COUNTRY FORMING THE *SOCIALIST FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA* - WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CHOOSE AN AMERICAN FICTIONAL CHARACTER AS NEW ICON ?) ; SOME OTHERS ARE ECONOMIC AND LEGAL (WHY WAS THE PRODUCTION OF THE SCULPTURE IN THE US SO EXPENSIVE IN THE FIRST PLACE ? WHY SO "CHEAP" IN THE SECOND INSTANCE ?) ; AND, EVENTUALLY, SOME ARE ARTISTIC (SHOULD WE SPEAK ABOUT AN AUTHORISED COPY ? INTERPRETATION ? TRIBUTE ? WHAT MATERIAL WAS USED ? WHAT FINISHING ? WAS THE SCALE OF THE ORIGINAL RESPECTED... ?). THESE ARE THE KIND OF QUESTIONS WHICH PREOCCUPIED MATHIAS PFUND AND LED TO THE CONCEPTUALISATION AND PRODUCTION OF *YOU'RE GONNA LOVE PICASSO (AFTER SCHOMBERG & STAPARAC)*.

THE GESTURE IS MORE COMPLEX THAN WHAT IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE. IT ALL STARTED WITH OBTAINING PERMISSIONS FROM THE TWO ARTISTS, AFTER SEEKING ADVICE FROM ART COPYRIGHT LAWYERS. PFUND WOULD THEN LITERALLY INCORPORATE THE OFFICIAL 12" REPRODUCTION OF THE SCHOMBERG STATUE (PURCHASED ONLINE) ONTO A "BRONZE" BASE (THE HEIGHT OF WHICH HAS BEEN CALCULATED TO "SWALLOW" THE PLINTH OF THE REPRODUCTION) ; A BASE LARGE ENOUGH TO ALSO INCORPORATE, NEXT TO THE SCHOMBERG MODEL, A REPRODUCTION OF THE STAPARAC "COPY". FOR THE STAPARAC STATUE, AFTER OBTAINING PERMISSION FROM THE ARTIST, PFUND WOULD GO ON TO COLLECT IMAGES OF THE SCULPTURE MOSTLY FOUND ONLINE. HE WOULD THEN FORWARD THEM TO A STUDIO (*VOX.A*) THAT WOULD TAKE CARE OF THE "REPRODUCTION OF THE REPRODUCTION", AND THE MAKING OF THE BASE. THE FINISHING OF THE STAPARAC SCULPTURE WOULD MATCH THE ORIGINAL SERBIAN ROCKY'S ; WHILE THE FINISHING OF THE BASE WOULD BE HALFWAY BETWEEN THE STAPARAC'S AND THE SCHOMBERG'S, MAKING THE ARTIFICIALITY OF THE OPERATION VISIBLE AND OBVIOUS.

THAT THE PODIUM ON WHICH THE TWO MODELS STAND MAKES THEM "EQUAL" IN A NUMBER OF WAYS, BUT THIS EQUALITY IS MEANT TO HIGHLIGHT THEIR AMBIGUOUS RELATIONSHIP, AND, ULTIMATELY, ENCOURAGES TO ESTABLISH COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE TWO. NOTABLY : WHICH ONE CAME FIRST ? BUT ALSO : WHICH ONE HAS MORE VALUE ? IF THE SCHOMBERG IS THE ORIGINAL, IT WAS ALSO DENIED A PLACE OF CHOICE AT THE TOP OF THE MUSEUM'S STEPS, WHILE THE STAPARAC, THE COPY, WAS PRODUCED OUT OF A COLLECTIVE DESIRE, AND HAS A PLACE OF CHOICE IN THE SERBIAN TOWN.

THAT THE "OFFICIAL" REPRODUCTION, WHICH IS COMMERCIALY DISTRIBUTED, MAKES IT TO PFUND'S WORK, IS ALSO TELLING OF THE VERY PECULIAR STATUS OF THE STATUE : IT IS, FIRST AND FOREMOST, A PRODUCT, PROTECTED, AND IS THUS UNTOUCHABLE. THE STAPARAC SCULPTURE, IN ITS UNIQUENESS (BOTH IN ŽITIŠTE AND PFUND'S WORK), MIGHT THEN BE CLOSER TO BEING "AN ORIGINAL". YOU MIGHT ARGUE AGAINST THIS CLAIM, SINCE PFUND WAS GIVEN FREE REIN TO REPRODUCE THE SERBIAN ROCKY (ULTIMATELY THE COPY OF THE COPY) BUT WASN'T ABLE TO DO SO WITH THE AMERICAN ONE. THESE ARE ALL QUESTIONS THAT BLUR THE LINES BETWEEN STATUE, STATUS, PRODUCT AND PROTECTION.

BROUGHT TOGETHER, THE REPRODUCTIONS OF THE SCULPTURES ALSO VEHICLE QUESTIONS RELATED TO THE MEDIUM ITSELF AND ITS PROCESSES ; IT TRIGGERS COMMENTS ON THE PROPERTIES OF THE MONUMENT AND THE NEED FOR (UNIVERSAL) HEROES ? I LOOK AT THE PICTURE OF THE SCULPTURE AND THE POSE ADOPTED BY ROCKY KEEPS GETTING BACK TO ME (A "CLASSIC CONTRAPPOSTO POSE"). I REMEMBER ASKING FOR SOME STRANGER TO TAKE A PICTURE OF ME IN FRONT OF THE *ROCKY STATUE* IN PHILADELPHIA. I DID IT FOR MATHIAS. BUT THEN, I WAS ALSO, FOR A MOMENT, TURNED INTO A COPY OF ROCKY. A SCULPTURE, FOR THE FRAGMENT OF A SECOND, IMMORTALISED BY THE PHOTOGRAPH : STATIC IN PLASTICITY.

IT MIGHT THEN BE TRUE, WHAT THEY SAY : "WE ARE ALL ROCKY". BUT IF WE ARE, DOES THAT MEAN WE SHOULD ALL LOVE PICASSO ?