

THE FALLEN ANGEL AND THE SHATTERED DREAM. THE OBSESSION OF REPETITION AND AFTER CAUSALITY. THE NEVER-ENDING DREAM.

*Amour, mon beau, mon roi
Mon enfant que j'aime
Mon amour, mon beau, ma loi
Mon autre moi-même
Tu es le soleil couchant
Tombé sur la terre
Tu es mon dernier printemps
Mon dieu, comme je t'aime*

[Monique Serf, a.k.a. Barbara, from *Amours incestueuses*, 1972]

[...] *Thus, the significant terms of this art are the things that are outside of us, our bodies, what happens inside of us and what happens to us.* [...] (0)

A SECOND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL AND INCOMPLETE ESSAY. THE GAME OF BODY AND MIND POWER. AGAINST DEMOCRACY, IN FAVOUR OF A PERFORMATIVE VIEW.

Body imprisonment and the body imprisoned. Group and individual.

1

Silvio Ciappi, paraphrasing Zygmunt Bauman (1), has written:

[...] *The act of incarceration, which is the most radical way of restricting space, has constituted a visceral, instinctive way of reacting to diversity. Diversity is said to exist when the other is confined in a situation characterised by a lack of familiarity by means, for example, of the imposition of spatial limits.* [...]

[...] *It is therefore obvious that, when there is no familiarity, demands that the guilty party be punished will prevail over the concern with correcting the harm done. That is why prison becomes the necessary response to the more widespread feeling of non-familiarity. New prisons are not forced places of discipline, but containers that guarantee the complete immobilisation of today's new socially excluded, in the same way as happens in the new non-places in urban peripheries and in dormitory neighbourhoods.* [...] (2)

...a familiarity that makes life liveable, as Maffesoli puts it.

I should like to refer to a normal condition of humanity. Inhuman is not the word I would use to describe what this essay is intended to be, I'd be rather more inclined to say its approach is superhuman or trans-human and its sense one of passing... Like the topics of dualism and of dual polarity, this often forced, yet nevertheless inevitable, cohabitation between two poles – and above all the continuous quest for synthesis between several divergent or opposing fulcrums – have always been a source of instability and prejudice for mankind; possibly also a necessary pretext for liberation in a clash; while awareness as a bottomless pit is certainly a marvellous never-ending tunnel.

Duality by decree, the institution, the dominant power and the matrix have triggered and favoured comparative mechanisms of a moral hue; partisan processes, obviously. The application of the concept of "morality" (which in most cases is transmuted into "moralism") to the "model", as a premeditated manipulation of memory [an historical revision that also afflicts the culture and museology scene of a ministerial stamp], leaves less and less margin of movement to the individual, to his personal conception of freedom and even to his ability to praise his skills by fulfilling his functions. And there's more: the human soul could also end up contaminated.

Body, mind and spirit, in other words the essence of the animal, the human and the divine, of the "being human" that makes the "human being", are part of a whole, co-existing peacefully, to the extent that these characteristics succeed in balancing one another out pacifically. The body is flesh, pain is the spirit. Body and spirit are one. The practice of mortification or of bodily imprisonment, as a self-denial of the spirit and of dignity, of individualism, as the affirmation of the ego and of self: and of the quintessential, necessary anti-democratic art and gesture.

We are told that a human being's existence and identification are determined by his DNA, by his body, by the fact that he has an ID code before he even gets a name and a spiritual correspondence.

Imprisonment is not the only thing that **Mark Raidpere** (Estonia_1975) (3) talks about with us in his video – with a social and contextual character – entitled *10 Men* (2003).

As in many other of his works, the topic gradually emerges around man's identity, around his (quest for a) particular uniqueness, the concepts of freedom or of the desire to achieve identification and correlation within his community; but also around the meanings we attribute to what we see around us, in parallel with the lucidity with which we succeed in conveying those meanings back to our peers.

Working on a completely antiseptic photographic set, the artist from Tallinn "interviews" ten inmates in the prison in Estonia's second city of Tartu, portraying, filming and investigating them with his eye, portraying them head and shoulders, one after another, as they strike different poses and attitudes, all of them in silence. As described, the background is aseptic: a standard grey backdrop of the kind normally used in photography studios. The only sound that accompanies their show is an instrumental track, maybe it's music from an old vinyl LP, a bit sad and repetitive, almost as though it were coming out of a music box or carillon, from a cave that's been wiped from our memory, from the chronicles of the past, to create an incoherence and an interference in time. So it's a sound that tempts us towards a preceding history, but

also to question a certain, conscious historical course that puts us as spectators – in any case – outside and beyond any plausible temporal and/or real present.

Otherwise, the sensual male portrait and the male portrait sensually seen by Raidpere.

All these prisoners are serving long-term sentences, sent down for serious crimes, put away to serve long sentences away from social life, deprived of all normal dignity and of professional and individual freedom, imprisoned in a place that leaves them no other possibilities of identifying with the world around them but an unbalanced, ineluctable and pernicious (re)definition of their egos. Theirs is a slow, inexorable construction of a universe that moves further and further away from reality: but above all it is an expression of their freedom to “be”, a possibility that is still imprisoned only in the work of art.

It is only technology, as a matter of fact the video camera, that enables them to appear timelessly and outside the bounds of reality.

As Umberto Galimberti would say, the machine’s only purpose is to function. In this case, it acts, fulfilling its task as a medium, as the video, the dematerialisation brought about by Raidpere’s intentional hand gives them back their freedom to pose, to show themselves, to laugh or to boast. And to put in an appearance. No more. Technology, then, as abstraction.

Is this a mirror or a window? The medium as a window and interface, at first sight one that communicates, and a surface that reflects the observer, who looks, studies what he sees – and sees himself, then asks himself and answers all alone, as though he were looking into a mirror?

That is what happens to the public, to whomever seeks his unique, solitary definition in sharing, finding it only in interaction.

Raidpere’s prison inmates exist only as the characters in a video, in a film fable. In there, exclusively, they can be said to be; for our imagination. In the metaphor of the world.

From a slightly different angle, Raidpere reasons by allusion and not without a critical accent, expressing himself about today’s deaf-and-dumb society, so hooked on communication and technological perfectionism. To a certain degree, it tries to regain important values in a system that has reduced values to mere appearances and relegated them to vain contemporary legends, amid organisms of control and of parole: a hierarchic technocracy.

As an artist and a man, he grafts himself as an interference into the altered universe of a myriad interpretations of reality; the medium and the artistic making, as the veritable instrument of language. The group may thus define the individual. Raidpere’s inmates are reduced to the definition they receive on film, while our arguments are reduced to the more or less passive use of technology. Thus maybe the group influences the construction of the individual, contaminating his soul. Art succeeds in standing forth from reality and surpassing it.

2

Arguing about the body has never been straightforward, nor surprisingly new: complex, yes, as contemporary society derives from a particular historical and social development, from a neo-culture of fragmentation, whose genesis is said to be approximately traceable to the end of the nineteenth century, when the application of the concept of model, of system, (re)exerted its impact with renewed vigour, in parallel with the invigorating processes of industrialisation. Fragmented man is man who no longer succeeds in understanding himself, in comprehending

his own truth, in distinguishing between true values and allegories, in humbly experiencing his reality: in putting his ego into the relative context of interaction and comparing it with the fabric around him; internationalised man: globalised man.

The artist moves about within his visions and Utopias, as a forceful counterbalance to reality. To a certain extent, epoch-making changes have absorbed the very concepts of “reality” and of “truth”, mixing them up in a virtual technological blend that is still in progress, in the making to this very day. [The reasons might also support the hypothesis of a potential evolutionary and historical nemesis, albeit interpreted superficially].

Any interpretation actually appears to be hazardous, as any such attempt would have to include anthropological factors, human nature, the individual’s own historical grounding and, above all, man’s propensity – also in behavioural terms – when faced with the technologically sublime, supporting it (and thus its spirituality) gradually with the concept of the omnipotence of the machine... Society verges increasingly on a sort of non-place, where everything converges towards role-playing and the role itself acts as mask, profit and matrix: codes turned inside out. A non-place as in a place-of-non-characteristic and a place-of-depersonalisation, where the identity of anonymity and of homologation takes concrete form. The dictatorship of the object and of the machine.

It is fascinating to observe how, as Western society gradually becomes more and more materialistic and is dominated by products, artists and creativity in general have tended to react by throwing off a bourgeois conception, seeking and investigating in the subject’s *Id* and in subjectivisation, and/or in some rather peculiar, not to say extreme, artistic forms. So much in the early twentieth century.

In never-ending reflection, the process of liberation in the subject goes against the grain, progressively and keeping step with the coercive process of function-based society: a sort of *Neo-Enlightenment*, where function corresponds less and less to competence. The twentieth century unquestionably constituted an important example and a warning – albeit one that is not yet heeded enough – for the generations to come, above all for the ruling classes.

In addition, in that part of society that is apparently more “intelligent”, but is often just better informed – sometimes pointlessly and in a bogus manner – or merely the product of television, there is a domino effect at work that constantly sucks the characteristic back inside a telematic space-time system bereft of all perspective. In general. A horrifying, deviant technocratic well-being.

Going back to Mark Raidpere’s work, I feel that the window or mirror or interface effect now becomes clear. Is art a window through which we see “beyond” or does it remain an eternal illusion, a mirror that gives us back an image that is just the reflection of our own dualism, our visions and our Utopias?

I have often wondered to what extent the technological universe – that is often only fuelled by an apparent need for information, as a consequence becoming an hypnotic habit and a daily aestheticisation of communications – could influence or obstruct imperfect man in his quest for the absolute and the sublime, in his analysis of the ethical and moral ego, between his personalised vision and the reality that represses him.

That is what happens in a society – today’s post-industrial, post-modern consumer society – in which the forceful pull of individual identification is smothered and inhibited by the concept of the group, as a model to imitate. The same idea of the group that has absorbed individuality

and individualism within itself, intimism and intimate experience mystified by the awareness of the group, by controllable and controlled collectivism: the community or tribe of the Internet universe, the infamous *Second Life*. Where even the concept of the modern “welfare social state” has become an unbearable weight and an out-and-out lie. In short, a sort of cerebral palsy that produces no new ideas, nothing but parallel, masturbatory worlds of all kinds.

We would so much like to attribute some History to our day and age, too, and to reshape an experience of societal growth, but both options are closed doors to us, History is something we no longer have... or that we shall no longer have had. But, above all, what lesson do we learn from the historical experience itself? A customary topic about man, his nature and his identity. Under certain circumstances, human beings lose control, contaminated by their surroundings, subjected to forces that are not the forces of culture or of religion, of their upbringing or their intellectual education. More subconscious forms of truth that go beyond “culture” seem to prevail. So the topic of identity and the concept of freedom are indeed inestimably vast and many-faceted.

In this specific respect, **Marco Villani** (Italy_1973) (4) has created two works entitled *Who is Marco Villani?* (2007) and *DNA project* (2006), both of them works in progress that do not question any predominant or particular artistic aesthetic. They are works of social/anthropological commitment, whose characters lean towards installation, but primarily towards context, which the Italian artist basically proposes and tackles by starting out from the topic of identity, of the quest for an identity as the possibility of being identified within a social or professional group, for example.

To make *Who is Marco Villani?*, the artist who hails from Genoa conducted (and is still conducting) in-depth research into all the cases of people who share his own name and surname: Marco Villani. The artist has spent much time studying and working artistically in terms of affirming his own identity. The video is an interview with several people who share his name: they all certify their “authenticity” by stating their name, surname, place of residence and profession, thus declaring their social sense of belonging to a community. The artist does not separate his art from reality, but sublimates its reality.

As Matthys de Beer (5) is right in saying, the concept of “identity” is a constant of mankind, a principal requirement of the human being in religious, ethnic/cultural, social and professional terms, or of belonging to the human race. Its purpose is to reiterate his uniqueness within the group. To test his identity, but before that to adapt to it and to persuade the tribe to accept it: that is the focus of Villani’s research. An obsessive compilation of historical and bureaucratic identity data, as cold as they are administrative, that comply with the other action, entitled *DNA project*, in which the artist asks and persuades the Genoa Institute of Forensic Medicine to examine his DNA: the only real proof of existence we have today.

Simonetta Verdini has stated:

[...] *The number of systems studied can be considered to guarantee such values of probability that the possibility of sharing by chance with another individual taken at random from the population is so remote that it can be considered non-existent. In other words, the results specified are capable of excluding 99.99999997% of the individuals in the population.* [...] (6)

With the statement [...] *Thus, the significant terms of this art are the things that are outside of us, our bodies, what happens inside of us and what happens to us.* [...], Lea Vergine, discussing *Body Art*, launches into a lengthy discourse, in which man entertains a substantially contradictory relationship with his own body, also in the general sense of the social body, or *corpus*, originally through his own interior being, with his individual truth and experience. As she says, it is hard to dissociate the mind and spirit from the shell of the body. Coercion – whether mental, spiritual or sentimental – is inflicted via corporal coercion: by imprisonment, martyrdom, (self-)mutilation, (self-)destruction, a lager, when an individual is beaten up by the group, when he is isolated from it, when he is betrayed sexually, abandoned and so on.

[...] *All the old categories of interpretation have exploded. For example, we cannot think in terms of the “individual” any more, a concept that in many respects once constituted the very crux of modernity, even though it gave rise to other definitions and conceptualisations. Similarly, the notion of freedom is no longer up-to-date. In fact, I feel it is important to stress that, these days, we are more “thought” than we ourselves think and we are more “acted upon” than we ourselves act. This statement defines my conception of what I call tribalism: it focuses attention on the existence of a dimension of confusion, of cross-fertilisation... Still reasoning along the same lines and borrowing from Gabriel Tarde’s sociological theory, we can highlight the laws of imitation: a phenomenon that is there for everyone to see in the fashion industry. What emerges in all social and cultural dynamics is actually the awareness that, intellectually speaking, I do not exist, except in and through the spirit of others, a realisation that calls categories into play other than the traditional ones of individual and freedom. The fundamental characteristic of the mindset that we call “community thinking” is that the group – the family, for example, or a small group of youths – comes before the individual. And I think I detect a sort of widespread return to this outlook.* [...] (7)

Nevertheless, one of the needs felt by man as a universal liberating phenomenon – regardless of his own condition – is still the quest for individual identification within the group: a group that would appear to be more managed than self-managed. The step of leaving this *corpus* is an exclusively individual action and calls on the person who takes it to make his peace with the absolute, the all, with his individual vision and Utopia.

The *Gesamtkunstwerk*, as a behavioural, stylistic and linguistic conviction and mindset, may constitute the moment when any style is overcome, when impotent man is swept off his feet by the awareness of his limits, albeit in his Utopian expression. The more visionary cases burst forth from the membrane of time to live and cohabit in unconfined spaces...

*«Viens! Oh! Viens voyager dans les rêves,
Au delà du possible, au delà du connu!»* (8)

What Maffesoli writes about contemporary man – more thought about than he thinks, more acted upon than an actor – is also interesting. Convinced as I am that thinking must translate unequivocally into action, so that real experience may also become no more than a pretext, we are now witnessing a notable devaluation of personal reality, of a weak conception of the body and of the *corpus*, or an over-valuation in the sense of trivialisation, of the exaltation of the object, of addiction to group, television and other models.

In that sense, today’s technological and hyperbolic society, with its excess of democracy, has certainly deprived pure thinking of the typical authenticity that is unequivocally linked to human creativity and finiteness.

I have already written in *La Famiglia. The Leaving Room* (9) about the infamous line between normality and otherness, passing over which remains a duty of growth and a more or less conscious commitment, a sign left by the artist, a for him indescribably significant gesture of cathartic, liberating passage, of breaking through the boundary between what is *said* and what is *left unsaid*, between the *licit* and the *illicit*, between the *body* and the *spirit* or *psyche*, between *temporary* and *infinite*: between *this side of the line* and the *beyond*: beyond the possible, beyond the known, as Baudelaire thought.

To a certain extent, that act of breaking through the boundary constitutes/d for us the exasperated attempt fundamentally to transfix and rout the concept of body in the quest for *Id*, as an individual interior, superior, involuntary and unconscious reality, and the artist is a sort of shaman, a communicator who uses different methods: the one who passes through himself.

[Marshall McLuhan's groundbreaking writings, Franco Vaccari's warnings about the *Technological Unconscious*, the advent of performance and body art as reappraisals of the body and its imprisonment, favouring its subjectivisation, the return to the concept of the "nature of man" with Joseph Beuys' neo-shamanism, Urs Lüthi's questioning of the concept of identity and of the relationship between subject and object: all this has provided cause and effect about the cognition of the human being. And, even earlier, there was Marcel Duchamp with his decontextualised and occult(ed) work.

And there's more. Because of its very nature, today's technological, telematic era of "short thinking" seems to have become tantamount to the time we have available. I also allude to humanity as a whole as it expresses itself ritually, tribally and through ongoing initiation and rites of passage towards a different decision-making maturity, more elevated: cosmic and conscious. Not always intelligent, even though it may be just.]

CREATIVITY = NATIONAL INCOME (10)

Maffesoli describes today's aggregative dimension, where a sort of confusion and cross-fertilisation prevails, as "tribal in type"; a society in which there is a severe loss of individual identity that is sometimes expressed in the form of behavioural emulation – for the most part summarised in mass emulative body phenomena, submissiveness to the media and the definition of a one-model-to-fit-all approach.

The *body* starts to be talked about again, as a term that can certainly be traced to many broader meanings and versions of anthropological or social man, within a given socio-political order. *Body Art*, an established artistic movement that started up around the end of the fifties, actually reflected a phenomenon that was already out there, whose history could be traced further back in time, to when man started thinking about the definition of his ego and how to overcome it, about his propensity for vision, for the sublime and the heroic. Openly tribal thinking, pregnant with ritual or with ritualistic hypnosis, also contains the vocation for transforming the ego into *Id*, as a revival or affirmation of the subconscious. As a matter of fact, the creation of a work of art does leave a graphic mark on the world, starting out from the artist's internal geography, from his spiritual supremacy and – always – expressing itself against any (de)limited timeframe.

Even though at first sight it may appear that *Body Art* tackles topics concerned with the body, as a whole it substantially analyses the behavioural phenomena related to "escaping from the body", the ones that enable us to explore the world of the ego and the *Id*, where so many parameters in fact become relative to a de-objectivisation of the body and an objectivisation –

or assumption – of a psychological, spiritual or even mystical identity: the act, then, of breaking out of the carnal constriction, of the static confines of the moral or moralistic judgement of a merely objectivist society, of the dualism of opposites, of the limits of the human dimension.

I believe it can be taken for granted these days that there is a truthful discussion about the bipartite aspects of good and evil, light and dark, although it may sound trivialising to melt the two together or to accept them at the same time as opposing dichotomies.

Emancipation from the body could mean discovering an individual way to counteract any group aestheticisation, emulation and globalising concepts that inhibit the cognition of the individual, of the subject. Self-investigation could and should induce man to greater awareness.

As Agnese Galotti (11) reminds us, reviving Jung, who compared the concept of *I do* with that of *I am aware of what I do*, Lea Vergine also wrote the following, in parallel with her writings about Body Artists:

[...] *What's important is not to know, but to know that one knows. This is a state in which culture is no longer of any conceivable use.* [...] (12)

Acknowledging collective aggregation as a form of neo-tribalism in which there is evidence of [...] *the fear of not being crushed by a global world and cultures, synonym of uncertainty and insecurity* [...], Silvio Ciappi reminds us of Maffesoli's thinking when he writes that the intellectual's task is also – and among other things – that of rehabilitating intuition [...] *as a means towards achieving knowledge and as a driver of intellectual, scientific and artistic creativity.* [...] (13)

This is that creativity that progresses from thought to form of experience and, as a consequence, interior growth, driving me to think intimately that no human being is illegal and trusting that this is more than just an *Enlightenment* vision.

[I'd like to add, here, that today's propaedeutics seem to have almost entirely betrayed the concept of being self-taught, driven by curiosity and based on the development of personal experience, as an element of uniqueness, individual inimitability and quest for our own ego. The figure of the politician is subordinate to the world of economics and finance.]

Continues Silvio Ciappi:

[...] *This brings us to the concept of community. The State, which is the community par excellence, is neither a collection of citizens who identify with the abstract principles of a republic, nor a sum total of consumers who calculate the costs and benefits of their actions. This outdated mechanistic and contractual model ignores the organic reality of social bonds: isolated individuals only exist in theories.*

Everyday life is a permanent movement of attraction and rejection, of contagion and fusion, of empathy and proxemics, of symbiosis and metamorphosis: the individual not only inherits and transmits the collective affiliations that existed before his time, but in his turn becomes committed to elective communities that forge his experience of the world. Thence comes the person (from the Latin word persona, meaning "mask"), which takes on the multiple identities that define the exuberance of social life, the diversity of the world and the polytheism of values.

While the moral of having to be has been and remains one of the obsessions of modern thinking, post-modern societies are increasingly often organised around aesthetics. Evidence of this is found in the cult of the body and care for nature, the success of sport and the quest for leisure pursuits, the importance of fashion and the preponderance of images, the staging of sensitivity and the primacy of emotivity, the taste of exploits and the pleasure of travelling. The predominance of the rule that obliged us to accept a given identity and a given behaviour is thus replaced by the prevalence of the style that enables us to identify and participate. This phenomenon articulated around desire and pleasure cannot be shrugged off as the hedonistic cleaving of a wealthy generation that has known no war, as reactionary critics often deplore. [...] (14)

Still on the subject of *Body Art*, Lea Vergine has also written:

[...] The attitude of ritualism gives further strength to a search for relationship between aesthetic activity and regressive pleasure. The discomfort of unrequited desire, the hazard implicit in our precarious existence, and the continuous tension that is experienced when faced with the prospects of hypotheses that may never become realizable are all understood to be quotidian situations that lead inevitably to a state of anguish for the being-in-the-world, and likewise to the pain that results from the impossibility of finding a real relationship with it. This, then, is what gives rise to the catastrophe reaction and the protection delirium. [...] (15)

[...] Post-modern tribes certainly do not all have a positive image, especially since the media, the markets or the Ministries of Culture have been working to instrumentalise some of them to their own advantage. What counts most is that the phenomenon of tribalisation does not always rule out the mass approach whose opposite it is said to be. [...] (16)

There you have it: the Ministries of Culture, of the industrialisation of culture and of the arts.

The ideal of collectivisation, of a shared awareness, of the group as an ordered aggregation whose purpose is to pursue noble aims, including defending the individual's human rights and cultural independence, seems to have been replaced – and not just recently – by the idea of collectivism. By creating a suffocating unawareness, today's technological and telematic world and, more generally speaking, the concept the "assembly line" beforehand have certainly achieved their aims: to standardise and integrate the individual into predetermined models and to move away from reality as experienced and (re-)defined by phases of increasing maturity. [A relationship of force, where the winner is the system and the *Enlightenment* world of functions.] While Maffesoli describes today's society as neo-tribal from a sociological standpoint, from an anthropological one today's "tribes" look somehow different from their remote counterparts: less aware and more subordinate.

The museums were born with industrialisation, not by chance, by as a cause and an intentional misunderstanding.

ART = KAPITAL (17)

Going back over history, social aggregations are found to have been constructed, as a model, at the same time as slow, initiatory configuration of the strength of the individual's identity within the group; it is a process that took place gradually, as awareness of the very concept of history gained ground. This energy in fact corresponded to man's awareness of history, to the

unflagging sequence of generations, a result of “reality and experience”, concepts that are still today capable of giving the individual a sense of autonomy in his growth towards maturity, knowledge and the preparation of the *here* as a step towards the *beyond*; all this so that willpower and decision could constitute cases of the loftiest, most heroic vigour... and mysticism maybe also as an antidote to the fear of uncertainty, of death and of responsibility.

Today’s aggregate social body (to which Maffesoli and Ciappi refer specifically in their essays), on the contrary, produces aspects [and is nourished by them] of regressive implosion, of solitude and of nihilism (where the struggle for survival – as Villani suggests – also throws us back to the status almost of a wild beast, towards today’s prevailing egoism, as the lack of dialogue corresponds to a human opportunity lost); against the need to reconstruct many important foundations, such as a modern family that does not suffer from mediaeval legacies, mental and intellectual freedom and property, the authenticity of being and its psychic self-determination.

Marco Villani still thinks that:

[...] In the end, when the great ideas and the great Utopias of history cross-fertilise with human nature, which is fundamentally an animal nature, they always become perversions... [...]

As I wrote before, *Body Art* painted today’s society in advance of its time. It had already formulated what everyone was predicting, stigmatising a mistaken concept of modernity of the system, throwing light, in the course of its theoretical and artistic progress, on the unhealthy perverse decrement in order to favour an aware revival of the individual’s own personality, starting – among other things – from infancy and its traumas and upsetting the purer of analytical criteria. The manner in which the relationship between subject and object has been questioned, to which Jasper refers, can be found here once again, in an almost psychopathological form of alienation.

To return to the topic of the body, or of society as an organism, the individual’s desire to lay claim to his emancipation from a group context emerges once again and more forcefully, even though – and despite aware dissemination – it still remains easily rooted in cultural or religious, or simply political and social, criteria today. To what extent do codes of identification stand out and make a mark of diversification from within majorities or minorities? How is the model applied to minority groups within others that dominate in terms of social or racial power?

This is where Matthys de Beer’s thinking about **Steven Cohen** (South Africa_1962) (18) and **Lincoln Theo** (South Africa_1972) (19) takes on new meanings, as the body goes back to being not only the individual’s primary language for expressing his subjective ego, but also a tool for reiterating the individual’s identity, also within his cultural and religious minority, as a gay Jew or as a transgender, in the two specific cases cited, for example. So de Beer’s contribution is of some relevance here when he puts this all into the perspective of the aspects of artistic multilingualism that are so essential to approaching thinking and creativity/creation today.

Political and institutional farsightedness has ceased to exist as a guarantee for each individual’s own space and liberal spirit. Once again in this case, the system of the industrialisation and corporativisation of thinking is unequivocally still going its negative way.

Umberto Galimberti wrote in a recent work:

[...] *We are in the world of technology and technology does not tend to a purpose, produces no meaning and no redemption, reveals no truth. It does one thing and one thing only: it functions. And as its functioning is becoming planetary, the concepts of individual, identity, freedom, salvation, truth, meaning and purpose end up relegated to the background, as do the concepts of nature, ethics, politics, religion and history that nourished the pre-technological era.* [...] (20)

Emancipation, as an attempt at personalisation, may take place as a result of a rebellion against the group and so against the model, sometimes taking a dramatic and exaggerated form; it may also take place as a result of self-denial, the bodily and intellectual isolation forced on the individual by the tribe; or of merely following behavioural clichés that end up excluding those who are different, or at least those who believe they belong outside a concept of majority, of standardisation and of systematic subordination and behave accordingly.

(Self-)punishment, mortification and mutilation of the body and of the mind: the latest trends point increasingly frequently at (self-)destruction, at the (self-) destructive phenomenon at work in youth society, where means of communication or communicability have lost sight of their aims, downgraded to a pure aestheticisation that is also deprived of contents in the grip of a given hierarchic control. The quest for the *Id* is thus said to correspond to a nostalgic and also more unconscious reconstruction of the relationships entertained by individuals with a reality they are often incapable of adopting; a process of across-the-board devaluation and draining whose evidence can also be seen in the contemporary arts.

[In this state of affairs, intelligence, too, is isolation and imprisonment, or self-defence.]

It may therefore be, in a more literal sense, that alienation appears to be more with regard to a passing phenomenon, related to no more than a social, economic and financial realignment; just another form of negative social growth to be shaken off as quickly as possible.

The *mal de vivre* expressed by Barbara (21) and Nietzschean disquiet have existed for some time and beyond time, almost like a state of grace or a symptom of a truth beyond the body... even though they may take different forms. Once again as a revelatory rather than an apocalyptic phenomenon, in a society in which the communications network tends – as I said before – to aestheticise and trivialise everything, including the body and the spirit, thus denying rather than confirming cases of absolute truthfulness belonging to the sphere of universal values.

The body as the “body of evidence”, evidence of a crime committed, the sign of a commercialisation of human life through its flesh, so as to progress to defining its spiritual truth as “evidence of an offence”.

Imprisoning the body, the individual, within a mass group is tantamount to reacting violently and with coercion, so as to make a statement about the power wielded by the group in question. This duress or self-coercion is brutal, because “violence” is “morally and ethically against others and against oneself”; a low degree of self-esteem and the inability to perceive the reciprocal interaction with reality “objectively”.

Intelligence isolates. A threshold of greatness.

The political community and the way in which it is organised sanction the application [of coercive imprisonment] in consideration of dualistic concepts, based on the notion of good and not-good, black and white: the enactment of measures whose purpose is to remove a

peculiarity or to subject it to restrictions. As a consequence, the imprisoned body reacts to its forced segregation by thrusting its problems into the sphere of the mind and then of somatisation.

Anaesthesia, de-materialisation and subversions of perspective

Monday, 15 October 2007, 12:16:46

[...] *Beware: this is an extremely dangerous border terrain. Where you can easily become an alchemist. The "manipulation" of reality and of the perception of reality is the crux of what we find ourselves experiencing at this moment in time as a "species". Maybe it all started from philosophy, then from the interpretation of artistic expression and then from the legislature. Psychology and sociology have joined into all this, regrettably sometimes and unintentionally becoming tools of that same manipulation. Information is no more than the latest stage... and let's not forget that the medium, too, is the meaning and becomes a tool for communications, context and reality. The art and, above all, the aesthetics that brings ethics with it may suddenly become a nucleus of resistance to destructive corruption and maceration. [...]*

(Antonio Pettinelli, Rome)

The phenomenon of etherisation, of hypnotism, can be found in *Body Art*, deriving from the conceptualisation and de-objectivisation of the body, through a process of repetition of a gesture, of rituality and of ritualisms.

Some hold that such a stripping-down within a performance can be traced back to the necessary regressive pleasure of discovering one's origins in one's own internal and mental darkness: unearthing the absolute individual truth that, from a psychological standpoint, could correspond to a return to the maternal womb or, more simply, to degenerative elements of our way of "living in our bodies", in reaction to the opportunity of (self-)acceptance and of being accepted. Plus sundry references to such organs as the genitals, the anus and/or others: blood, defecation etc.

As I wrote before, *Body Art* lays claim to escaping from the body, as a finite space, so as to use other methods to access never-ending space. The quest for the ego and the acceptance of the *Id* come about almost in the process of the psycho-motory reconstruction of the individual's experience. Emancipation could take place at several different levels.

Agnese Galotti wrote this in a lecture she gave in 2001:

[...] *Ecstasy, as a mystical-religious experience, can be found in all cultural arenas; in tribal societies, it may play a part in ceremonies of initiation and is often sought and/or induced by means of dances and particular rhythmic movements capable of triggering particular mental and physiological phenomena characterised by the temporary loss of the normal functions of consciousness and of the senses. These effects are often interpreted as the advent of a peculiar religious relevance, as a moment of direct, personal contact with God or with supernatural spirits and forces. [...]* (22)

Yet Agnese Galotti also continues:

[...] *Jaspers (23) explains the phenomenon as an interruption in the relationship between subject and object that is the normal condition of our experience... [...] (24)*

A statement that might also be applied to the relationship between sacredness and madness.

In this sense, the mortification of the body and martyrdom could also be interpreted as an attempt to sunder the relationship between subject and object.

Art and art literature as the subject. [...] *It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors. [...] (25)*

Art has within itself this double, ambiguous, luminous identity of both containing and inhibiting dualism, moralism and immorality.

Closing your eyes does not mean you are sleeping. Uprooted man and the family album. The syndrome *à la* Beckett and Woolf of *Orlando*. (26)

[...] *Repressed instincts are the dangers that menace the condition of civilized man. It is thus necessary to demolish the conventions of decency that support the great lie, necessary to destroy the artificial screen that separates the public from the private. Every latrine is a drawing room, every drawing room a latrine. The distinction between sublime and vulgar no longer makes sense. We are hidden beneath our opposite. [...]*

[...] *The spectator is forced to repeat psychic experiences that he has already lived through in the past, to reactivate old conflicts. The projections that he is instinctually incapable of not performing render him at one and the same time the victim and the performer of what is happening in front of his eyes. His neuroses charge the "scenes" with an additional meaning and another importance that are thus superimposed upon the events that the artists have already subjected to metamorphosis. [...] (27)*

Many – and varied – are the reasons why balances are lost, bringing about that regressive, inevitable, seductive meeting between the victim and his executioner.

As a reactive and reactionary gesture, breaking out of the body does not necessarily constitute a positive act, as it sometimes takes extreme forms. The altered relationship with reality may be such as to trigger an effect of schizoid fragmentation; in other words – as Agnese Galotti has said, quoting Karl Jaspers – *an interruption in the relationship between subject and object that is the normal condition of our experience... even though it may be traceable to the concept of ecstasy which, depending on a variety of factors, can be read as a sacred phenomenon or one of pure madness and/or of a pernicious pathology of the psyche.*

[...] *So the mystical life is also a way of cushioning the agony of separation, of attenuating the pain of loss, of reducing the sadness of mourning, which does not necessarily mean that it is just a "strategy of consolation" for the ego. On the contrary, it tends to testify to how the experience of pain and of loss is an essential element of ecstasy as a perception of totality. [...] (28)*

In the process of dissociating from reality, the artist may contain within himself all the potential for his art to constitute that margin of freedom and authenticity: not just coherence and stability, but continuous, never-ending research and quest. That fluid, indefinable line around which it is important to move without, however, wandering too far away on one side or the other.

Mental confusion inhibits intellectual order.

[...] *To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim.* [...] (29)

Some of the topics are shared by many by reflection, although only by a few in the restricted field of understanding an abstract universe, almost an alchemy of the mind. *Overcoming* the rational dimension remains a priority ambition...: art as a tool and a language chosen freely to express how we pass through life, with its obvious contradictions, until we reach the inexpressible.

At this stage, I'd like to reconsider two works (the *Jerusalem* trilogy and *Extreme Oath*) by the Italian artist **Valter Luca Signorile** (Italy_1965) (30). These are two works of video art made using a mobile phone: a fleeting, precarious, almost aesthetic-cosmetic medium, a tool for expressing a short thought, one that can be intentionally concealed in a pocket or in the car dashboard, but for dynamic, occulted communications, as well as a veritable piece of socially desirable design.

A researcher even before being an artist, he overcomes the limits of what we can normally do with the "telephone" as a medium, finally making it become trans-functional. In the self-referential state that is indispensable for him, the artist uses this medium almost as though he wanted to spy on himself morbidly in his impotent, (in)voluntary solitude. In his voluntary, prickly isolation and passive self-absorption.

This tool of social aesthetics and yet also of communications, as I said, also takes on functions that enable its user to extend its application to advanced situations of a rather different, obscure imagery. Time and again, the way that the video camera in a mobile phone can be (ab)used has been condemned, for example in the recording of a tragic disaster, of a gang rape or of other violence exercised by a group on an individual, providing a range of variations on the sadly splendid theme of the performance of an individual or collective drama, of a misfortune.

The medium is technological and so is the performance.

That is what Valter Luca Signorile does with his videos *Extreme Oath* and *Jerusalem #1, #2, #3*, stealing away moments of intimate internal laceration and giving them back to us.

Maybe it's already too late when the awareness he has achieved enables him to break free into his art, in a way crossing as well as stating, (self-)denying and sacrificing; passing beyond the application of his firm belief in his own model for life, beyond the obscure evil, beyond the model and the matrix that wear him down... beyond the dualism that determines the astringent concept of moral, that forces him into the cellular mentality of what I already described as "short thinking", of the triteness of deceitful technology and of self-concealment: ...beyond the idea that recites that the way to find freedom from a sense of guilt is through self-punishment, self-destruction and imprisonment.

Schizophrenia and destructive superstition.

Only dogs lick the hand of the black angel, the great eunuch, this glowering master with the face of a goat and dyed fur. Within a perimeter that I want to demolish, always, and with which I do not identify. A black, perceptibly transparent veil covers nearly every thing, every living being. Any attempt whatsoever that the artist makes to break out of his prison is fatal to him, as he is hunted down, captured, immobilised and cancelled out. Unequivocally imprisoned in the group.

Aspettando Orlando, an installation dated 2003, shines with the sad tale of dualism between desire and rejection: a fragile crossword of identities balanced on a knife-edge between a sodomite, visionary desire, as open as it remains unspoken, and the hetero-farce of a homosexual relationship, whose acceptance is insecure and shameful; ...but also between a dream and the desire to make it come true, between thought and action. There is evidently a reference here to Virginia Woolf's novel *Orlando* (31), published in 1928, as there is also clear evidence of Signorile's sad psychological construction.

A reference to bipolarism and to dichotomy is also manifest, not merely as a repetition of the duality of counterpoint – to which Filippa refers in the essay quoted in the note –, but actually as an allusion to the opposite, to the counterpart, to the comparative combination between two poles whose interpretation is said to trigger the concept of moral and, as a result, of self-denial.

[...] *Beckett's plays shatter our illusions of the individual in control of himself and his destiny. In a paroxysmal and premonitory way, he shows the contingent and ephemeral nature of all individualism and underlines the factitiousness inherent in the process of individuation which can only lead to a prison.* [...] (32)

Within this dynamism, it may also be possible to catch a glimpse of a pernicious disease of willpower and of the relationship between conscious and unconscious, between object and subject, that is bound up with the desire to wait, suspended between desire itself and the world of dreams.

Signorile's symbolic world – or symbolism more generically speaking – clearly takes us back to the concept – as might be expected – of overcoming something, as a flight into a quest or a quest for flight, into the sense of pitiful, statuary sublimation of a personal, mental tragedy, of the desperate attempt to achieve a space-time shift to escape from reality towards sidereality. Asking for mystical religious responses as excuses, as he might prefer to do.

The artist claims to summarise the fields of study about the life of Man, in which the Centrality is Man himself; in this case, a sick, tragic, imprisoned centrality in search of redemption. To do this, he considers the layer upon layer of experience "in general" (not merely *Erlebnis* or *Erfahrung*) that have accumulated over hundreds of years and questions the predetermined criteria of our material life on Earth, trivially and usefully carnal, which he does not refute, but designs and spreads slowly within himself, with imbalance and suffering.

Both in *Jerusalem #1, #2, #3* and in *Extreme Oath*, Signorile seeks to put new order into mnemonic situations, within the bounds of a heritage characteristically featuring others that are substantially more unconscious and psychic, though no less important: you might almost think that the reaction could still be considered a reality that is yet waiting to be experienced.

To the irrational, he adds the unconscious and removed, trans-real, religious spirituality, for a plausible response that maybe cannot be, almost as though he were in search of a reason for

the incomprehensible and/or for that which has not been understood, for that obscure part that only art has a hope of containing and allowing and that only art can set free and reveal. Signorile sets out to revive this through its unconscious psychic dimension and experience of life as an ordinary man.

As I already had occasion to write in the essay *La Famiglia. The Leaving Room*, invocation and imprecation constitute the continued imbalance between the imperfection of the human being and the possibility to perfect him, an odious quest between the boundary of the carnal and the cathartic gesture towards superhuman immateriality. A sort of quest for the absolute, a garden of bodily and mental signs and symbols in space; his reality is dichotomic (ignoring his inexpressible and unexpressed fragile interior world), as he still appears to be attempting to clothe the real imperfection of finiteness with infinity. His conscious, reasoned humility takes him back to the origin, to the All that stays balanced on that knife's edge between remorse and resentment, to a universal synthesis that concedes no aestheticisation to aesthetics, no spectacle to significance.

His video trilogy *Jerusalem #1, #2, #3* (2007) touches on the theme of the "body as language" and of the ritualism practised by imprisoned man as a light – maybe even a vain one – at the end of the tunnel of the liberation of the spirit. Ritualism corresponds to liturgy and repetition: to obsession. And obsession, as we know, is also an unachieved and so unrequited desire, even though it belongs to a certain extent to the world of virtual or vain things.

As I wrote (described) above, this trilogy was made in an anti-aesthetic manner, using a mobile phone: the works are three actions without any audience, nobody at all, in which the artist-actor stages himself as he goes through repeated symbolic physical acts located somewhere between invocation and imprecation, almost as though it were a mechanism of psycho-dependence brought about by a gestural hypnosis: a tortuous, unconscious automatism that verges on losing all real reasonable meaning and becoming a theatre of life and in its turn a topical locus.

Signorile conceives of the locus of the shoot as a trans-physical room. His gestures are equally metaphysical and solitary: the fists he beats desperately on his breast or the hands he raises towards the heavens in the process of his developing into a potential adult: the vanity of emancipation. His personal *mise en abîme* (consignment to ruin) is in his repetition of the act of invocation, in his obsessive reiteration as an assumption and, later on, a cloning of the world's tragedies, of his own and everybody's tragedies, just as the oppressive awareness that original sin and remorse continue to (co-)exist in a ceaseless crescendo towards a liberation from a condition of imprisonment.

This liturgy is almost as though it were a form of antidote to the awareness of Death versus an unlikely divine justice, or just man's sense of responsibility.

[...] *The ritual perpetuates itself, and through the variety of routine or everyday gestures the community is reminded that it is a whole. [...]*

[...] *As I have just stated, the community 'exhausts' its energy in creating itself. In its very repetitiveness, the ritual is the strongest proof of this expenditure and by so doing it guarantees the continued existence of the group. In the anthropological view of death, it is this paradox with regard to the funeral ritual that reintroduces 'the community ideal which attempts to reconcile man to death as well as to life'.* (L.-V. Thomas, *Rites de mort*, Fayard, Paris 1985, pp. 16, 277. It might also pointed out that J.-L. Nancy, *op. cit.*, p. 42 ff., draws the comparison between community and

death. About the cyclic, tragic aspect of rituality, see my *La conquête du présent. Pour une sociologie de la vie quotidienne*, DDB, Paris 2000 [also in Italian as *La conquista del presente*, launa, Rome 1983.] [...] (33)

Signorile's work with the topics of searching for individualism in the suffering of relationships leads back to – or at least implies – an ethical and moral exercise that asks questions of relevance not only to self-reference, but also to self-determination: questions and tools of thinking that, in their turn, then prove to be necessary for defining concepts of ethics and morals.

While Valter Luca Signorile – already in the exhibition entitled *The Body of Evidence. Imprisonment* (34) – takes veiled satisfaction from any form of acceptance in or of the physical pain reflected in body language, which – in its fragile taken-for-granted – is taken to be self-martyrdom and/or endurance of suffering, in the sense of the ultimate religious and experiential end from an exclusively mystical standpoint, others – less imprisoned in that sort of religious self-gratification – appear to attribute the main causes of conflicts to this apparent spiritual sublimation.

Torture is the consequence of a test of faith and of a very intimate, ascetic counterforce that also constitutes the condition of more or less voluntary isolation of the individual; nevertheless, it may trans-manifest outwardly, also as an illusory collective involvement, in a manner as destructive as it is spectacular and media-focused. A sort of mass rendering, in a situation in which there is not necessarily any category or identification.

What comes to mind is the martyrdom of the kamikaze who turned themselves into flying bombs, other ancient forms of ceremonial and theatrical splendour of suffering inflicted, such as exaggerated blame, the imposition of the law, the declaration of authority, the application of torture or religious torments, the death of a probable hero, the collapse of the twin towers of the World Trade Center in 2001 etc., as well as such other tragedies as the Shoah.

Having martyrdom inflicted on you or going forth towards it.

Coherence could correspond to an attitude of closure and of dialogue with oneself.

Experience should be experienced, not suffered.

But there's more. The expression and acceptance of imprisonment, of torment, of (self-)repression in general is a statement of the power wielded by the system, not – as many would have it – its denial within an evolved vision.

This is what Lionello Puppi has written about Justice:

[...] *More or less three centuries ago, in the brief introduction to his celebrated etching The Modes of Legal Punishment, Jacques Callot in his turn alluded to the deterrent value of a punishment inflicted in public ("supplicium sceleris froenum"), at the very moment in which he magnified the significance of spectacular punishment in a crude, horrifying sequence of examples. The scene is set in a large square; there are onlookers: so, yes, it is a spectacle, a fleeting one and yet recurrent in obedience to the script – which can be performed in many different ways, but is ultimately compact and fixed – of the use of the staged warning of punishment and the use of all sorts of machines of execution to make a statement about the Power, whatever that Power that may be, as the guarantor or law and order [G.Sadoul, Jacques Callot... op. cit., Paris 1969]: of security. To tell the truth, however, Callot was preceded by Pieter*

Bruegel in his shocking drawing of Justitia, dated 1559, now in the Prints Cabinet at the Royal Albert I Library in Brussels.

*I omit to investigate the contents of deluded irony underlying the conception of the image and making declarations (justice: in the middle, high on a podium and like the blindfolded woman who holds the scales in the left hand as she dispenses it at random with the sword she grasps in her right hand, is represented by the group of judges, concerned and intent only on consulting the law books and on drawing up the sentences of condemnation, with pedantic application etc.) and that can also be found, for example, in the etchings by Peter Flötner that represent Justice (Gerechtigkeit) now in the pillory, now while she escapes from the horror of a room where torture is being inflicted [about the Bruegel drawing, see L. Münz, *Bruegel Drawings. A Complete Edition*, London 1958, pp. 228, 229, cat. 146. For Flötner's etchings, cf. F. Holstein, *German Engravings, Etchings and Woodcuts, c. 1400-1700*, Amsterdam 1954, p. 755]. It is the approach used in the composition that interests us as an implacable, well-distributed sequence of torments, as though they were chapters in a procession of pain and of death: water torture, the ropes, decapitation, whipping; plus the procession that winds its way from the city square to a horizon where we can make out the smoke of an auto-da-fé, the gaunt profile of a gallows from which several corpses hang and wheels on which broken bodies are spreadeagled. In actual fact, it is a theatrical site, still within the city and is immediate environs, a place of display, with the townsfolk as its audience. The city: a space, I repeat, that comprises splendid places of worship and magnificent buildings, squares enlivened by majestic fountains and wide, well-paved streets, as well as neglected hovels with squalid, temporary, tumbledown shanties in narrow, dusty alleyways clogged with refuse giving off all sorts of nauseous fumes. And the audience: of course there are the lords and ladies in their carriages or in the procession, as well as merchants and craftsmen, but above all there is the heaving mass of those who live by the day, from hand to mouth, the miserable and the desperate. The display, finally, is not made up of a sumptuous progress between parades and arches, statues and achievements of wood and papier-mâché, a procession to celebrate a sovereign's superior, glorious status, the joyful, many-hued passage of groups celebrating a princely marriage, nor the slow, solemn, chanting progress of the mourners taking their last leave of a great man departed this life, nor yet the comparable devotions of any of the thousands of religious confraternities [cf. the excellent essay by R. Rusconi *La religione dei cittadini: Riti, Credenze, Devozioni*, in AA.VV., *Ceti sociali... op. cit.*, Viterbo 1985, pp. 17-40, with further substantial bibliographical references] or the performance of passion plays [R. Pacciani, *La città come palcoscenico... op. cit.*, Viterbo 1985, pp. 61 ff. See also and at least the very rich proceedings of the *IVème Colloque de la Société Internationale pour l'Etude du Théâtre Médiéval* (1983), M. Chiabò – F. Doglio – M. Maymone (eds), Viterbo 1985, which are very useful for painting a general European picture. Methodologically fundamental, among other things because of the attention paid to the social involvement on the city level triggered by sacred and secular performances, are the classical textbook by J. Duvignaud, *Les ombres collectives. Sociologie du théâtre*, Paris 1965 (also available in an Italian translation, Rome 1974) and H. Rey – Floud's, *Pour une dramaturgie du Moyen Age*, Paris 1980.], but by the ritual, no less calculated and regulated in its development – yet made up truly of pain, of blood and of death inflicted on the "star" of the show, who is its "forced actor" [cf., C. Frugoni, *Realtà, trasposizione scenica... op. cit.*, Viterbo 1985, pp. 84 ff. and A. Mango, 1989, pp. 164-165.] – of the execution of justice. Here is the Power, once again: yet this time in the representation not of its magnificence, but of its dreadfulness, shining with a different light. Is it possible that this ritual that impregnated everyday life so obsessively could have left no reflection, no deep mark, on the conscious or subconscious, individual and collective conscience? [...]*

[...] A performance – an urban one to boot: the point is repeated – par excellence: and it is no coincidence that another French expression designates the conclusive episode of the capital event: échafaud (scaffold) derives from the language of the theatre. Comparably, in German, the scaffold could even be described as the Schaubühne (literally the "display stage"), while

Italian makes frequent reference to the “terrible spectacle of justice”. Except that the element of radical differentiation from every other one of the many and varied ways in which the Power is celebrated, making it a privileged episode and the most splendid of all, actually consists of the fact that there is absolutely no room for pretence or imitation, of the total, unalloyed truth of the performance of the body’s physical suffering, of the awful screams of the condemned wretch, of the horror of the mutilations to which he is subjected in a terrifying crescendo.

*Did a Mendelssohn and a Schiller not assimilate the elaborate typology of the capital execution to the category of “tragic” and of “sublime”? Stimulated by Burke who, in a revealing passage, remarked how the theatres would empty of their audiences as soon as an important execution was announced, as everyone moved out into the public square or the open street where it was scheduled to take place, and where their participation and their involvement, by virtue of the authentic, definitive character of a rather different performance, would be not so much – as it were – one of artificial emotion, but of existential participation and, in the etymological sense of the word, of compassion [cf. M. Mendelssohn, *Philosophische Schriften*, Ersten Teil, Berlin 1771, pp. 142-143, and F. Schiller, *Über die tragische Kunst* (1972), in F. Schiller, *Vom Pathetischen und Erhabenen*, L. Berghahn (ed.), Stuttgart 1981, pp. 31-32. (“When a numerous procession accompanies a criminal to the showplace [*Schauplatz*] of his sentence, neither the pleasure of the love of justice satisfied, nor the less noble one of vendetta achieved, can explain such a phenomenon. The wretch may even be pardoned in the heart of the spectators, the sincerest piety may be focused on his salvation: yet all the greater will grow the desire, on the part of the onlookers, to pay close attention and listen well to the exhibition of his sufferings. While, if those who are more sensitive and finer of soul may make an exception, this depends on the fact that the strength of piety and of the rules of good manners prevail in him”). For the “source”, cf. E. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, London 1757 (though without forgetting Nietzsche in *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, II, 6: “An der grossen Strafe ist so viel Festliches”: i.e.: there is so much of celebration in a great punishment)].*

[...] Of course the foundation on which this entire spectacle was built was primarily the Law, at the point where it provides for and prescribes the type of sentence and punishment, in relation to the type of crime committed, complete with all the suitable aggravations of suffering to be applied: and there is an obligation on me to point out that – without even touching on the problems of legal history, which is not my discipline – even a superficial, fleeting glance at the texts of the codes and statutes emanated, amended and reformed that were in force in Europe between the fourteenth and the nineteenth centuries offers an extremely broad and varied range of methods of punishment, often going so far as to provide illustrations, both in the manuscript versions and the printed ones that already started appearing towards the end of the fifteenth century: suffice to cite the endless repertoire listed by von Amira. [...] (35)

Religious faith and mystical experience still represent a concept of life and a precise geography of the spirit for some individuals. Isolation is one of their pre-conceptions or first concepts. Can the individual experience of faith be extended to the group or to the model? If not, is it possible that it will be transformed into fanaticism or integralism, bigotry and (in)tolerance?

As for wars, scourges, human tragedies or holocausts, was the aim to act in the name of a political or religious faith in attributing a liberating meaning to them as apocalyptic as it is splendidly theatrical, almost as though it were a supposed necessary evil to be defeated? Just as Puppi or Zygmunt Bauman fit in quite neatly while we are on the subject of imprisonment, this and other worse measures of inhibition are said to equate to a form of prevention, of fear of the social, professional and intellectual decline paradoxically generated by the system itself, in which – as Bauman thinks – necessary repression prevails over precautionary measures or others designed to correct the damage out through education. Lastly, the collective pleasure of

feeling liberated by those who must have no place in the political-social, racial or religious fabric.

One of society's many regressive elements – and not just today – that would put the dualism between power and freedom or – as in the case mentioned a short while ago – analytical capacity or incapacity, good and evil, normality and diversity etc. back inside an interplay of relationships.

[...anxiety would be the obligatory way-station towards ecstatic forms that liberate from self-infliction, or in any case from a state of imprisonment or of isolation.]

To take up my main line of reasoning again – already sketched out for Signorile – about the analysis of the relationship between the group and the individual, a sort of “Arianna's thread” that ought to give us food for thought about the concept of rediscovery and of identification, it is as though, when choosing the two works *The Singing Lesson 1* (2001) and *The Game of Tag* (1999) by Artur Zmijewski (Poland_1966) (36), I had wanted to represent myself through the artist's eye when approaching his works; in other words there is a comparison between the author of exhibitions and the author of works of art; counterpositions, bipolarisms; depiction and representation of otherness, of the holocaust as an instrument of sacrifice of diversity, of the degree of acceptance of the individual on the part of the group, the universe of ecclesiastic power and of the Church.

This is once again a work about the forceful relationship between a dominant culture and a minority, also in the broad sense of the term, and about how the individual's idiosyncrasies really attempt to identify with the group, at the same time as actually being integrated. It does this provocatively and provokingly. Zmijewski makes a terrible, pitiless attempt to sublimate and discuss the pathology as a disease that makes itself manifest from birth, or also as an “evil” sanctioned by society, their acceptance and the reflections around the sacrifice. The film style used by the artist is always the prevailing documentary one and is contextual in its approach to strong topics that research and analyse human nature, by adopting an analytical approach to the use of the camera.

The preparation and performance of the *Kyrie*, from the *Polish Mass* composed by Jan Maklakiewicz in 1944, on the part of a choir of deaf-mutes filmed by Zmijewski inside a Catholic church is the theme of this first work: *The Singing Lesson 1*. Although it is constructed without any relevant narrative chronology, the work is highly coherent and sensual in the dialogue between sound and performance. The video starts with the image of the altar piece located in the church where the tale is told. It depicts Jesus Christ and, while the video camera changes field, slowly panning downwards, the choir of young deaf and dumb men and women appears, issuing its abstract vocals, organising itself and exercising in the performance under the guidance of a conductor and an organist. There is willpower, but incommunicability. Reality and vision.

Because of the choristers' innate infirmity and their involuntary inability to hear themselves, the author questions the problem of how to express the ego with the body, together with the ethical relationship he creates in relation to his use of the linguistic medium in art. But there is more, as the artist goes further. The spectator is convinced of a comparative, conscious analysis of the acceptance of *Diversity*. A tendency towards the sublime and the author's poetic mindset make this video almost a metaphysics of *Otherness*, the attempt to overcome the parameters of appraising and constructing a true, absolute possibility of acceptance.

Without any form of misunderstanding, Zmijewski tackles the question related to History and to the admission of (his own) historical awareness. The strong, complex and controversial awareness of Catholic Christianity revealed in *The Singing Lesson 1* seems to provoke a shadow of irksome unease once again in his attitude to the historical period of Nazism and of Poland's annexation to the Third Reich.

This face-to-face with the curator derives from his decision to approach the 1999 work *The Game of Tag*, a video comprising two consecutive acts without any break between; one, the first act, takes place in a cellar, while the second is situated in an old gas chamber from a Nazi extermination camp.

The work develops around a sarcastic cross-fertilised parallel between the pattern, or game, of naked bodies as a symbolic and psychotherapeutic return (the game) to traumas and to their objectivisation, and the reconstruction, as conscious as it is voluntary, of an identity that has been "put away": the scene of the basement as a concealed, invisible part of an inhabited domestic space, or as a mental space put away. The cellar immediately and ably also becomes a place of death and of extermination, transmuting almost tautologically and cruelly into a gas chamber in the second act of the video.

It is a psychological state of prolonged tension that the artist continuously intends to create between opposing concepts, such as normality and diversity, but also such as *voluntary* and *involuntary*.

It is this last pair of terms that takes us back in parallel to the concept of historical development, around which the artist stigmatises the involuntary nature of the trauma, in cause or effects, and voluntary drama and responsibility. Holocaust as a responsibility of mankind, as the exercise of free will in the extermination and destruction of diversities or religious and ethnic minorities: the voluntary awareness of the disfigurement of the body and of its human and spiritual dignity in imprisonment and in physical and moral perdition.

The combination between the systematic extermination of human lives and the concept of play, as a lucid analysis of decomposition and recomposition, or of destruction with the pretext of a new reconstruction, appears to be even more bitter.

Hence the need for the discourse on which Matthys de Beer ventures about "gender" in relation to the codes for identifying a minority and the individual within it.

His is a critical contribution and provides substantial food for thought, more specifically coagulating around the dual poles of *nationalism* and *religion*.

In the video installation project entitled *Extreme Oath* (2007), Valter Luca Signorile links the idea of unconscious experience up with that of the moment of birth, vividly – and in an unequivocally autobiographical manner – reiterating the experiences of *Body Art* enunciated by Vergine. The reconstruction of the unconscious dimension between dark and light, life as a segment between night and day, as a state of awareness that has been forgotten or put away, is discussed once again between uncertain rationality and irrationality, between the violence of betrayal and sentimental civilisation or civil education for feelings. To what extent is the irrational a part of life as it is experienced, forgotten or put away, as a sequential layering of human and/or trans-human reality that has already been experienced? Is this darkness as a (re-)birth, as a rediscovery of oneself in the centre of birth?

Extreme Oath is a video shoot of the lower part of the body, with bare feet that are having some difficulty fitting into a small basin containing a reddish liquid, hinting at blood as an

element of life, of passion and of death, and at amniotic fluid, as a sign of an incestuous return to the maternal womb. The feet penetrate into this liquid symbolically and are gradually covered with the substance, almost as though they were re-enacting, or re-experiencing, the act of birth from the mother, only in reverse, while the coincidences diverge for Signorile into devastating interferences and misunderstandings, moving desperately and pointlessly in search of a coherent, yet individual, sexual, erotic, religious and – even more importantly – sentimental identity.

[Mother and matricide.]

The extenuating, obsessive presence of the maternal female, as a consequent counterbalance to the lack of solemnity and mythology on the part of the paternal figure, is to a certain extent one of the topics in this video, the testimonial of a psychological subconscious imprisoned in the regressively reconstructible, in sentimental and physical incest, as well as in individual, professional and social decline.

The reflection is a neo-classicism...

Imbalance, excitability, autonomy and uncontrollability of reflected vision. The obsession of the dream.

The analysis of the falsification generated by technology, as a “tampered mirror of obsessions”, is re-elaborated in his works by **Stefano Scheda** (Italy_1957) (37).

By way of introducing this artist, it is important to cite *Protagonista di un film che non voleva fare. Ovvero l'artista* (2007), a film made by **Devis Venturelli** (Italy_1974) (38) as a sort of biographical tribute to the artist, in which the latter agreed to be the actor, appearing as a desperate lead role caught up with himself and a slave of his scenographer. The reference is considered to be important, as it throws clarifying light on Scheda's tormented creative personality, in parallel with his entire production proceeding.

In the film narrative of this biographical work, the artist is a prisoner of his obsessions. Making intelligent use of the medium, of nervy cuts and editing on the verge of animation, Venturelli clearly highlights the topics related to his leading man's fears: cross-fertilisation, promiscuity, viral disease, contamination by organic liquids, hysteria about contact and interaction, self-mortification as prevention and everything that ought to lead us back unequivocally to illness and to physical and moral decay. Nor is sexual identity extraneous to this. The representation of a form of pathology, which for Scheda constitutes almost a state of normality. A psychic and mental condition split between the affirmation and the negation of the ego, between desire and obsession, between reality and allegory.

Referring to the two works that Scheda installed in the exhibition *The Body of Evidence. Imprisonment*, in the video *Fuoridentro #2* (2006), the scene is set by a wall built in the foreground out of little cages stacked up on top of each other, containing medium-sized songbirds, behind which men and women are coming out of the sea. From behind this metal barrier, they head naked towards us, the audience, morbidly curious, looking at us as though through the door of a prison: their vantage point is a different world from ours.

They observe us with scanty concern from behind this fence that blends and becomes metaphorically one with the wall of the exhibition space, almost as though they were living – from our unique vantage point – imprisoned behind and beyond the projection and trying to break across the threshold between abstract and physical, between imaginary and real, between the body as projected and the real one.

It is exactly around this autobiographical declaration of impotence that Sceda's entire opus unfolds.

Also in the specific case of the work under consideration, the nudity expresses that the soul has been stripped bare: the more or less great opportunity we all have to try to discover the truth about and within ourselves.

Nudity as the lightness of being, but also as the aesthetic ideal of internal beauty expressed through the body. It is a merely reflected sensuality that goes beyond the artist's ideal grid, immediately becoming the wall of the closed space of a museum, where the artist plays his cards in the way he interacts with the public.

This is what is so tragic about this dialogue between dream and reality, the magical instant when the sublimation of the sexual, ideal body meets Sceda's real obsessive fears, who is regressively dangerous, actually diseased... as though the quest for truthfulness and the exploration of the *Id*, of the truth in its unconscious vision, were necessarily to touch on subdued, serious and dark dimensions of the human soul.

Once again, here is a perverse dialogue between voluntary and involuntary, between cause and effect, between the autonomy and the uncontrollability of the psyche.

Thinking of the image projected as a reflection, a sort of mirror, in which we may see our own visions reverberating or our longed-for Utopias reflected, the artist from Bologna manages to project "his truth" in the aesthetic beauty of the scene and, above all, of the undressed bodies. The obsession of his unfulfilled expectations, of the desires he will never be able to convert into real action, of his carnal and erotic, beautiful and negative hedonism, will stay imprisoned in his art, as it has already surpassed reality.

Man whose corporal pleasure has been expropriated.

In this state of difficult dissociation, the bodily seduction expressed by Sceda reflects nothing but his hallucination, his obsession with the sensual allure of the body that he will never possess. A universe of vanity.

This explains the insistent presence of the mirror as a medium in his eclectic works, as a surface that reflects more than just the soul.

In a way that bears comparison to the artistic works of Raidpere, Zmijewski or Signorile, the observer accepts the active responsibility of being and reverberating the work's significance, at the same time as his own nightmares.

Even more obvious, in *Cartoline* (2004), is the artist's humiliating male fantasy, as he truthfully constructs a sort of magic box, an array of mirrors installed on a beach by the sea, in which the naked bodies of bathers are reflected: more or less conscious actors. This is once again a case of reality within reality, or of reflected images.

Otherwise, it is an interesting re-pacification between the natural elements of earth, water and sky.

Art imprisoned, emulation or self-abuse

[...] *All the old categories of interpretation have exploded. For example, we cannot think in terms of the "individual" any more, a concept that in many respects once constituted the very crux of modernity, even though it gave rise to other definitions and conceptualisations.* [...] (39)

[...] *Post-modern tribes certainly do not all have a positive image, especially since the media, the markets or the Ministries of Culture started thinking of exploiting them to their own advantage. What counts most is that the phenomenon of tribalisation does not always cancel out the mass tendencies it sets out to counteract.* [...] (40)

Somewhere, somehow, sociologists believe that the community phenomenon may be a fundamental and integral part of the way that an advanced collective awareness is formed, as well as of how the group's ethical and moral exercise is developed; they also point an accusing finger at a particular development of post-modern and contemporary society for having downscaled individuality and individualism – as characteristics – within the aggregation. Disagreeing with Maffesoli's thinking, which holds that exclusiveness is not necessarily the same thing as exclusion, however, I believe that an effect of alienation can be triggered (un)consciously in technological society and the virtual world (which is not always the same thing as the potential universe). Anyway, or in any case, in a society ruled by the media, towards its extension to the model and to the matrix.

Art and artistic production have not been set free of the yoke of post-industrial and above all technological society yet, either. While references to science and quantum theory have admittedly provided food for thought and for conceptual construction in the area of artistic creativity, the parallel development of technologies and the intrusiveness of machines have certainly also contributed to deporting the premises of authenticity from the message and from artistic languages. As it is those artists who have devoted their work to foretelling and denouncing this phenomenon of manipulation of the conscience and replacement of history; such is their action on the subconscious.

Reviving the idea that there may have been a proportionally increasing relationship between the bourgeois "dictatorship" of the object and progressively more subjective artistic research, vigorously marked by the historical transition (I referred beforehand to the early twentieth century and here add the notes of warning voice in *The Glass Bead Game* (1943), by Hermann Hesse, a novel I am particularly fond of), the museum could here play the more or less conscious role of the place of power and/or of the imprisonment of culture (as a causal effect), accentuating the countless divergences between the power itself and artistic vision.

The identity of the order of museums or of institutes of culture is that of an initiation into the debate about the importance of creativity as a target for people's consciences, even before being a barricade of the political power, of party statistics or of a prestige showplace; although that, on the other hand, is what happens increasingly often.

Paradoxically, the actual art is looked upon with superciliousness and very often with fear by the system itself, as museums and institutes of culture have in fact lost impact and identity as a place for artistic experimentation and research.

Economic and financial power also influences art and its market in the broadest of interpretations of the term.

A museum's programmatic decisions are often dictated by this logic, pursuing the formation of a collection, a didactic approach and so on. Politics, economics and market logics are globalising the places occupied by art and also their directors, who have evolved into mere bureaucrats of public property, relegated increasingly to their respective little backyards.

The system of competences has been replaced with the system of functions... and functions do not always imply competences.

The cases of censorship or of "contamination" of art exhibition organisers – and of artistic expression in general – are increasingly frequent, as that is the academic-*Enlightenment* or bourgeois way of seeing things.

[Who could forget the episode of political censorship perpetrated to the detriment of Thomas Hirschhorn because of his exhibition *Swiss Swiss Democracy* at the Swiss Cultural Centre in Paris? ...To name but one "Swiss" case – and a very recent one at that...]

By osmosis, museums and cultural locations are not immune, either. Faced with a society built on rapid, telematic communications, maybe the principle has not been understood yet that multimedia cannot be reduced just to its component techniques or the diversification of the means of production, but these days comprises primarily the never-ending universe of languages, in which the confrontation between art and reality, vision and Utopia, becomes really focused and where categories lose all meaning.

Market surveys and communications strategists have often also clipped museums' wings, rendering them childish and relegating them to places where art is imprisoned, to the status of a tourist phenomenon, standardised, fashionable, imitated and plagiarised: the museum as a place of emulation provoked by the market, by dominant taste and by investment that is culturally poor, but merely financial.

And institutes of culture are destined to exert less and less influence in future as representatives of a cultural vision that may well be regionalist, but is no less globalised for that, unless a serious attempt is made to realign the locus historically in relation to today's new requirements.

The museums were born with industrialisation, not by chance, but as a cause and an intentional misunderstanding.

The icons of art exert an attraction and generate behaviours of imitation and antagonism, which in themselves are not always negative in the sense of study.

The construction of art, of an artist and his work, the responsibility of the curator. Strong thought.

The metaphysics of pain and the indifference of abandonment

[...] *All art is quite useless.* [...] (41). It is a path man follows towards redemption and liberation. Towards ontology as an eternal, universal truth and starting point.

L'Europe ne se limite pas à des marchés,

*c'est aussi des valeurs et des cultures.
 Dans la hiérarchie des valeurs,
 les valeurs culturelles viennent avant les valeurs économiques.
 Si l'économie est une nécessité dans la vie,
 la culture est ce qui fait que la vie vaut la peine d'être vécue.*

[José Manuel Barroso (1956), President of the European Commission, 2007]

...close your eyes and think of England...

Mario Casanova, (August 2007-July 2008)

[Translation Pete Kercher]

- (0) Lea Vergine, Italian art historian, *Body Art and Performance. The Body as Language*, Skira Editore, Geneva-Milan, 2000, p. 15
- (1) Zygmunt Bauman (1925), British sociologist originally from Poland, Great Britain.
- (2) Silvio Ciappi (1965), Italian criminologist and lecturer in criminology, in *La costruzione del ghetto: evoluzione e significato del carcere*, in ARES Association for Research and Development, 2007).
- (3) Mark Raidpere (1975), Estonian artist, Tallinn, Estonia.
- (4) Marco Villani (1973), Italian artist, graduate in modern literature, Genoa, Italy.
- (5) Matthys de Beer (1975), South African brand and communications strategist, professor at the Vega Brand Communications School, Cape Town (South Africa).
- (6) In www.marcovillani.net
- (7) Michel Maffesoli (1944), French sociologist.
- (8) Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), extract from *La voix (Les épaves, 1866 in Les fleurs du mal, 1857)*.
- (9) Mario Casanova (1962), *La Famiglia. The Leaving Room*, Neos.e, Genoa 2007.
- (10) Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), German artist, *Edinburgh 20. August 1973. 12 hours lecture*, blackboard, 1973. Marx Collection, Germany.
- (11) Agnese Galotti (1962), Italian psychoanalyst and psychotherapist.
- (12) Lea Vergine, Italian art historian, *Body Art and Performance. The Body as Language*, Skira Editore, Geneva-Milan, 2000, p. 9
- (13) Silvio Ciappi (1965), Italian criminologist and lecturer in criminology, in *La costruzione del ghetto: strategie di sopravvivenza*, in ARES Association for Research and Development, 2007.
- (14) Ibid.
- (15) Lea Vergine, Italian art historian, *Body Art and Performance. The Body as Language*, Skira Editore, Geneva-Milan, 2000, p. 15
- (16) Silvio Ciappi (1965), Italian criminologist and lecturer in criminology, in *La costruzione del ghetto: strategie di sopravvivenza*, in ARES Association for Research and Development, 2007.
- (17) Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), German artist, *Untitled (ART = KAPITAL)*, blackboard, 1980. Marx Collection, Germany.
- (18) Steven Cohen (1962), South African artist and performer, Johannesburg, South Africa and La Rochelle, France.
- (19) Lincoln Theo (1972), South African, BA LL.B. M.Soc.Sci. (African Studies) (UCT), PhD Candidate (Women's & Gender Studies Dept, UWC), Attorney of the High Court of South Africa (CPD) (non-practising), Cape Town, South Africa.
- (20) Umberto Galimberti (1942), Italian philosopher, in *L'ospite inquietante*, Giacomo Feltrinelli Editore, 2007.
- (21) Monique Serf, a.k.a. Barbara (1930-1997), French singer-songwriter.
- (22) Agnese Galotti (1962), Italian psychoanalyst and psychotherapist, lecture on *Ecstasy and Panic*, GEA Association, Genoa 2001.
- (23) Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), German philosopher and psychiatrist.
- (24) Agnese Galotti (1962), Italian psychoanalyst and psychotherapist, lecture on *Ecstasy and Panic*, GEA Association, Genoa 2001.
- (25) Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Ward, Lock & Co., London 1891.
- (26) The reference is to *Aspettando Orlando* (2003) and to other literary-theatrical works by Valter Luca Signorile.

- (27) Lea Vergine, Italian art historian, *Body Art and Performance. The Body as Language*, Skira Editore, Geneva-Milan, 2000, p. 16.
- (28) Agnese Galotti (1962), Italian psychoanalyst and psychotherapist, lecture on *Ecstasy and Panic*, GEA Association, Genoa 2001.
- (29) Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Ward, Lock & Co., London 1891.
- (30) Valter Luca Signorile (1965), Italian artist, Cardé (Cuneo), Italy.
- (31) cf. Marco Filippa, in *In Situ, En Plein Air*, Pinerolo, August 2003.
- (32) Michel Maffesoli (1944), French sociologist, *The Time of the Tribes. The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*, SAGE Publications Ltd, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, 1996, p. 10.
- (33) Michel Maffesoli (1944), French sociologist, *The Time of the Tribes. The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*, SAGE Publications Ltd, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, 1996, p. 17.
- (34) *The Body of Evidence. Imprisonment* (King's (Daniele Innamorato/Federica Perazzoli), Mark Raidpere, Stefano Scheda, Valter Luca Signorile, Artur Zmijewski), CACT Switzerland, Bellinzona 2007-2008.
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- (36) Artur Zmijewski (1966), Polish artist, Warsaw, Poland.
- (37) Stefano Scheda (1957), Italian artist, Bologna, Italy.
- (38) Devis Venturelli (1974), Italian artist and architect, Milan, Italy.
- (39) Michel Maffesoli (1944), French sociologist.
- (40) Silvio Ciappi (1965), Italian criminologist and lecturer in criminology, in *La costruzione del ghetto: strategie di sopravvivenza*, in ARES Association for Research and Development, 2007.
- (41) Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Ward, Lock & Co., London 1891.