

AN INCOMPLETE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY FOR AN EXHIBITION IN LOCARNO

[...] *I only know that she was an intelligent woman finding herself in that situation only because of the system in which she lived.* [...] (0)

About *La Famiglia. The Leaving Room.*

[...] *Maybe the most significant and creative aspect of my work is its ambivalence as such... I do not put much store by objectivity: everything is objective, just as everything could be subjective...* [...] (1)

Let's imagine a place where there is also art (not a space defined as "of art"), a geography where everything stands to be revealed, starting from us, from ourselves as individuals, from those who see (themselves), from what comes about in the observer who sets out sensually to pursue in the "object" that surrounds him the "subject" that is refracted in it; a geography where free will is pain, pleasure and redemption – and everything we are capable of being, but would like to be. A territory where the ego and id are not obliged to feel themselves to be *of* this world, but to be weighed up *in* the world, in balance, as veils fall and, with them, pieties and a nostalgic remorse. A place where there is no depersonalisation or school of personality, where the affirmation of a concept loses every mercenary character, while creativity and the creative act are at long last set free of the limitations of passing technological and aesthetic fads, of the mass manipulation versus the individual [us], the singular. A place where the "collective imagery" is an epitaph that conceals the intimate secret of desire and the concept of "all" overcomes every possible imagination, real or reflected, here and now. A special garden, where the relationship between rights and duties neither seeks, nor finds any correspondence in visible reality.

This important borderline for an always unprecedented approach to a different interpretation of reality and truth through the lens of our ability and perceptive awareness.

What I am describing is a real geography and a theatrical space, later a truth first mental, then architectural, in which the model of art history – or generically of historiography and of museum presentation – does not rebel or prevaricate against emotions. Where the conceptual understanding and the intellect are neither forced nor dogmatic, a dictatorship or a conditioning factor. As long as they are deviant. I like to think of the *magic theatre... not for everyone... only for the mad...* described by Hermann Hesse in 1927 in his *Steppenwolf*. A fantastic, disquieting narrative that takes us back – rightly – to a borderline (there it is again), almost in limbo; that strip of space-time between the two great wars, when folly and reason, models and behaviours seemed to meld indistinctly and without any evidence of sensible order, when even moral and

ethical commitment seemed to be something that could be disposed with. That point when psyche and reason came across a desperate, delirious cause of dissent. What is cause? And what is effect? What is allegory and what is hallucination? Just how does one apply rights and duties? Can an artist and a curator still give a shape to thought and to artistic creation, to absolute truths, even in today's absence of the premises for theorising?

A borderline where objective measures up against subjective, public against private, concept against sensoriality, hatred... and the fear of losing. The point of transition from a collective, mystified vision to another that is more consciously unconscious, intimate and intimist.

[...] There are lunatics who observe people's faces and behaviour. Not because they are epitomes of Lombrosian positivism, but because they know about semiology. They know that culture creates certain models, that those models influence behaviour, that behaviour is a language and that, at a point in time when spoken language is becoming increasingly entrenched in conventions, becoming completely sterile (i.e. technical), body language is becoming more and more important. [...] (2)

And again

[...] Personal and individual possibilities aside, it is always the force of logic and the weakness of contradictions in a system which decide and produce, in part, certain behaviors. [...] (3)

Pier Paolo Pasolini was referring to an emotional stance to be countered as a liberatory expression – the body as language – to the communications encrypted and codified by technology, technique and techno in general.

Talking about Body Art and all its performance aspects, Luigi Meneghelli went on:

[...] But the question is not so much one of verifying how the work bursts upon the everyday present, how the artistic gesture dissolves into a commonplace gesture, as of noticing the body's invariable implication in it as the primary sign, evidence of a back to the roots of life, a return to shouting, breathing and orgasms [...]. There is a presumption of a coincidence between identity and elementary expressiveness, between being and doing, between self-knowledge and unreserved awareness. But that does not necessarily involve conquering an authentic body (revealer of the subject's truth) or a body liberated (from structures and from social codes), so much as a continuous examination of the body's objective reality, of an explicit requirement to know what is the essence of its reality. (4) And it is no coincidence that the body as language (as a festival, a ritual, a passage to action, violence, pulsion etc.) is manifest in moments of disturbance, of malaise or of threat: in other words, when consideration has to be given to new perceptions of the world, new life positions. [...] ... an approach to the body that (in the sixties and seventies) took the form of a fleeting exhibition of the subject and affirmation of an ever-elusive, ever-transitory identity. [...] (5)

So as to establish, maybe, a shared empathy between subject and object.

The erection of a meta-real "room for the mind" – something of a private domestic installation environment entitled *La Famiglia. The Leaving Room* – was devised by creating a well-defined curatorial (de)sign on the basis of the criteria listed above. This approach underlies the *mise en scène* with a strong focus on performance dialoguing with the observer's intimate, individual

perceptibility. The curator's personality is not restricted to generating the décor of a space, as he rather tends to investigate the manifold possibilities for presenting the works, their contents and their value as artistic expression, confronting the public with their various meanings and different interpretative options. [The observer has his own awareness – including the option of understanding or not understanding.] This is also brought about by the curator's personal use of the exhibition area available: nearly always the poetic expression of infinite universal concepts, within the finite limits of a fixed, temporal geography, an architectural cube. Here is the family as the place of birth, of separation and of removal. A system within the system. While cohabitation is difficult, detachment is no less laborious.

Certainties, intuitions, alternating states of social commitment and desperation and also a great many preconceptions are some of the driving forces of artistic creation, subjected – even before aware evolutionary reversibility – to a necessary process of increasing subjectivisation. “Globalisation”, the “international style” or the “artistic showcase” are concepts that tend to be increasingly absent from the curator's premises, as the awareness of defining a fundamental stylistic or conceptual line and establishing its place in history gradually wanes. Comparable thinking needs to take place with regard to the place of art and its utility.

[This exhibition was held in Locarno, Switzerland, in the summer of 2006, in the abandoned venue of a family printing works, a place deputed to commercial activities related to imagery by marketing and to the duplication and diffusion of corporate flyers and gadgets. My choice fell on this location as a form of industrial archaeology and recuperation. The event was part of a project with the somewhat commonplace title of *Kunsthalle?*, which also – as far as I was concerned – asked some important questions about the existential opportunities of a (contemporary) art space in southern Switzerland].

The tumbledown decay of the container – comprising a room on the ground floor, a second room on the building's first floor and some other “non-places” chosen to punctuate an exhibition design – indicates the extent to which such an area of miserable, patched-up memory, left to its own devices after its useful life is over, now ends up taking the form of a final frontier to be broken through if we are to change the relationships between the rhetoric of a recent past and the intimate individual, unconfessed/inconfessable universe of the immediate present. When such a venue is transformed from a point of commercial sale and trade into a place of art and the exhibition steps in over its threshold, the gestures involved in the processes become cathartic, of individual transfiguration and – primarily – of affinity connected to the mnemonic strength exuded by the space itself. From a family business to the middle class family's ideal living room, raised to the status of a garden of personal delights or, more precisely, to a semiological nursery: a bed of signs and signals.

The project passes the fatal line between reality and pretence, the spoken and the unspoken, the actual and the Utopian, between reality and its reflection, between pleasure and pain [and pleasure in/by means of pain], tradition and modernity, reason and psyche. Art and applied art. Between ordinary and extra-ordinary, beyond the possible, beyond the known and the conscious. With the consequence of art's disappearance as an object.

In the age of technological dematerialisation, of the immaterial society and of the materialism of values, on which a certain kind of artistic production does not want to turn its back, but which forces us to turn our backs violently on reality and on the sensoriality of matter, this place transcends its physical dimension as it is transfigured into an ideal place: a sort of

intimate/individual interface for a cathode/television, social, collective, enlightened and well-educated audience visiting art events. The choice of works is not specifically thematic, despite the curator's commitment, as the basic principles of this stage-set, of this "theatre of obsessions or of the psyche", do not necessarily meet art and, above all, do not obligatorily match it or its more rhetorical and official interpretation. I took the observer, as a mode of behaviour, and put him face to face with a different way of conceiving of an art exhibition, as the visual route is more psychological, personal and introspective than the kind of visit you make to a trade fair. So the choice of works is not specifically thematic, except for the attempt to make them all thematic as they interact with the observer, to some extent a move away from "making exhibitions", from the usual way of "seeing exhibitions", that uses such concepts as museology, curatorship and installation to overturn, reflect and investigate the art system.

The dichotomies and bi-polarism encapsulated here and developed in the design bear the seed of sharing with the visitor those enigmatic meanings that, paradoxically, imply the perverse, pleasant meeting between two opposed focal points. Public/private, reactions to collectives, achieving self-awareness etc.

When Viana Conti makes a point of insisting on the concept of *mise en abîme* (consignment to ruin), she is referring to this very possibility of redemption for mankind on his suffering path of self-discovery as introspection and centripetal analysis in exploration.

This vicious circle thinking also shapes the concept of family, the theatre of the dynamics related to introversion, whose "essence" is so obsessive and harassing, but whose "appearance" is paradoxically so social and Mediterranean. An arena where the desire for the meeting and clash between the victim and his nemesis is consumed and where *Beauty and Tragedy*, *Punishment and Pardon*, *Seduction and Pain*, satisfy one another, where an interesting, perverted overlapping of object and subject, or of other subjects, comes about in the interaction. The system also creates ecstatic behaviours that verge on the metaphysical and the absolute. A huge terrain of the psyche, where – like day and night – "appearance" measures up to "essence", public to private, evolutions to curatorial creations, where less conventional systems for interpreting artistic production that are tied more closely to a need of the soul give the observer a model of interpretation of his own, "his own" freedom of (self-)identification and, as a result, "his own" (re-)cognisant or inhibitory capital.

The setting plunges the visitor into a contextual work, in reciprocity with everything and, specifically, with art, thus stimulating those who "search with their eyes" to develop a particular attitude of comparison with their own – even their own intimate – individuality. This is a place where *Drama and Poetry* couple, a poetically enchanted place of the yielding kiss between *Pleasure and Repression*, of death and of (re-)birth.

In the *Leaving Room* – which is preceded by a sort of antechamber, a vestibule on the ground floor – the works are paintings, drawings and old (or recent) photographs installed on the walls; objects and TV sets are located on the tables in this large middle-class living room, with images of artistic TV news items, objects and toys running between them on the floor and in the cupboards. Sofas and armchairs. A mirror, the same element that reflects the work and the visitor to the work, who sees himself as he is visiting the work.

[The criteria at the root of this *mise en scène* and – in a broader sense – of artistic comedy, aim to conjure up other fields that are not extraneous to symbolic and theosophist references. While in a time that was not so very long ago the terrain reserved to the artist was

deconsecrated, before that representation was governed by the laws of prohibition, as the symbol already constitutes a representation. The room looks like a travesty, an object of the senses and of the rationality of the individual, but absolute and metaphysical.

Without necessarily reflecting any timeframe relative to the past and future, but leaving to the visitor/reader the task of slotting things into their historical place, the aim is to restore freedom to artistic creation as a (self-)liberating, corrupting act of reconstruction, cause and effect of a continuously moving process. A more apocalyptic attitude actually looks upon the parallel end and consignment of styles, of forms, of technologies, of the “everything has already been said” and of the apogee as a sort of arrival, of barter, of total perdition and of the end of what failed in unseating Absolute Truth in more mystical terms. So a positive view of sequences of historical and cultural events is replaced by another more pessimistic one that sees our future as the catastrophic, or at least catastrophist, evolution of History and of Mankind: the *Apocalypse*, of course, as only a superior truth can command complete knowledge of time and events.]

So does the future hold the construction of experience or its reconstruction? In this light, the concept of *Revelation* could look like a pathological consequence. *Beauty and the Beast. Revelation as the Pathology of the Apocalypse.*

Mistakenly, contemporary production seems to undergo the same omens: when we believe in its impending end, when we believe we are aware that it may actually have reached the end of the line, the evolution and the concept of historical cycles is questioned once again by the fact that that notorious borderline has been broken through, that the apogee can be seen as the beginning of a decay. *Apocalypse or Revelation? Art has this unlimited, eschatological other-worldly power to anticipate the events of History. Apocalypse is Revelation or, at the very least, the one does not rule the other out.*

[According to a more theosophist conception, the need to seek the ideal being, pursuing rationality and analysis, has been extensively outstripped by the concept of “metaphysical essence”. In total opposition to psychological isms [a real plague of profanation in the modern and contemporary age], it proposes a more ontological belief that predicts an analogy, a compatibility, between the divine essence and the essence of creatures; once again we have the quest for an archetype, for an absolute truth, common and of the community. Quite apart from the languages used to mean it and above us.]

The system creates behaviours

[...] *Il pleut. Les marquises sont devenues grises.* [...]

Symptoms and intuitions for *Beauty and the Beast*

Every observer has his own awareness: even when it is the awareness of understanding that you do not understand. This takes place to the extent that you are incapable of elaborating and

thus of overcoming – as Palazzoli suggests – what you really see or suppose you see and understand, identifying and attributing meanings and values to it.

If our technological society has succeeded in establishing a manipulation of reality and of the world of human perceptions, to the extent of exploding the falsely mystical and opiate plague of popular passiveness vis-à-vis technologies [a sort of illusion of reality or of invisible reality] and of control of the masses [a sort of technocratic- financial fundamentalism] – people were writing a short while ago, among other things, about the aestheticisation and the spectacularisation of information and imagery –, it has also and at the same time created and encouraged the notion of “beauty of form”, of models to be copied, of consumerism or of phenomena of collective aggressiveness that have now become planetary: the consequence of an evident emotional and spiritual emptying of man that derives from his submission to the machine.

In such a terrain of control, everything could be, just as everything could be the very opposite. I am talking about television, about information technology, about the communications and the obsession with communicating that run on the telephone line or – even worse – via satellite; I am talking about the Internet and about all those technological media with the potential to lead us by reflection to a distorted, or just an immaterial and impalpable view of reality. At a fleeting speed. These days, the recuperation of an image could well prove to be a surrogate, a copy, in its turn a copy of the many possible copies of the original, so infinitely reproducible.

Which opens the discussion about the “matrix”.

On the dramatic pessimism that reigns about technology replacing man, it is interesting to take a look at what Giorgio Piccinini writes about the work of two artists.

[...] ...to be sure, it is a path already embarked on by several artists, clearly by Stelarc and Marcel-li Antunez Roca, but I think that the philosophy is of the opposite brand, i.e. surpassing biological nature, so as to take man further. For the former, passiveness vis-à-vis the machine becomes a decomposition of the body and its opening to robotic and computerised systems in a biomechanical interaction [...], yet always under man's own physical and mental control, while for Marcel-li, the public's external intervention through the machine in the dynamics of the manipulation of their own organism can also be interpreted politically as the evolution of the concept of critique to the bourgeois body, seen as egocentric property and by means of the loss of self-determination through the collectivisation of movements induced by other minds on biological material that is no longer just personal. Above all of this, questions certainly start being asked about the concepts of identity, mental and physical suffering and on to the extreme possibility of induced, yet unconscious, “self-destruction”. Etc [...] (6)

To which Piccinini also adds:

[...]Of course there are many interpretations of Marcel-li's work, all of them more or less plausible with different nuances, as he himself said about his relationship with the public, which is paradoxically the actor in the theatrical action: “You create an ethical dilemma, because you are manipulating a human being and, in reality, you are causing him pain. I am no sadomasochist. There are more important questions in the air: the depersonalisation of human relations, the indefinite borderline between sex and power and the use of the computer as a means of control...” [...] (7)

Orson Wells and *The War of the Worlds*, Franco Vaccari with his far-sighted *Exhibition in Real Time N° 4*, with the eloquent title of *Leave a photographic trace of your passing on these walls*, for the XXXVI Venice Biennale in 1972. His technological subconscious. Controlling the masses, historical sophistication and the conflict between “work of art” and “artistic product”.

Vaccari’s first alerts and warnings, recorded and described here by Daniela Palazzoli, are evocative.

[...] *One of his most exhilarating Exhibitions in Real Time is The Blind Man will be Right Back or Der Blinde kommt gleich, held in Graz, Austria, in 1973. Inspired by a blind beggar whose patch was by the tram stop near the museum, Vaccari created a video that only showed the blind man’s hat. Projected on the beggar’s patch by the tram stop, the video took passengers by surprise, though maybe it just astonished them (without even persuading them to offer any charity to the TV set). The aim of this early reflection on the relationship between “real” and “virtual” was and remains that of reminding us to draw the necessary comparisons between what we see, what we don’t see and what, on the basis of how we see, each one of us manages to define as the meaning and value of a given work. [...]* (8)

Regardless of the medium used to give voice to its form and regardless of its languages, art is an act of resistance to all forms of emptying of content. What Marshall McLuhan said in the seventies about the relationship between artistic creation and technology relaunched and reiterated his belief that art can constitute an archetypal and ontological potential, a sort of antidote reality, an ideal idea rather than an idealistic one within the debate about reality and mystification, aimed at the social, anthropological authenticity of “being human”.

In his book *The Gutenberg Galaxy. The Making of Typographic Man* (1962), McLuhan discussed the birth of printing as a precursor of today’s technologies, theorising a situation in which the senses would be all but isolated and, as a consequence, there would be a reduction of awareness in the area of creativity. He saw Art as a counter-environment in this unstoppable proliferation of technology, i.e. as an antidote to a context that enables mankind to understand the context, while at the same time attributing considerable importance to artistic creation as regard training and the development of judgement and perception.

And Jean-Paul Thenot recently wrote:

[...] *Nowadays, maybe faced with a new Renaissance, every artist, transformed in his role and in his social status, has to take as his model Leonardo, the precursor of the multidisciplinary man, a strategist, painter, musician, thinker, architect and philosopher, all at the same time. We are involved in the enormous leap that our species is taking along the road to virtual. The interior quality of being may be dominated in this day and age by the economy and by knowledge, as every new invention is easily reduced to a simple manipulation. Should virtualisation be resisted by concentrating on terrains and identities at risk or by trying to tackle the problem by giving it a meaning, in short by inventing a new art of otherness and of community? [...]* (9)

[Thenot neglected to mention finance, as well as the economy, as a phenomenon of dematerialisation of the notions of wealth and value correlated to the notion of the operativeness of work.]

Technologies and technological sublimation have been transformed, as McLuhan urged, into the message. They tend to reflect man's ambition to achieve perfection and the gradually greater – so pernicious – scope for the attempt to do so, such that the area of “making” grows progressively smaller and the arts are also dragged down into the vortex of aesthetic consumerism.

If man with his perishable characteristics is to be tempted by the “technological sublime”, the machine's superlativism will have the effect of inhibiting any human characteristic and peculiarity. He will tend to measure himself increasingly against the mechanical device and will be seduced by it, to the extent of inducing a man-machine overlap, if not of actually succumbing to it. That may be the final drama of a voluntary surrender of man's own free will, the meeting between the artifice and mankind with his millennial urge to achieve perfection: an autocratic gesture of self-sterilisation, the ecstatic and ultimate meeting between the persecuted and the persecutor. If the infinite universe of the emotions leads us back to the body and to matter, the no less finite universe of concept accompanies us towards the sterility of a technical and excessively conceptual language.

I think I can say that the fall and exhaustion of the historical avant-gardes [not of History as a lighthouse] is followed by the appearance of the concept of contemporary art, at times bereft of rigour and simplicity; an endless, unnerving period of apparently unordered research set up to counter History itself, as summarised in the dogma of globalisation, of the multiplicity of media and languages, amorphous and sometimes without propriety.

Thinking back to the notion of *Apocalypse*, as *Revelation* and/or a possibly even pathological rediscovery of an inevitable and desirable path to take us back to *All* or to an archetype of reality, the question asked by Jean-Paul Thenot about reviving a transdisciplinary and “other” value of artistic creation, and of the figure of the artist, seems to be aptly put. Certainly also as an answer to today's trends towards privatising, industrialising and massifying art and all its ramifications: the *diktats* of neo cultural/electoral policy countering the concept of reality, having passed from a sociological and anthropological view of it to another that is capitalistic, illuminist-functional, pointlessly socialistic and on the way towards the deconstruction of knowledge and of consciences. Or maybe just of the concept of individuality.

But McLuhan also asked some fundamental questions about the suitability of virtualisation. In times when the media are multimedia, of the rise of information technologies and of electronic art as an inexorable erasure of the space/time relationship, the concept of *here and now* presumes the cancellation of any self-determining human presence, leaving just the preponderant, domineering presence of the machine, the sole real medium to seduce man with the idea of ubiquity. By definition, it [the machine] creates perfect duplicates that can always be further improved upon, but it never creates originals. The very concept of “unique piece” and “original” – broadly speaking relative to man's central and unique nature – is lost, replaced by the concept of mass digital reproduction, so with no identity of matter.

With the false reasoning of reality and starting out from the standpoint mentioned a short while ago of man's passiveness, on his knees before the society of capital and the power wielded by the mass media and technology, maybe what we need is a necessary reactive/reacting oscillation between apathy and extremism; a sign, this latter, that the right codes of behaviour and identification are being reclaimed and revitalised, maybe with more clearly expressed accents.

[...] *When we talk about time, we use a vocabulary that pertains to space and, more specifically, to movement in space: time turns and “passes” or is “behind us” etc.; the future is “in front of us”, it “comes” or is “to come” etc. [...] (10). [...] Time is a result. It is what results from others’ actions. [...] (11)*

Whence we can deduce, according to Recanati and Latour, that the concept of *time* is defined in parallel to that of *real space* and, as a consequence, of material and matter.

To go back over the terrain described by McLuhan and his appeals, art might therefore still be valid as a counter-contextual or counter-cultural expression: an expressive language that confirms man’s central position and his spiritual – not necessarily mystic – and revelatory truth.

Every action causes and is followed by a reaction and a counter-reaction, even if they are not always reproduced regularly within the framework of historical reversibility. Supporting the thesis that information is nearly always subjected to a process of aestheticisation expressed with the sterility of technical language, as mentioned by Pasolini, the approach adopted in recent years to presenting current affairs teaches us, for example, that the diffusion of a piece of news has a greater communications impact than the information itself [or other models], as McLuhan’s position actually anticipated: i.e. that the “means” (implying technology, mass media and information vehicles) would prevail over the “message”, would replace it or at least come before it, increasingly removing and belittling the passive “spectator”, the remote co-author.

The antidote that might shed light on the context [the system more than anything else], with all its absurd paradoxes, is the counter-context or the reaction. To technologies and the technological instrumentalisation, to artistic/cultural classicism. To the aestheticising technological sublime and to the placebo effect.

The fact that certain criteria of the artistic movements of the sixties and seventies (but also of other periods in the twentieth century) have been revived is no coincidence; nothing is, of course, and not only in art: not coincidental, then, it is causal. The choices are disparate and today’s carefree impotence is not yet capable of laying down solid historical foundations for the future.

Nevertheless, the attempt to go back to the art of painting, for example, and also to topics with a strong bond with identity/body and to diversified codes of identification in contemporary society have now been with us for some time. Reviving such past movements as *Body Art*, *Action Painting* and other performance arts, such as visual *Punk*, or an extended area such as *Queer Punk*, is no longer a phenomenon limited to any single historical or cultural context, but can be traced back to a broader homogeneous group of reaction and resistance: that mental and psychological geography that aims to thrive on the rediscovery of its own existentialism through the body, sexuality and their mortification as an act of sublimation, of artistic and creative liberation through multimedia languages, not just media.

A possible rediscovery

Is it legitimate or, at the very least, conceivable to state that ours is a post-Enlightenment or a post-Enlightenmentist society, since it has voluntarily adopted an identity of cold functionalist

organisation, of both things and people, draining both those things and those people of their spirituality? Just as it has gradually and systematically changed man into a pawn inside an increasingly functionalistic apparatus?

The regime of roles springs from a precise logic of competences and aims to create a system of power that denies individualism and individuality by adopting mechanisms that astutely govern their tentacles. This form has always influenced History and the way its meanings are interpreted, as well as its warnings. The creation of a system of information systems, through television or information technology networks, has not produced collectivism so much as globalism. While the political classes have ended up yielding to the power of economics and finance, the individual has always and unquestionably been frustrated. His is an attempt that often recurs in the reality of group systems or powers that are subjected to capital.

To this state of affairs we must then add technology, the tool that separates us from reality, or the concept of artificial intelligence – a terrifying hypothesis and the real tool of the system supported by the system. Immateriality, unreality/virtuality and simulation make it even more difficult to draw an identikit of both the dominators and the dominated these days, as this would imply having to define their physiognomy.

History is written by the winner and the system (re-)appropriates it, adapting its contents. It is in this context that technologies are so important, because of their mystifying nature: they inevitably also take on the identity of the faceless Whitehall mandarins who provide the means of control and propaganda that appear to change everything, while ultimately never changing anything at all.

As mentioned a short while ago, the floor is thus open once again for the debate about the “matrix”, the same one that is to man, by equation, as the artifice is to (and replaces) the original: the desire to achieve a form of “final solution” of cognition, of knowledge, of recognisability, of willpower and of humanism.

Man’s search for himself and for awareness in his humble fusion with the whole requires an important construct. Self-discovery is salvation. Discussing the finer points of the concept of self – or at least deciding and/or accepting its real essence – is also tantamount to merely repeating the existential/experiential path trodden by the human being (a concept that is described better by the German terms *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*) in his eternal, universal and grandiose solitude.

This quote comes from Luigi Meneghelli again, when he was writing about Body Art and History:

[...]Body Art has often been associated with primitive propitiatory rites: there is no doubt that the glove fits, at least at first sight, because primitive man has no history and modern man has no history and more. [...]... with his performance, the body artist is not referring to anything else but himself... [...] (13)

[Does this mean that technology could dialogue with itself?]

When Viana Conti makes a point of insisting on the concept of *mise en abîme* (consignment to ruin), she is referring to this very possibility of redemption for mankind on his suffering path of self-discovery, a feeling that reveals his own identity. His being.

And again: “true” or “virtual” reality, as Palazzoli seemed to be asking? Could the absence of a definite historical identity for contemporary man end up playing the part of an historical potential in its turn?

The nameless one, another way of saying the locus of art... Remembering what I have written about the system, I wonder what is the purpose of a locus of art. Why a museum? Why close an historical memory and a contemporary one expressed through the arts away in a sort of reserve when, at the same time, creative thinking manifests itself against the trend with the concept of the global village and of the demolition of real spaces?

A locus of art is a place of power, a bulwark of and for those who more or less pleasantly arrange, organise and undergo the mosaic stones that go to make up a system. We may decide to belong to it, or it may shelter a perverse, conflictual sharing of public political and private interests. It is also a defined geographical and architectural place... not a *Museum Without Walls*... outside which less importance might – paradoxically – be attributed to art. A place of power that might contribute to sanctioning art’s prices, one which may feature the figure of the corporate curator, who transforms and frustrates values, creates new alchemies within the value-for-money relationship... precisely. [For many years now, the terrain of exhibitions has been pandering more or less consciously to a mercantile vision of artistic production, artificially creating a multi-gearred class system: you are either inside the system, or you are out of it. In this respect, no curator can deny his responsibility.]

Now let’s imagine a locus of art that, either because of the approach adopted by its curator or because of its morphological characteristics, practically leads the observer (sub)consciously to waive his function as an objective, habitual viewer. I should so much have liked to define the invisible, say the unsaid, find the metaphors or the allegories that are always missing, make that *museum without walls*, so that every one of us could find and reflect himself in his dialogue with the works. For each an identity of our own, delving with neither interest nor artifice, with our gaze on the images around us. The works of art, the curatorial approach and the gaze of the public, as the abominable but veracious mirror of an invisible reality, since we have the professional duty, after all, not to interpret art exclusively as deviation, although we also have the right to use it as a necessary deviating agent. A place where art has only marginally taken advantage of the concept of artistic consumer product, where a lifetime is summarised while simultaneously making it pass as it should again.

The disturbing and apparent normality of the representation of a container that hosts works of art, the metaphorical revival of the “bourgeois drawing room” with pleasantly Victorian overtones, unquestionably puts the observer face to face with a wide variety of topics and intimately cerebral potential keys of interpretation: perceptions. I should have liked it if the visitor were to succeed in decrypting himself, yielding to his own unique, individual, (il)logical and psychological mechanism of reading and thus of communicating about himself to others, trying to probe the inhibitory or liberatory devices of the public and of the artist.

La Famiglia. The Leaving Room intends to provide some form of signal for a post-contemporary creativity. The return to ethical and moral messages and values indicated by the author over and above a system of artistic communications and/or evolution etc... To a certain extent, I simply wanted to reiterate the concept of “recognisability” of the work of art as a

reaction to all the *isms* that have held sway in recent decades and regardless of the criteria of its museological presentation.

In this sense, a new curatorial approach could be of assistance inside unusual *spaces*.

It is no coincidence that, in search of an archetypal vision in the contemporary multimedia and technocratic magma, today's creators – or yesterday's opposition – seek to approach a revealing thought that exceeds the work itself, rather than giving way to apocalyptic vision. Which once again begs the question about the responsibilities of the locus of art, as we have already asked ourselves another question: what is the purpose of culture through the arts? And yet another question: can the arts themselves or other areas such as philosophy or history still teach us to improve ourselves and our society?

Thus it is that the use of technology, of machine and body is summarised and put into practice by Valter Luca Signorile. The message leads us to the means... and not the other way around. *Jerusalem #1, #2, #3* is a first video triad of his about the meanings that surround the body, space, rituality and ritualism. There is a subtle interval between intimately sensual situations and more collective consciousnesses. Made anti-aesthetically using a portable cellphone [which for the artist is also a tool for immediate memory storage], the works are three actions without an audience, in which the author-actor stages himself, stripped bare, in the corner of a room familiar to me (*coin-coincé*): black walls and an off-white floor. He stands erect with bare feet, as this naked part of his body metaphorically represents the purity and incidence of his gesture, of his stepping forwards or backwards. Just as the way his whole video is made is realistic. It is anti-aesthetic, as I said, so as to leave that absolute, objective and universal beauty intact in the artist's corporal sublimation and in the use of the medium, and conceived – also but not only – as a desire to escape from his individual will.

By means of highly symbolic gestures of invocation, but also of imprecation, the artist comes across humbly as a medium between earth and sky, in its infinite, grandiose, individual, unique corporal bodily spiritual concentration, almost hypnotic and liturgical. A repeated rituality that, through space and time, enables him almost mystically and religiously to approach internal yet nonetheless collective equilibrium, as the hermetic universality of his gesture translates equally into a collective awareness, as concrete as it is realistic and expressed. The de-objectified body language [specifically, a kind of subjective, carnal non-place] prevails over figurative aspects, referring back to the sublimation of bodily gesture as a language, to the origin, to the archetype, to the precepts, to the absolute, ontological truth. Everything.

La Famiglia. The Leaving Room is a curator's work of art, as it is just the representation of a bourgeois drawing room, which contains other representations by other artists. There are hints and points of convergence between the exhibition designer-observer and the author in this intentional, provocative parallax, which maybe also simultaneously suggests troubling, essential divergences whose purpose is the exercise of interpretation. The converging interdependencies – or seductive bi-polarism – between significance and signifying, between reality and pretence, between the rational or aesthetic use of the medium and their irrational overcoming, actually constitute one of the many *raisons d'être* of artistic visions or visionary arts.

The Leaving Room is the recreation (the de-creation of a *Living Room*) of a domestic setting as an obsessive place of transit or of definitive passage, an almost cathartic, liberatory, transcendent sign of transformation of reality into visionary.

Similarly, Signorile conceives the place of *tournage* as a trans-physical room; his gestures are metaphysical, the fists he beats against his breast or the hands he raises skywards. His *mise en abîme* of the man Signorile is all there in the repetition of the gesture of invocation, in obsessive repetition like cloning and the assumption of the tragedies of the world.

Barbara et ses choix de vivre

*Ça ne prévient pas quand ça arrive
Ça vient de loin
Ça c'est promené de rive en rive
La gueule en coin
Et puis un matin, au réveil
C'est presque rien
Mais c'est là, ça vous ensommeille
Au creux des reins*

*Le mal de vivre
Le mal de vivre
Qu'il faut bien vivre
Vaille que vivre*

*On peut le mettre en bandoulière
Ou comme un bijou à la main
Comme une fleur en boutonnière
Ou juste à la pointe du sein
C'est pas forcément la misère
C'est pas Valmy, c'est pas Verdun
Mais c'est des larmes aux paupières
Au jour qui meurt, au jour qui vient*

*Le mal de vivre
Le mal de vivre
Qu'il faut bien vivre
Vaille que vivre*

*Qu'on soit de Rome ou d'Amérique
Qu'on soit de Londres ou de Pékin
Qu'on soit d'Égypte ou bien d'Afrique
Ou de la porte Saint-Martin
On fait tous la même prière
On fait tous le même chemin
Qu'il est long lorsqu'il faut le faire
Avec son mal au creux des reins*

*Ils ont beau vouloir nous comprendre
Ceux qui nous viennent les mains nues*

*Nous ne voulons plus les entendre
On ne peut pas, on n'en peut plus
Et tous seuls dans le silence
D'une nuit qui n'en finit plus
Voilà que soudain on y pense
A ceux qui n'en sont pas revenus*

*Du mal de vivre
Leur mal de vivre
Qu'ils devaient vivre
Vaille que vivre*

*Et sans prévenir, ça arrive
Ça vient de loin
Ça c'est promené de rive en rive
Le rire en coin
Et puis un matin, au réveil
C'est presque rien
Mais c'est là, ça vous émerveille
Au creux des reins*

*La joie de vivre
La joie de vivre
Oh, viens la vivre
Ta joie de vivre (13)*

(Text by Mario Casanova in *La Famiglia. The Leaving Room*, neos.e editions, Genoa, 2007, ISBN 978-88-87262-52-0. Translation Pete Kercher)

- (0) Giuseppe Desiato describing his performance entitled *Rite No. 1*, 1964-65, from Lea Vergine, *Body Art and Performance. The Body as Language*, Skira Editore, Milano 2000.
- (1) Urs Lüthi, from *A Few Mindflashes*.
- (2) Pier Paolo Pisolini.
- (3) Giuseppe Desiato describing his performance entitled *Rite No. 1*, 1964-65, from Lea Vergine, *Body Art and Performance. The Body as Language*, Skira Editore, Milano 2000).
- (4) Germano Celant, *Artmakers*, p. 31.
- (5) Luigi Meneghelli, *Shape your Body (verso il corpo astratto)*, in *Shape your Body*, Edizioni La Giarina, Verona 1994.
- (6) Giorgio Piccinini, unpublished essay, 29.01.2007.
- (7) Giorgio Piccinini, unpublished essay, 16.02.2007.
- (8) Daniela Palazzoli, *Franco Vaccari: il cieco torna subito. Franco Vaccari: The Blind Man will be right back*, in *Arte e Critica* N° 45, January-March 2006, pp. 40-41.
- (9) Jean-Paul Thenot, *Jean-Pierre Giovanelli. Una poetica dell'essere*, Edizioni Il Melangolo, Genova 2006.
- (10) François Recanati, in *Les immatériaux*, edited by Jean-François Lyotard, Centre d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou, Paris 1985.
- (11) Bruno Latour, *ibid.*
- (12) Luigi Meneghelli, *Shape your Body (verso il corpo astratto)*, in *Shape your Body*, Edizioni La Giarina, Verona 1994.
- (13) Barbara, *Le mal de vivre*, 1965.

