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*From the introduction by Pino Aprile to*  
**"A. Vespucci - across the oceans"**  
*November 2002 - Salomone Belforte & C. Publisher*

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Sailing translates the language of the sea. What a river says is immediately obvious: from source to mouth it has a direction, a rule imposed by the force of the current. A river is universally comprehensible, since, like time itself, it is simply question of following a river bed along its course. Salmon may dare to climb in the opposite direction, but at the cost of their lives, when they win the challenge against the law of the river and reach the source, they die.

But, what about the sea? In one of his books, Alessandro Baricco wonders where the sea begins and ends, since its shores are not really its boundaries but, rather boundaries of the land, while continents are merely islands. Even if we were to find the beginning and the end of the sea, we still would not know what it is saying, despite the fact that everyone standing on the shore manages to hear the "voice" of the sea, its tempo marked by the waves, and to recognize its moods.

The sea does not reveal its direction or "law" to someone on the shore, as the river does. It does not seem to have direction or course; how can one understand where it comes from and where it goes to? There is only one answer to be found: in sailing. Thus one discovers that the sea indeed appears to lack direction, but only because it encompasses all directions, but not necessarily at the same time.

Sailing translates the laws of the sea (wind, waves, currents) while simultaneously imposing these laws on the sailor. From time to time a stretch of sea, a destination or an intention may be allowed or denied. And when the wind fails to arrive from far off, when one is off the coast, with only a slight breeze, it is the sun that is then in control, and with the sun the wind picks up, until gradually the source of heat radiates in a subtly different manner, creating a shift in angles. Indeed even the wind of civilization blows among diversities, never among equalities.

One either obeys or is overwhelmed by the rules of the sea. Mistakes or forced actions are paid for clearly. Sailing can be a benevolent force if the infringement is trivial, but it will not tolerate serious violation. Thus the sea, through the mediation of sailing, teaches rigour and diligence, and educates as to proper behaviour, actions and solutions. These are codified within the essence and ordinances of the sea. Any confusion creates danger, potential damage. Sailing functions perfectly and objectives become feasible only when the equilibrium between forces hindering are calibrated.

Sailing transfer the equilibrium and rigour to the sailor.



Lack of discipline at sea, even combined with genius, is likely to end under water, sooner or later.

The elements to be fused into this nautical equilibrium are Nature's most unstable ones: winds and waves. Yet sailing demands that the only one thing should not change when faced with changing conditions: efficiency. Sailing requires maximum attention, in tackling sudden shifts in the wind. It teaches flexibility and promptness. At sea, unlike on land, the helmsman cannot decide to stop, consider the best course and then act accordingly. Nor can he avoid taking decisions. At sea, when conditions make their demands, you have no option but to act, and act immediately, to act for the best, otherwise those secret directions that sailing can vouchsafe to you, will act against you, rather than in your favour.

If one knows the sea well, it can terrify. There is only one way to stop surprising and punishing you: seek to understand how it will behave, how waves, weather, wind as well as your ability to confront and master them, will develop. Thus sailing accustoms you to predicting the future, envisaging various scenarios, assessing your own and others' abilities, as well as formulating adequate solutions. Moreover, leaving aside single sailors, navigation requires coordination and action of various people. One always knows who is in command - the helmsman - and what is expected of one. There is no more rigorous test of the spirit of cooperation, any harm done to another constitutes harm to oneself. Rigour, flexibility, concentration, quick decision-making ability, strategic vision, cooperation: all these can be gained from the discovery of the numerous and unexpected directions of the sea, even if you do nothing but hoist a sail. It seems a mystical action, forcing you to cast your eyes heavenwards.

A motor boat also sail but, without heeding the numerous laws of the sea, it neither obeys nor breaks them, it passes over them. It would appear churlish for a sailor not to seek the perfect middle way between one's intention and the innate codes of the environment one is operating in. The motor is mendacious in question of force: it lets you believe you can dominate the sea and that your will power is unbeatable. The sail knows, and you along with it, that it is only a guest at the sea's table. He who know nothing on the sail, ignores the law. If sailing were a subject studied by primary school pupils, may it would be to much to say we would be a nation of sailors but, without any doubt we would foster better citizens.....

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