

Into the Author's Mind: Cesare Garboli and the Essay as Embodied Comprehension

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ABSTRACT:

In light of the blurring of strict boundaries separating different literary genres, literary theory during the twentieth century considered criticism as a particular kind of rewriting, in which the meaning of the primary text is recreated through a new text, that is the text of the critic. This theoretical turning point is grounded in the idea that style can be a method of comprehension, and writing an extension of the mind, through which thoughts are shaped and not merely transcribed. If the space of writing is the very place where thought happens, rewriting becomes a strategy for understanding.

The enhancement of writing as an interpretative tool is particularly relevant to the essay, conceived as a hybrid genre bridging criticism and literature. Indeed, the essay assumes stylistic patterns commonly associated with literature, such as a narrative tendency, the use of figurative and metaphoric language, and a combination of historical and fictional elements. Moreover, the cognitive value of the act of rewriting is endorsed by more recent research on human cognition. Philosophical, cognitive, and even neuroscientific studies, in fact, have underlined the role of empathy and reenactment in the processes of comprehension, elaborating the idea that cognition is an embodied process, instead of a pure intellectual faculty.

This contribution aims at showing how the work of the Italian critic, Cesare Garboli, realises the possibility of conceiving the essay as a form of embodied comprehension. Indeed, the closeness of Garboli's critical writing to the primary text, often strengthened by a biographical knowledge of the author, is a way to recreate the very experience of writing. Garboli's essays can be interpreted as a deep form of rewriting, insofar as they literally narrate the creative processes experienced by writers. Exploring the biographical, cognitive, and even biological roots of creativity, Garboli rewrites the mental genesis of the author's style, in order to explain his/her work.

The Writing Mind

Walter Benjamin writes:

The power of a country road when one is walking along, it is different from the power it has when one is flying over it by airplane. In the same way, the power of a text when it is read is different from the power it has when it is copied out.¹

Seen from on high, a road is a line winding through the landscape, apparently subject to the rules of the surrounding territory. Only one who walks through it ‘learns of the power it commands’, insofar as he is assailed at every crossroad by the sudden appearance of ‘distances, belvederes, clearings, prospects’.² Similarly, transcription, according to Benjamin, since it allows us to retrace the changes of perspective that arise through the creative process, can be considered the most authentic of all forms of reading.

During the second half of the twentieth century, several critics, also influenced by the assumptions of the French *nouvelle critique*, were inspired by this metaphor of transcription. They thus started to focus more attention on their own specific form of writing, which they conceived as a creative operation: working through the stylistic movements of the primary text and rewriting it in order for it to be understood. Through such a method, the meanings of the original text are reformulated by the critical text; they are *deployed* into the new text’s system of meaning.³ Writing is an act of knowledge, an instrument of understanding; the style and formal organisation of speech create meanings which never pre-exist the act of writing.⁴ Writing itself can be considered a *critical method* and not just a way of transcribing concepts previously shaped within our mind.

By developing and implementing this hypothesis into the sphere of mental processes, cognitive science has recently described writing as a *thinking organism*, a device that works along with our mind. It is not an instrument of expression for pre-existing thoughts, but the dimension where our cognitive processes are shaped and organised.⁵ Thought and language are not two different faculties operating successively in different moments, rather thought unfolds *through* language and consequently writing produces an *extension* of our mind.⁶

¹ Walter Benjamin, ‘One-Way Street’, in *Selected Writings: Volume I 1913-1926* (London: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 447.

² *Ibid.*, p. 448.

³ See Roland Barthes, *Critique et Vérité* (Paris: Seuil, 1966).

⁴ See Jacques Derrida, ‘Force et signification’, in *L’écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), pp. 9-50.

⁵ See Richard Menary, ‘Writing as Thinking’, *Language Sciences*, 29, 5 (2007).

⁶ See Andy Clark and David J. Chalmers, ‘The Extended Mind’, *Analysis*, 58, 1 (1998), 7-19; Andy Clark, *Supersizing the Mind. Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

The process of writing is an active part of critical work, since it produces ideas and directs the development of our understanding. If we focus on the history of the literary sphere and particularly of criticism, we see that it is in the case of the essay that writing clearly assumes its value as an instrument that creates meanings. As stated by different scholars,⁷ the essay is a hybrid genre that combines the logic-argumentative faculties of critical writing with the imaginative faculties of literary writing. The essay adopts the stylistic forms of literature – it often employs metaphors and organises its argumentation in accordance with narrative schemes and patterns⁸ – but is a combination of invention and analysis, fiction and philosophy.

In this paper I would like to show the connection between this tendency of the essay to hybridisation and the basic mechanisms of human cognition, the latter of which have recently inspired a transversal debate within the neurocognitive sciences and the philosophy of mind. This debate especially highlights the role played by empathic mechanisms and emotional engagement within the processes of understanding.⁹ That is, the idea that the cognition of the world is an *embodied* process, determined by the immersion of the body-mind continuum into the environment, rather than by merely intellectual activity.¹⁰ Since the essay similarly reveals both the cognitive value of creative writing and the imaginative basis of critical writing, it also entails a flexible and hybrid conception of our processes of understanding. In the practice of the essay, understanding the world is a productive and creative activity, with knowledge thus resulting from the dynamic and processual relationship linking the subject of the act of knowledge to the object. The *third space* created by the essay combines analytical and creative elements and can therefore arguably be considered the result of what cognitive theory defines as *blending*: the ability of the human mind to overlap different and distant conceptual domains in order to produce new knowledge.¹¹

The creation of this *third space* can be detected in literary works such as *À la recherche du temps perdu*, in which Proust experiences, reproduces, and analyses reality in the context of a narrative. I have termed this blending of critical and imaginative attitudes the *Proust function*, which

⁷ See Dieter Bachmann, *Essay und Essayismus* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1969); Alexander J. Butrym (ed.), *Essays on the essay: Redefining the Genre* (London: University of Georgia Press, 1989); Jean-Marcel Paquette, 'Prolégomènes à une théorie de l'essai', in *Pensées, passions et proses: essais* (Montréal: l'Hexagone, 1992), pp. 315-319; Alfonso Berardinelli, *La forma del saggio. Definizione e attualità di un genere letterario* (Venice: Marsilio, 2002); Giulia Cantarutti, Luisa Avellini, and Silvia Albertazzi (eds), *Il saggio. Forme e funzioni di un genere letterario* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2008); Andrea Cortellessa, *Libri segreti. Autori-critici nel Novecento italiano* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2008); Angela Borghesi, *Genealogie. Saggisti e interpreti del Novecento* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2011); Anna Dolfi (ed.), *La saggistica degli scrittori* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2012).

⁸ On intersections between different genres see Jacques Derrida, 'La loi du genre', in *Parages* (Paris: Galilée, 1986), pp. 249-287.

⁹ See Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error. Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (London: Putnam Publishing, 1994); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought. The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹⁰ See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh. The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

¹¹ Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexity* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

is recalled and adopted as an epistemological tool by critics such as Curtius, Auerbach, Contini, Debenedetti, and Longhi.¹² This method is further developed by Cesare Garboli, on whom we will focus here in order to explain his conception and practice of the essay as *embodied comprehension*.¹³ Garboli defines himself as an *interpreter*, a reader who appropriates the text and executes it ‘so as a pianist does, when he transforms sounds and signs of the score that he sees or remembers, making music accessible to everybody’.¹⁴

In his considerations on the work of Elsa Morante, Garboli detects a conflict between the *pesanteur*, a sort of *gravity* that threatens to keep her writing and existence rooted to the ground, or rather a sort of thought complication that inhibits her creative liberation, and the *grâce*, which is precisely the imaginative liberation.¹⁵ The battle of gravity and grace is a conflict that affects also the writing of the essay. In the case of Morante, gravity makes use of grace, since access to reality is assured by the fantastic switch, and thus even the *rooted* thoughts are not bound to scientific description:

In order to be taken into account and heard by her, the truth, the concreteness, the mystery of reality required to be gathered around a flame and to be carried by imagination as by a great mystic force, like a hallucination or a drug.¹⁶

Intellect and memory intervene later, providing a logical shape to what is left of the creative flame, ‘and yet the reality of that adventure, of that intellectual and fantastic experience of the world, never went through the purity of logic’.¹⁷ Indeed a model of intellectual strictness, of firm consequentiality, does not correspond with Morante’s tendency to contaminate her writing with impure elements of a biographical and even *biological* nature, so that in fact she ‘lets the brinks of her literary creation coincide with the facts and needs of physiology’.¹⁸ The *brinks* of the literary creation are exactly the space of existence of the essay, which however continuously tries to anchor imagination to a thought

¹² Paolo Gervasi, ‘Ricerca della creazione. La critica italiana e la funzione Proust’, in *Letteratura e scienze cognitive: teorie e analisi*, ed. by Alberto Casadei, *Italianistica*, 40, 3 (2011), 95-109.

¹³ Cesare Garboli (1928-2004) was a critic, translator, editor, playwright, and screen-writer. He trained with the journal *Paragone*, founded by the major art historian Roberto Longhi, and collaborated with some of the central Italian writers and intellectuals of the second half of the Twentieth Century. For a comprehensive overview of his career and his biography see Laura Desideri, *Bibliografia di Cesare Garboli (1950-2005)* (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2007).

¹⁴ Cesare Garboli, *Pianura proibita* (Milan: Adelphi, 2002), p. 166. All translations of Garboli’s and other Italian texts here and throughout are my own, revised by professional translator, Gennaro Lauro.

¹⁵ Elsa Morante (1912-1985) was a writer deeply involved in the cultural environment of the post-WWII Rome, particularly in dialogue with Alberto Moravia and Pier Paolo Pasolini. Her most famous novels are *Menzogna e sortilegio* (1948), *L’isola di Arturo* (1957), and *La storia* (1974), which enjoyed an overwhelming success.

¹⁶ Cesare Garboli, *Storie di seduzione* (Turin: Einaudi, 2005), p. 147.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

structure, observing the fire of grace from the side of a heavy shadow.¹⁹ Whilst, according to Garboli, Morante was ‘completely within imagery’ meaning she could have never become a real essayist, the space of existence of the essay appears as a point of hybridisation, where the *blending* between gravity and grace is achieved.

Narrating Meanings

In order to outline paths of meaning and interpretative hypotheses within a semiotic world more and more complex, chaotic, and instable, Garboli adopts patterns of knowledge based on an individualising paradigm, on the *conjectural* and empirical reconstruction of an ever-partial reality. Far distant from systematic pretensions and generalising theories, the essayist writes about the irreducible nature of the *case-study*: the uniqueness of any artistic experience that, subject to a creative process operating in accordance with the structures of narration, may be told as a *story*.

The close relationship between narrative logic and the construction of meaning recalls a specific way of functioning that is proper to human cognition and its strategies of organising experience. The narrative order is the filter through which mind becomes acquainted with reality: cognitive sciences describe narration as a tool that activates our mental faculties, *a tool for thinking*.²⁰ Narration has an epistemic function, in that it contributes to the cognitive assimilation of events and becomes one of our mind procedures aimed at making sense of reality. It is a form of understanding that operates through empathy and emotional participation in the states of mind of other people and is activated by an *embodied simulation* of the narrated events.²¹ As a virtual *technology* specifically aimed at simulating problems, narration has been described, by scholars such as Dutton, Vermeule and Gottschall, as an intense *laboratory* of experiences, which is able to strengthen and improve the cognitive capacities of human groups.²²

In this perspective, the essay describes literary experiences as individual stories, employing an empirical approach that does not subsume the critical case within an *a priori* theoretical system of reference. Garboli’s essays are always stories, tales, critical novels, or little biographies directed by a narrative criterion that maintains the interpretative hypothesis. Garboli writes *in the presence* of the authors, he often narrates events concerning his biographical closeness to the writers and he shows

¹⁹ The opposition is suggested by the title of the posthumous collection of Simone Weil’s writings, in the edition conceived by Gustave Thibon. Translated by Fortini for the publisher, Edizioni di Comunità, the title of this collection hints at gravity through a metaphor of shadow: *L’ombra e la grazia* [*Shadow and Grace*]. See Simone Weil, *La pesanteur et la grâce* (Paris: Plon, 1947).

²⁰ David Herman (ed.), *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences* (Stanford: Csl Publications, 2003).

²¹ Vittorio Gallese and Hannah Wojciehowski, ‘How Stories Make Us Feel: Toward an Embodied Narratology’, *California Italian Studies*, 2, 1 (2011).

²² Dennis Dutton, *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, and Human Evolution* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009); Blakey Vermeule, *Why Do We Care about Literary zCharacters?* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010); Jonathan Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal. How Stories Make Us Human* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012).

himself on the scene of the creative event, which is therefore narrated while it takes place. The essay is structured as a novel of ideas, as an invention whose content is the development of cognitive processes and whose plot is given by the succession of thoughts:

There are primary and secondary ideas, like the characters of a novel; ideas that suddenly turn up in the middle of a chapter and ideas that follow you from a distance, as sharks; those that silently coil in the bushes and crawl endlessly, and those that land on you, leaving you breathless. There are no ideas without their own duration; without the dramatic, fictional, underground story about the time spent in writing them down.²³

In his introduction to *Diari* by Antonio Delfini,²⁴ Garboli admits that his interest in Delfini is due to the fact that he might be the main character of a story. Garboli does not simply want to know the man, he wants to *read him* and to help him to *write himself down*:

He was the character of a novel; the *writer* was only the diabolic piece of glass in which he looked at himself, without recognizing himself, a character who had been waiting there goodness knows how much time, and goodness knows how much longer he would have waited to be *written down*.²⁵

Garboli constructs one of his biographical stories around Delfini's escape from life, his melancholic joy of being a squanderer of his own talent and intelligence. He writes the writer down as a character and reveals his style by reproducing it. He even includes on the scene the presence of the critic who writes in the first person:

Delfini was there, standing in the patch of light cut out of the depth of the sweltering night, in front of the bar, one hand in his pocket and the other either holding the glass or raising to scratch his almost bald head. When he saw me (when he saw whomever) his grin scooped his face stretching from ear to ear.²⁶

The critic observes the writer's attempts to rid himself of the damnation that he himself chose: the impossibility of *writing his book* and the drain of projects created as alibi that in fact hinder the achievement of his work. Garboli encounters the writer in a semi-textual sphere, suspended between life and writing. He escapes life to take shelter in his writing, and then escapes writing to hide again in life. In his description of such an endless instability, Garboli presents Delfini as the character of a

²³ Garboli, *Pianura proibita*, p. 64.

²⁴ Antonio Delfini (1907-1963) was a writer, who, during his life, remained an outsider to Italian literature, publishing few and barely known books. Garboli, however contributed substantially to the posthumous knowledge and comprehension of Delfini's works and experiences (see Antonio Delfini, *Diari 1927-1961*, ed. by Giovanna Delfini and Natalia Ginzburg (Turin: Einaudi, 1982); Andrea Palazzi and Marco Belpoliti (eds), 'Antonio Delfini', *Riga*, 6 (Marcos y Marcos: Milan, 1994).

²⁵ Garboli, *Storie di seduzione*, p. 11.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

second-level narration, of a tale that recapitulates the birth of the writer and the motions that gave rise to his writing. The critic engages in dealing with an ‘unachieved, missed, unutterable, unrealised destiny, characterised by wrong paths and missed dreams’, and tries ‘to provide it with an achievement, integrating it into a time that *is not* its own’, but that of the critical narration. Reconstructing a destiny requires ‘a literary, critical, historical and fictional effort’. Arguing against the risk of barrenness, Garboli, as an ‘unsatisfied critic’, ‘unbelieving historian’, ‘contraband narrator’, relies on a ‘further clairvoyance’, that he describes as the difficult and ever-insecure blending of *truth* and *fantasy*: ‘I closed my eyes, erasing myself from the present, I appealed to all my fantastic powers, without distorting the historical truth’.²⁷

Biology of Writing

Cesare Garboli’s critique also aspires to connect the phenomena of writing with the writer’s biological experiences, as he attempts to detect in the form of the text the features of a living organism. Garboli aims at describing the literary experiences as undertaking a biological path to cognition: re-establishing the unity of body and mind, and furthering, too, an embodied conception of cognitive processes.²⁸ In order to do so, Garboli’s critique instinctively develops at the convergence of *bios* and *logos*, between the biological description of the body and its cultural construction, or textualisation. Style and figurative language transcribe the experience of our mind and body within the text. This transcription is marked by the shape of the body that lives, feels, suffers, gets ill, and finally perceives the signs of death. Peter Stockwell writes:

All forms of expression and forms of conscious perception are bound, more closely than was previously realised, in our biological circumstances. The notion of embodiment affects every part of language. It means that all of our experiences, knowledge, beliefs and wishes are involved in and expressible only through patterns of language that have their roots in our material existence.²⁹

Garboli focuses on how fiction is contaminated by such spurious elements as existence itself and its immediate, non-formalised facts. Garboli’s essays are an unceasing search for those forms of ‘intertextuality between life and literature’³⁰ as well as an attempt to describe ‘the analogy, or better the isomorphism, between the process through which the destiny of a life is fulfilled and the somehow

²⁷ Ibid., p. 176.

²⁸ See Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind. Constructing the Conscious Brain* (Pantheon: New York, 2010).

²⁹ Peter Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics. An introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 4-5. See also Mark Turner, *The Literary Mind. The Origins of Thought and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Elena Semino, and Jonathan Culpeper (eds), *Cognitive Stylistics. Language and Cognition in Text Analysis* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2002).

³⁰ Garboli, *Pianura proibita*, p. 65.

predestined process through which a text arises and develops'.³¹ According to Adorno, it is in exploring this analogy and restlessly investigating the possibility of an isomorphism between nature and culture that one finds the hidden content of any essay, which seeks both to break the 'blind nexus of nature' that has given rise to the myth, and to reveal that culture is originally rooted in the world and its forms:

The greater the determination with which the essay suspends the notion of primary reality and refuses to draw the features of culture from nature, the more radically it is able to acknowledge the natural essence of culture itself.³²

Garboli places his interest in *written things* outside the field of literature: 'rather than in books, I have always been interested, at least in the past, in people. Rather than in "literature", in all what literature hides and reveals'.³³ This notwithstanding, literature and life cannot be detected at a pure level. Therefore Garboli rather focuses on the wide 'middle earth' existing between texts and existence:

I have probably not been interested in people, but in the mystery that they bear, that only they can bear: the relationship between being and doing, or, which is the same, between not-being and doing. The relationship between people and their 'works', between people and their objective correspondence.³⁴

It is here, in this 'free, but misty and uncircumscribable area',³⁵ where the incubation of work takes place, and indeed where the essay exists, that the essayist may describe the process that *draws* writing from life. Garboli explores the darkness in which the literary creation appears as not yet fulfilled; he dwells in the uncertain domain of potentiality, inspired by the idea that 'nothing is more sacred than what has not yet been redeemed by style nor achieved by intelligence'.³⁶ In this sense, the essayist's task is 'to look around the laboratory, to sneak into the atelier', and to verify the hypothesis according to which 'a no-man's-land stretches between work and author, an unknown continent which is precisely the place that is to be explored, a sort of a "text within the text": unfathomable spectres, but not less objective than the "text itself"'.³⁷ The relationship between the writer's existence and his work is already a story, a *sign* containing a meaning that we have to interpret. Although aware that

³¹ Ibid., p. 68.

³² Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', in *Notes to Literature*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 17.

³³ Cesare Garboli, *La stanza separata* (Milan: Mondadori, 1969), p. ix.

³⁴ Ibid., p. xvii.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., p. xxvii.

³⁷ Garboli, *Pianura proibita*, p. 76.

the only visible trace of such a relationship is the text or its writing, Garboli remembers with deep nostalgia those residues that the text has not been able to maintain.

Garboli spends his time with the writers. He takes part in their existence and records intimate motions and revelations, details and hints of their need for expression. Such testimonies are often even reported in his own voice: 'In an afternoon of many years ago, I cannot remember where our conversation was heading (we two alone were sitting in a café), Elsa Morante sighed'.³⁸ This sigh gives rise to the elaboration of a sort of dissatisfaction and unease that affects the writer's creativity. The record of this sigh also gives rise to the essay: the narration of an experience of writing that corresponds to a bodily experience. The writer's body is engraved, *written* by the unfolding of the work, marked by the phases of creation, and subject to physical changes that can be read by the critic. The beatitude that characterised Morante's first books leaves a 'somehow visible trace within the mist that apparently reigned, floating and bluish (certainly an effect of myopia) around her frowning figure and her way of smiling, as from a distance'.³⁹ Morante's stories unfold just like the 'pathological phenomena' that they recount, which are 'felt as mysterious processes of transformation on which the principle of every fictional organism is founded'.⁴⁰ Thus Morante's work deals with the metamorphosis of bodies and existences, and is further characterised, too, by a 'metamorphosis' reflected in the text: we find 'translated in fictional words, the extraordinary physiological metamorphosis of its Author'.⁴¹ The two organisms, book and life, change according to an enigmatic, underlying mutuality.

In his essays on Natalia Ginzburg,⁴² Garboli represents himself as biographically and existentially close to the writer, assuming an inner perspective, an involved and *concerned* point of view. This closeness that allows the critic to enter the weave of the work and to become a reader of its genetic code, rather than that of only the final literary organism, is 'wild and accidental as a blood relation'.⁴³ The complete synthesis of writing and existence is already at the core of the critical interpretation here, as these are the forces operating in Ginzburg's writing, yet Garboli further ascribes to Ginzburg a 'physiological intelligence' that presides over the 'transformation of the physiological theme into narrative body'. This transformation involves narrating 'the encounter with the world, the entrance into life, the act of eating, giving birth, the formation and development of the blood

³⁸ Garboli, *Storie di seduzione*, p. 143.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 148-149.

⁴⁰ Cesare Garboli, *Il gioco segreto: Nove immagini di Elsa Morante* (Milan: Adelphi, 1995), p. 11.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴² Natalia Ginzburg (1916-1991) was a writer who lived and worked in the intellectual environment of Turin, before and after WWII. She was persecuted, together with her husband Leone Ginzburg, for their Jewish origins and for their anti-fascist activities. She contributed to the developing of the publishing house Einaudi, working together with Cesare Pavese and Italo Calvino. Her most famous novels include *Lessico familiare* (1963) and *Caro Michele* (1973).

⁴³ Garboli, *Storie di seduzione*, p. 53.

relationship with reality'.⁴⁴ The meaning of her work is literally an attempt to *write life down*, to reproduce it along with its biological developments.

Ginzburg's works attest the existence of a correspondence, an isomorphism, between the development of the needs and desires of the human body and the development of narrative and dramaturgical organisms, or rather the formation of the work's *body*. Her works reveal a strategy of knowledge based on a 'specular relationship between the darkness of the body and the intellectual processes, between the bowels and their refraction on as many mental paths'.⁴⁵ Later, in her mature phase, the writer discovers the pleasure of narrating how this physiological intelligence works: by turning her writing into an essay-like form that allows her to '*employ physiology*', to 'employ the mind as well as the bowels', demonstrating awareness that intellectual knowledge is 'the slightly blackened mirror reflecting what is dark and yet readable in those depths'.⁴⁶ Employing the bowels in writing means to recognise the strict interrelation between the body and the mind, and to assume that understanding the world is not a purely intellectual, rational activity: intellectual processes are deeply influenced by bodily elements. And the reflection of physiology on itself precisely echoes the method of Garboli's *embodied essay*, in which the complicity of critique and creation appears in the darkness of biological depths, where any development is potential and any work is *contaminated*. Garboli slips into the dark depths where creativity is incubated; he obtains a space of co-gestation with the work; and sets himself in the borderland where the literary work is still shapeless. The writing of the essay consists in narrating the emergence of the literary form.

The critic tries to assume a point of view on the rise of writing; he sets himself *before* the work, in order to observe the work in its potentiality and its approach towards a form, as well as to describe its fluid nature, when it has not yet parted from the fibrous matter of existence. Through this *placement*, through his decision to write essays affording him this position, Garboli suggests and explores both an embodied conception of creativity, and moreover the consequences of this conception for criticism, which is, after all, still the work of a gregarious writer experiencing in his writing the physical character and biological and existential concreteness of the processes of creation. Thus the embodied creativity experienced by writers is turned by Garboli into an embodied comprehension, according to which the essayist must immerse his body-mind in the *life* of the literary work, and in the life of its author. As the comprehension of the world needs the embodiment of the mind in the vital experience, the comprehension of literature requires the *embodiment* of the essayist

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 59.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 60.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 61.

in the creative experience. The birth and development of the literary work can be narrated as a story, and within the essay the writer can become the character of a narration. Thus the comprehension of the literary experience is, once more, embodied within the story, and is conveyed by the emotional intelligence which is provided by narratives. By narrating the creative process and exploring the biographical and biological space where literary ideas take form, Garboli conceives the essay as a journey, much like that upon which Benjamin embarks in transcription: he walks through the writer's creativity; re-enacts his/her turns, jumps, rises and falls; and encounters all the changes of perspective experienced by the writer whilst writing.