

If I think back to last April, the journey to Munich with the materials for the exhibition in the boot of the car, the arrival at the Mariandl late in the evening, the busy days of work and the nights spent drinking and talking at the oak bar counter, it is like having an album of photos that no one actually took. But as I cannot describe those images as well as I would like, I will limit myself to a few observations, starting from the Munich exhibition and moving on from there.

None of us expected the Fukushima tragedy, which formed the real background to the work at the Kunstraum in Munich. Michelangelo had just returned from Nagoya, and, literally enchanted by Japanese culture, was hoping to return there as soon as possible. But then, with the disaster, things took on a different appearance. It seemed clear that it was not just an accident or a circumscribed environmental crisis, but the symptom of a bigger and more complex process.

It was clear, in fact, that the system, that complex and dynamic structure which dominates the world for profit, with its financial structure, its ideology and its acts of faith, would never renegotiate its assumptions. To maintain the crazy consumption of energy and the categorical imperative of so-called growth, ever more energy and new power stations would be required, while no one would consider the long-term collateral costs, which, when it comes to a power station, must be estimated for thousands of years. So as we worked on the Munich show there was a negative presage. We were spectators to a larger and unreformable global process still based chiefly on the profits of a few at the expense of the many, a design intended to dismantle the welfare state, liberties, rights, democratic guarantees, impoverishing constitutions and privatizing common assets, both tangible and intangible, and continuing to hold up empty and instrumental concepts such as growth and independence from the politics of big finance. We were soon to see, in Greece, Spain and then in Italy, that the so-called crisis is nothing other than a clearly devised instrument for the dispossession of property and political sovereignty – basically, yet another predatory action. The so-called crisis, like the state of exception, are simply the norm of this system. For our whole lives they would have us talk exclusively of money, of costs, of work, like in an immense concentration camp.

We are not the ones who create the world, yet each of us perceives it in our own way. So while all the newspapers in April and May of 2011 seemed almost to revel in catastrophism, after Fukushima it was necessary to rediscover, even if still imperceptible, what could really still oppose the big crisis and our consequent annihilation. Certainly it could not be achieved with a rain dance, but by constructing tools, even if only perceptual ones, in order to bring about encounters, possibilities of existence, personal and collective tools for conviviality.¹

This could not just concern the circumscribed world of an exhibition. Ultimately global processes involve the flow of our lives above all in the small things, in the limited projects of existence.

In Munich we probably wanted to compare our lives with those of other people who lived in different times and spaces from our own, and to investigate how an existence, however marginal, can bring about small changes in later generations or in some way elude or influence global processes.

In an initial phase, Michelangelo had invited some historic research into figures such as **Horace-Bénédict de Saussure** (1740–1799), **Gogliardo Fiaschi** (1930–2000) and **Masanobu Fukuoka** (1913–2008), respectively a Swiss naturalist, an anarchic activist from Carrara in Italy, and a Japanese peasant farmer. These three figures were linked by a common thread that spoke not just of art or ecology, but simply of creativity in the broadest sense of the word.

De Saussure was one of the founding fathers of alpinism. He contributed actively to the conquest of Mont Blanc, wrote naturalistic treatises and invented the *hélio thermomètre*, a precursor of the modern solar panel. Gogliardo,

1 Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, Harper & Row, New York, 1973.

on the other hand, was an anarchic activist. In 1957, he took to his bicycle and headed for Spain to oppose Francoism, but was arrested as soon as he crossed the frontier. Extradited to Italy after long years in prison, in his later years he became an environmentalist leader, helping to bring about the closure of the Farmopiant factory in Massa, a highly polluting pesticides plant. Fukuoka, on the other hand, was the father of natural farming; he inspired all kinds of organic farming practices, ranging from synergic methods to permaculture. He selected drought-resistant varieties of rice and barley suitable for the fight against desertification, and invented sowing with clay balls. Pia Pera describes him as a ninety-plus Japanese farmer capable of stirring the emotions more than a rockstar with his proposal for a peasant revolution as the pivot of a radical change in our society.²

Horace-Bénédict de Saussure, Gogliardo Fiaschi and Masanobu Fukuoka are certainly marginal figures in the history of grand events, but, in some way, perhaps only minimal, and even by means of an exhibition, can be regarded as important figures for the ecological memory of our planet. They are not recalled here as historical personalities, fixed on the pages of books once and for all, like insects with the needles. Instead, they are summoned up in the context of the search for creative hypotheses and solutions for a new society based on *conviviality* and *degrowth* – key concepts for the people who worked on the show and which we can find in the writings of Ivan Illich, Serge Latouche and Wolfgang Sachs.

They are not in themselves positive or joint models as such. Each of the three offered a different response to his historic and cultural environment, and in his own age. De Saussure's discoveries were almost a secondary consequence of his iron determination to climb Mont Blanc – an individualistic and sporting ideal that was very much part of the aristocratic culture of his age. As for Fiaschi, it would be difficult to share his admittedly youthful ideological recourse to violence as a political tool. Indeed, it can be seen as being specular to State violence, and its use, and the adoption of the same practices, can not be considered different or alternative to the same violent power it aims to oppose. With Fukuoka, however, we are on another plane. The poor, non-violent revolution of the Japanese peasant farmer, the one-straw revolution, as the title of his book puts it, represents one of the great conquests of our times. It too is not a model that can be slavishly applied anywhere. On the contrary, it involves, in order to make space in our thoughts, a complete reworking of our cultural habits and our *modern* models of existence.

The exhibition seems to be a system of relations in which the different elements interact.

In the room on the ground floor of the Kunstraum, two large monitors, one in front of the other, showed two videos, one about Fiaschi, the other about Fukuoka. Next to these was a third video, screened low down on the wall, with the solo climb of Mont Blanc, devoted to de Saussure. In the end we were not able to screen it on the stairs. The idea was that the mountain would have appeared towards the top, and visitors would have climbed the stairs as if on the edge of a precipice. As they climbed their shadows would have been cast on the projection, recalling the shadow of the pumpkins on the wall. But in the end, all this was not necessary, and perhaps overly cumbersome, and so it was deemed best to eliminate it.

Michelangelo had brought three polychrome ceramic pumpkins to associate with the three figures of the videos, and to dot around the show. Three ceramic sculptures of a different colour – white, black and an earth colour – and fired to different degrees – biscuit, third firing and raw clay. The ceramics referred to the land and to fertility, but also to the head and to thought.

During the Middle Ages, pumpkins were also used as containers for transporting water, wine or salt. In Italy, the expression “avere sale nella zucca” (literally ‘have salt in your head’) still means ‘to be intelligent’, as opposed to being empty-headed, that is, having “la zucca vuota”. The ceramic pumpkins were objects inviting reflection, but in the

2 Pia Pera, “Buttate via l’orologio”, in Masanobu Fukuoka, *Lezioni italiane*, LEF, Florence, 2005.

end they too were judged unnecessary and removed from the show.

On the upper floor there was a room illuminated by three different lights, plus three framed portraits and three tables made from stacked wooden pallets.

Pallets are used for industrial warehousing and transport. They are moved mechanically and immediately suggest globalization. But they are also bases for other objects, and in this case acted as tables or as pedestals for sculptures. They are, then, found objects that can also be recycled as tables or monuments, obstacles or sculptures, barriers or barricades. They are therefore snares and possibilities in a possible reading of the project.

On each of the three tables there was a hand-bound book, each about one of the three personalities. These were distinguished by a geometric sign on the cover: *M* for Masanobu Fukuoka, *H* for Horace de Saussure, *G* for Gogliardo Fiaschi. The *M* was together with a circle, the *H* with a triangle and the *G* with a square. Each book had its own colour, and on each book there was a paperweight, which intentionally recalled a work of the same name by Emilio Prini. On each table there were also objects bearing testimony to aspects of the three personalities' lives: for instance, a red-and-gold fabric heart of the kind that Fiaschi used to make and send to his friends from prison; a clay ball, associated with Fukuoka; and a small, pocket-size solar kitchen associable with De Saussure.

Finally, there was a fourth book containing a text written entirely by hand, denying that it is possible to write a biography of someone without knowing them personally. This was the contribution of Massimo Tantardini, who had dug up something said by a biographer of Sartre, thereby posing a still unresolved question that became an integral part of the sought-after snares of this exhibition – questions always in search of an answer and never closed. We placed the book in a corner on the floor, lit by an old spotlight, ostentatiously visible but impossible to read. In fact, no one ever picked it up off the floor to leaf through it.

Fiaschi, Fukuoka and Saussure are three personalities summoned to build hypotheses for a new ecological and social memory, overcoming the snares of history as it has been transmitted to us. It is said that history is always written by the victors, but also that we are history. And so we can say in conclusion that our memory is in some way proportional to our commitment to search for the truth.

The personalities convened for this exhibition are marginal figures which are not even mentioned in the history of big events. But they are also people who lived in a creative way, leaving a legacy of discoveries, inventions or simply traces for future humanity.

Observe the three photos.³ Close inspection will reveal that they are not portraits of once-living people, but the reproduction of their monuments. Each photo has a different frame, like the three colours of the pumpkins, and this invites reflection on the difference between the real person and memory, between body and monument, reality and recollection, direct presence versus absence and mediation.

Besides the three personalities, the show also featured a work by the Italian film director Marco Ferreri. In Ferreri we can find an element associated with Gogliardo Fiaschi: the negative of the vaguely pop ceramic pistol, red with white polka dots, that appears in Ferreri's *Dillinger è morto* ('Dillinger is Dead'). It is no accident that certain scenes in the film were shot in Mario Schifano's living room.

In Consani's most recent shows we can find reciprocal references, like a single open book consisting of combined but independent parts. And so the decoration of the ceramic pistol recalls Pop imagery and the psychedelic art of Yayoi

3 **NOTA PER IL GRAFICO. INSERIRE IN PROSSIMITÀ I VOLTI DEI TRE PROTAGONISTI**

Kusama. The apparently innocuous, infantile weapon suspends and conceals, in a mimetic guise, its aggressive charge.

Rounding off the show, on the second floor of the Kunstraum, was a video that deconstructed the finale of *Il seme dell'uomo* ('The Seed of Man'), a film by Marco Ferreri dating to 1969.

In the plot of the film, Cino and Dora are two young people travelling home. But after emerging from a long tunnel they find themselves in another world where everyone is dead. Alone, they ensconce themselves in an abandoned house by the sea and try to survive, while the television continues to transmit images of a world in flames. Other survivors soon appear, who affirm that the women must be fecundated in order keep the world going. Another woman then arrives who falls for Cino and tries to kill Dora, who, however, manages to get the better of her rival and kills her. But some time later Cino gets Dora pregnant during the night, when she is unconscious. At first she does not realize, but when Dino reveals what he has done, she asks despairingly why he did it. He begins to shout, laughing and circling around her: "I've sown! The seed of man has germinated! I've sown!..." Until, and this is the finale, the earth explodes beneath their feet and swallows them up.

Consani's work deconstructs this finale of the film, which is as mysterious as it is negative. He works it so that at the end we no longer see the smoke of the explosion, but the moment in which Cino comes out of the water with a freshly caught fish. By inverting the finale with an earlier scene, Michelangelo turns a finished thing into an open, modifiable material; an obligatory and negative finale which becomes a piece of *good news*, like the *buona novella* that Serge Latouche saw in the thought of Ivan Illich.