

“à...à...aaah!”

And firstly the desire (the need?), “*nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita,*” to go back to the origin when nothing was decided yet but everything was already taking shape. To ask the critical question of how it all began and to answer with the first-born letter, the small ‘a’ at the beginning. ‘A’ as in childhood, and perhaps the childhood of art too, at least for those willing to recognize that art may be nothing but the keen recollection, the fanned embers of a certain state of shaky accomplished perception of the world and of the self.

This, then, would be the beginning. The self, the word, the appropriation of one by the other through play: games of roles, identities, and objects. Theatre, in short. Theatre first and foremost. As a womb out of which everything proceeds: pictures, sounds, words (“*Words, words, words*”), singing, and all the uncertainty that will end up contaminating the very foundations of the real. If I’m not me then who can you be? And what truth is this that seems to pass through a small insistent sailor shirt or be trumpeted by an instrument of hollow fame? Slippage, illusion, uproar. The world is a stage, but when children appear on it to play the comedy, it is always with such immense earnestness.

Which means that they can lose their heads in it (like a certain king who was not convincing enough as a servant and so had his cut off) or lose sleep over it (dreams, puzzling signs, fallen castles, antics, masks, opaque screens, faceless figures and reflectionless mirrors). And no remedy this time, no hope for help from Dr. Sigmund: Oedipus still erring blind, blundering in the darkness of a dream. Happily, the ancient chorus of women is keeping watch and it will know how to tell the story. From then on, the child, trusting and with no holds barred, will immerse herself in the book.

This is how A’s childhood was spent. This is how I imagine it. Turning back to it in the middle of the way of an artist’s life, speaks of recognition, in both senses of the word. Firstly of giving homage where homage is due: we move then from the small initial ‘a’ of childhood to the preposition with an accent, the ‘à’ that is the mark of the dative case in French, the indirect object; and here giving takes on the full meaning of a restitution. Secondly of recalling and identifying what once was, with a sort of refund self-evidency that is surely what elicits the exclamatory aaah! of delight in the title. But I’m writing of this in words only, whereas Ana Torfs’s images are mute, meaning they are eloquent. Like the *in-fans*, the infant lacking language but not insight.

Jean Torrent, 2003

Translated from the French by Gila Walker.