

BOOK EXTRACT

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Long Live Responsibility!

The responsibility of intellectuals, and therefore of artists, was, as we have seen, a subject very dear to Bourdieu. From politics to culture, one of the most used and abused words in recent years has been responsibility, which, in the sense given to it by the German philosopher Hans Jonas⁵¹, is the human capacity to answer for one's own actions and their consequences for our contemporaries, for those who have not yet been born, and for the environment, which has been particularly compromised by our activities. In the Italian context there have already been examples of this for many years, demonstrating that Italian artists care deeply about this issue. Below I cite some artists who in recent years have attracted my attention because of their affinities with what has been argued in the preceding pages.

Whenever I think of a liberating condition or dimension, I cannot help but think of the artistic practice of Maurizio Nannucci, who has always seen art and creativity as a way out of all those problems that afflict, imprison and suffocate our freedom and emancipation. These are always simple and direct phrases, but also enigmatic, poetic and disorienting, inviting us to reflect, offering ideas for the future, for change and new connections, for thinking the unthinkable or trying to make the impossible possible. Art is the instrument that opens our minds and invites us to live life differently and more responsibly. It is a practice that offers neither recipes nor alternatives (because otherwise it would become prescriptive and therefore no longer liberating), but sees freedom as our only lifeline. Particularly significant in this respect are the large installations *There is another way of looking at things* (2012) and *No more excuses* (2013), which is an invitation to act without fear, without further excuses, without wasting any more time. As already stated, the artist does not prescribe what to do, but those three simple words bring our attention back to ourselves and to the capacity we have, as free

human beings, to act without waiting for someone else to do a certain thing. Freedom and responsibility are therefore two sides of the same coin.

Michelangelo Pistoletto, one of the best-known and most highly regarded Italian artists internationally, has in recent years created projects that stimulate dialogue between different people and cultures, entrusting art with the task of addressing political and social issues. In his Progetto Arte Manifesto of 1994, Pistoletto states: “Progetto Arte is founded on the idea that art is the most sensitive and integral expression of thought, and the time has come for the artist to take upon himself the responsibility of bringing every other human activity into communication, from economics to politics, from science to religion, from education to behaviour, in short all the instances of the social fabric.” According to Pistoletto, art has a social responsibility arising from its commitment to responsible social transformation. Thus, on the occasion of the 2003 Venice Biennale, he presented a mirrored table in the shape of the Mediterranean basin, surrounded by chairs from the countries bordering this sea, making that work the symbol of Love Difference – Artistic Movement for an InterMediterranean Politic.

In the Love Difference Manifesto (2003), Pistoletto states: “The guidance of world politics cannot be left to the pure logic of economic speculation. A new way of thinking must inspire economics and politics. The formative place for this thought can be the creative laboratory of a socially engaged art. Love Difference, a movement of ideas, was born in this laboratory [...]. Art, the primary expression of creativity, assumes social responsibility and becomes the compass indicating the direction in which to guide the perspective of a new civilisation on a planetary scale. Cittadellarte’s projects bring art into direct contact with every sector of the social structure, including politics. Politics is no longer external to art but integrates with it, sharing a vision and a responsible operating system. Thus a political movement of creativity and art is born, aimed at identifying, discussing and cooperating with every other sector in the search for solutions to the great and serious problems of society.” Starting in Venice and subsequently in many other countries around the world, numerous activities and projects of this movement have been presented around the Love Difference table, with the aim of promoting and creating cultural projects that foster dialogue among people belonging to different cultures, political positions or religions, in order to create a stable network of people and institutions interested in addressing social problems through art. Since 2004 Emanuela Baldi and Filippo Fabbrica have

coordinated the work of Love Difference, organising workshops, “making together” initiatives, artistic projects for intercultural dialogue, gastronomic events, congresses, meetings, seminars, concerts and exhibitions around the world.

A further phase of Michelangelo Pistoletto’s work centred on recycling and environmental sustainability came in 2003, when he wrote the Third Paradise manifesto and designed its symbol (the New Infinity Sign), consisting of a reconfiguration of the mathematical infinity sign: between the two opposing circles, understood as nature and artifice, a central circle is inserted to represent the Third Paradise, conceived as the ideal overcoming of the destructive conflict in which nature and artifice find themselves in contemporary society. In Pistoletto’s words, the Third Paradise is “the fusion between the first and second paradise. The first is the paradise in which human beings were totally integrated into nature. The second is the artificial paradise, developed by human intelligence through a process that has today reached globalising proportions. This paradise is made of artificial needs, artificial products, artificial comforts, artificial pleasures and every other form of artifice. A truly artificial world has been formed which, with exponential progression, generates, alongside its beneficial effects, irreversible processes of degradation on a planetary scale. The danger of a tragic collision between the natural and artificial spheres has now been announced in every possible way. The Third Paradise project consists in leading artifice, that is science, technology, art, culture and politics, to restore life to the Earth, together with the commitment to refound common ethical principles and behaviours, since the effective achievement of this objective depends on them. Third Paradise means the passage to a new level of planetary civilisation, indispensable for ensuring the survival of humankind. The Third Paradise is the new myth that leads everyone to assume personal responsibility at this epochal juncture.”

Through installations, drawings, videos, sculptures and other media, Liliana Moro has long reflected on the theme of fragility and precarious balance, seeking to involve the viewer and alter their point of view. She does so by beginning with the world of imagination and childhood, play and fairy tales, as for example in the work *Dumme Gans* (2002), a house made of biscuits like the one in the tale of Hansel and Gretel, inviting from the outside but frightening within, where the artist placed drawings depicting Gretel pushing the witch into the oven. Also distinctive is *This is the end* (2004), a sculpture in which the viewer not only walks through and discovers the works on display, but which becomes a

symbol both of the obstacles we must break down in order to discover what lies beyond our everyday life, our culture and our perception, and of the wall we must tear down in order to communicate with those on the other side. The theme of fragility also returns in the artist's more recent production, less centred on playful and childhood elements, as for example in *Articolo 1* (UDHR 1948), in which she reflects on the fragility of power: a portable loudspeaker placed on a gold-coloured trolley plays the Italian national anthem, thus reflecting in a simple and direct way on the cultural impoverishment and superficiality of recent years.

Emanuela Ascari pays particular attention to the environment, connecting different worlds made of stories, collapses, abandonment and memories: those fragments that remain of the human capacity to create, forget and abandon, only to create, forget and abandon again in a continuous and endless process of creation and abandonment. She does so also in the interesting installation *Erosioni a Nord Ovest*, resulting from the journey the artist made from Bologna to the project room of GalleriaCart in Monza, where the exhibition was installed. A journey along the Via Emilia led her to take an interest in a series of discarded materials such as fragments of bricks or window frames, plaques, parts of columns or floors that have ceased to perform their specific function but are still able to communicate something, to tell a story and preserve a memory, to bear witness to a culture and its evolutions, to the manipulation and contamination of the environment, and so on.

Enrica Borghi's aesthetic research begins with the contemporary tendency towards the continuous consumption of goods and resources, whose negative consequences concern not only the psychological or relational sphere but also the environment, with a continuous production of waste and discarded materials which, taking future generations and the health of the planet into account, must become a source of environmental and cultural regeneration. Against this background, the artist recycles discarded materials, using them to create works of great aesthetic impact, such as the children's installation *La Regina*, or mandalas and mosaics that evoke a spiritual and abstract condition which clashes sharply with the discarded status of the materials employed. This tension takes concrete form in an active process of "reanimating" what the capitalist system has discarded and, consequently, of questioning its logics and actions.

In her artistic practice, Dacia Manto is always highly attentive to the tension of power between humankind and nature, between possessing certain points of reference and losing them. In *Inlandsis*

(2005–2009), for example, installed at Strozzi in Florence in 2009, she analyses the boundaries of the Antarctic continent, which have become increasingly variable in recent years not only according to the season (in winter the continent is twice the size it is in summer) but above all because of climate change caused by global warming. It is estimated that Antarctica, which currently contains 90% of the world's ice, loses 36 cubic miles of water every year, equivalent to 152 cubic kilometres. The problem, therefore, is that if geographical maps change, and thus our points of reference, our mental maps necessarily change as well, requiring constant and continuous adaptation on our part.

Thinking about more recent artistic expressions, we cannot overlook the Roman artist Cesare Pietroiusti, whose artistic research seeks to give voice to all those relational forms that favour an open and democratic conception of art, in clear contrast with the forms of communication typical of the contemporary artistic field, which are increasingly configured as unidirectional and authorial. Art as dialogue, exchange and encounter, but also as critical reflection on itself, social reflection and cultural critique. In other words, what prevails in his work is a resistance to commercial logics and to the norms typical of the capitalist system, which govern the artistic field as well as, of course, our entire lives. Thus, for example, over the course of his career he has freely and independently distributed watercolours whose value derives from the fact that they are given away by the artist and consequently lose value if sold or transferred. Always motivated by this “non-functional thought”, in 2007 he opened a shop in Birmingham where he sold £10 and £20 banknotes using the purchaser's gaze as the medium of exchange⁵². In his critical reflection on the art field, he has sought not only to surprise but to “deconstruct” the expectations and knowledge typical of gallery visitors, as in the performance *Visite* (1991), when he organised visits to the apartments located in the building housing Galleria Il Campo in Rome. He invited eight elderly people with no interest in contemporary art and left them outside the gallery, underlining that access to art is reserved only for the initiated⁵³; he created a contemporary art gallery, *Evolution de l'Art*, specialising in “immaterial works”⁵⁴. Referring to tourist forms of cultural consumption, he organised sightseeing trips (Fig. 83) in which he presented “ordinary” places (a road tunnel, a water purification plant that does not work, an abandoned petrol station, etc.) as though they were actual monuments⁵⁵.

Finally, we may cite Luigi Coppola and Marzia Migliora who, together with Teatro Valle Occupato, Nomad Foundation and Nuovo Cinema Palazzo, tired of seeing culture always relegated to the margins

of electoral programmes, invited all citizens, on the occasion of the 2013 Rome municipal elections, to put culture at the forefront for development that was not only economic but also social, organising at Nuovo Cinema Palazzo the workshop Cantiere comune di immaginario politico, which gave rise to the performance/demonstration Io in testa. The artists listened to the participants, translating their potential, proposals and projects into artistic terms. The artists and participants wore a newspaper hat typical of construction workers, a symbol of their construction site of political imagination as well as of this desire to rebuild, in a concrete way, just as construction workers do, international credibility by giving new vitality to Italian national identity. No longer, therefore, politics dictating the law to art, but art and creativity becoming the only way out of a bureaucratised world in which mental categories of classification become insurmountable physical and cultural barriers⁵⁶.

“We are therefore unable to address you, even though you represent the city’s highest institutions, as people dear to us who honour agreements, perhaps unwritten ones, but the only ones capable of cementing civil coexistence. These ancient agreements between institutions and the people say that your efforts should coincide with ours in order to give representation to the city’s best energies, granting them quality and authority before everyone. Instead, precisely at crucial moments such as the present one, so complicated precisely in terms of representing this quality and, above all, at a moment when the fate of extremely important cultural institutions is being decided, you irresponsibly propose solutions and names that have nothing to do with artistic culture. [...] We have the impression that all the reasoning you engage in is even more mysterious and grim than it was during the period of subversive plots, and that if you persist in refusing to recognise and give dignity to the active forces of culture, you will contribute to plunging the city back into those same plots, contributing to the same destructive objective: spreading alienation from institutions and a sense of failure instead of hope and the desire to change the world.” These are some passages from the letter that the artists Alfredo Pirri and Jannis Kounellis entrusted to the pages of the newspaper La Repubblica on 12 February 2014, addressing the governors of the city of Rome in a climate in which the city’s cultural institutions were by then adrift, deprived not only of investment and resources but of any interest whatsoever on the part of the political class. Perhaps the Roman gallerist Giacomo Guidi is right: in an art system such as Italy’s, almost completely dependent on public investment and therefore completely paralysed in a historical moment, lasting for several years, characterised by cuts and spending reviews, having the

strength and the means, and believing as an entrepreneur in the potential for growth offered by culture — not only economic but also social — he will open in the autumn a new 1,500-square-metre space in Trastevere, thus creating a museum space entirely of his own.

Notes

51 Hans Jonas (1979), *Das Prinzip Verantwortung*, Frankfurt Am Main, Insel Verlag [Italian trans.: (1990), *Il principio responsabilità. Un'etica per la civiltà tecnologica*, Turin, Einaudi].

52 The performance *Money-Watching* (2007) was created as part of the project “Paradoxical Economies”, curated by Ikon Gallery on the occasion of the “Fierce!” festival. For further details on this performance and on all those cited below, see www.pensierinonfunzionali.net

53 *Quelli che non c'entrano* (2006), performance created on the occasion of the exhibition Gareth James – Cesare Pietroiusti at Galleria Franco Soffiantino, Turin.

54 www.evolutiondelart.net

55 Zagarolo-Gallicano-S. Cesareo-Zagarolo (1998), performance created for the exhibition “Stradarolo '98 – arte e spettacolo sulle vie dei pendolari”, curated by Stalker and Têtes de Bois. Of the same kind was the performance *Greve-Panzano-Otto luoghi e storie* (2003), created for the exhibition “Tuscia Electa”, curated by Arabella Natalizi.

56 For further information see: <http://iointesta.tumblr.com/>

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