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Imagine looking at yourself in the mirror. You look in the mirror, you see your eyes, your nose, your mouth, but around them there is something you don't see, something that escapes you. There is a fabric that is dissolving. No matter how much you try to get closer to the mirror, you can't see it; entire parts of your face are missing. And if you don't see your own face, you don't know who you are, you don't know where you come from, and you don't know how you can change that face, how you can change that story.

The landscape, the historical and artistic heritage of the nation—these are the words of the Italian Constitution—they are the true face of the homeland. This is an expression that enjoyed great success around the turn of the 20th century. Benedetto Croce uses it in the introduction to his landscape law. John Ruskin probably used it first, and Piero Calamandrei would use it: the true face of the Italians. A nation not made of blood, because we are mixed, we are blended; a nation by way of culture, and thus by definition multicultural, in the past and in the future.

And our face is the knowledge of our hamlets, our villages, our ancient settlements—the small ones, those in the inner areas, those forgotten by everyone, those we only remember when they collapse and we ask, "But what collapsed?" Or when the news arrives that the last old person has left, the last old person has died, or that a child is no longer born—who knows for how many decades? We are used to looking at this lesser Italy as a problem. What do we do with these villages? What do we do with these abandoned places? We never think of these places as a resource, not as a question, but as an answer: a different place, a different lifestyle, different values, a different perspective, a medicine that can cure our

sickness—which is not that of the villages, but that of our big cities, of our loneliness, of concrete, of the destruction that our generations have brought.

So, for this face to inspire us again, we must be able to see it, and see it precisely in those parts that are only seemingly secondary. An eye might seem much more important than an indistinct area of the cheek, but if that area of the cheek is missing, it's no longer a face, we no longer recognize it, it's no longer us.

This extraordinary, titanic, imaginative, courageous, somewhat mad project deserves to be supported, deserves to be shared, funded, deserves to find someone who will spread it like a small flame throughout the rest of the country. Because if we manage to know, to see this Italy—this Italy not spoken of in catalogues, in exhibitions, in the Touring Club's "Red Guides," in the superintendencies' catalogues; this Italy no one has seen—we will have no reason to love it. How can you love something you don't see, you don't know? To be able to see these things, to bring our eyes to these places is like reassembling all the fragments of this face—the true face of the homeland, an open homeland, a homeland for all, a homeland open to the future.

Reassembling all the fragments, all the tiles of this mosaic means being able to build a future different from the obsessive present that seems never to end. The past and the future can shake hands, but we must return to seeing. The true face of Italy.

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