

**FUSARI** - Good evening to you all.

Of course, in the midst of so many experts, I don't have a role to play here. I was invited to greet you all and I do so happily, taking the opportunity to underline the importance that the City Council gives this experience of the project "Arti Visive Contemporanee" (Contemporary Visual Arts) which in recent years has made Palazzo Fabroni well known even outside the province of Pistoia. The public present here this evening is proof of this.

The project is really a window open on the world and it is our hope that, every now and then, people will look to Pistoia and to the cultural events that - with some hard work and in a very measured and spare way - we try to bring into being here. I like Esposito's exhibition very much - I say this being inexperienced - and I'm pleased that such authorities have come together to talk about it. I thank all those present who have come out in spite of the first great heat of the season. I leave the task of coordinating the evening to Bruno Cora, asking him to name those who will speak.

**CORÀ** - I, too, greet and express my thanks to City Councilor Andrea Fusari who has followed Palazzo Fabroni's activity with such great attention. He contributes by his presence and his concern about the Palazzo's developments with respect to what is the great project for contemporary art in the metropolitan area between Florence, Prato-Pistoia (which has made appreciable steps forward on the feasibility level).

This evening to join us in reflecting on and making considerations of Diego Esposito's show, *Passaggi*, we have invited a series of scholars, each of whom has quite a long history of work and collaboration with the artist and his artwork. Together with Esposito and myself at the table we have Professor Denys Zacharopoulos, who is the director of the Demaine de Kerguehenec, a contemporary art center in Bretagne. It is a place I invite you all to see and to get to know, because it is a site for an authentic production of contemporary art with a project for enlargement, research and outreach. It is aimed not only at artists to produce and place their works *in situ* but also at many young scholars who come to do stages and to study the artists' works, thus beginning their careers, with albeit different objectives, in the culture of artwork.

Also here with us is Professor Carlo Severi who teaches Anthropology at the Sorbonne in Paris, an old friend and colleague who has accompanied his thought and scientific research with writing: in the exhibition catalogue, we have published his contribution on which I will comment in a few minutes. I met Carlo Severi about twenty years ago on an occasion that brought him, as an artist, together with Diego Esposito, Marco Bagnoli, Francesco Clemente and other - then young, now more mature and consolidated - artists. I met him then, I meet him again today, twenty years have passed yet we are not aware of it. This means we are as tenacious as ever in our interests.

Marco Bagnoli, to my right, does not require introduction since he is an artist that you all know because he resides in

Tuscany. He recently held a show at the Pecci Museum in Prato. Diego Esposito's colleague for many years, he is here to contribute his ideas to this evening's task.

Last and certainly not least in terms of merit, Gianni Pettena, Professor of Architecture at the University of Florence, is very often our companion in reflections dealing with the borderlines of those experiences in the visual arts which have a strong pertinence to the problem of spatiality and therefore to architecture in a wider sense. He has always been a *border-liner* - that is someone who militates as an architect in the disciplines pertinent to his formation as well as an assiduous frequenter of the visual arts. As such he is, by his own definition, an *anarchitect* or an anarchist with regard to his own interests.

These then are the friends here with us this evening. It is my duty to present them and to invite them to enter in the freest, most ample, most sincere conversation possible with a reciprocal exchange of opinions and thoughts. Indeed I believe this is a further instrument for understanding the artwork of Diego Esposito who is here with us this evening. I think that during this meeting there will be enough time for all those present to speak, to pose questions, to draw even closer to their direct observation of the works now in the exhibition rooms.

Let me repeat that, among the guests here at the table with me, Carlo Severi and Denys Zacharopoulos have also contributed to the exhibition catalogue. They were invited by a common wish on the part of the artist and myself as well as of Chiara d'Afflitto who is the author of a fine catalogue essay dealing with the work that Esposito made for Palazzo Fabroni, in the city of Pistoia. These two careful observers of Esposito's work have provided some very original readings for focusing in on the artist's work. I cannot presume to speak in depth about these essays but, for anyone who hasn't read them, let me make a summary. In his text Carlo Severi speaks of *margins* and the work's prolongation, that is to say of an attitude on the part of Esposito's pieces to trespass beyond the very forms that define them. He also writes of *fwshes* - that is something that relates to light and color - as well as of a certain *echo* that the work itself, as a place, succeeds in emanating on its own. I believe that it is on these three nouns that he bases his thought. Maybe I'm wrong but we are here to compare our observations. It seems to me that, maybe for the essay's dry or spare nature, in using these three nouns he wanted to define his experience poetically. Naturally while he was doing this, a word came jumping out in his text which I later found in other authors' essays, like the one by Denys Zacharopoulos. The word is the noun *music* or *sonority*, a dimension that maybe belongs to the concept of the echo.

As for Zacharopoulos's essay, I would say that the wonderful title of his text on Esposito's work, "boomerang effect", explains one of his singular qualities: that is Zacharopoulos speaks about the fact that the utensil (the weapon but also the form that is a boomerang), when it is thrown, goes to occupy a space, taking into that space the whole path that it has followed. So he speaks of a kind of return by the

pathway followed to the place where the boomerang goes and therefore he refers to an occupation of space that is a hint of the very identity of Esposito's work. Such topological occupation coincides, Zacharopoulos says, with *he who threw the boomerang*. But that person won't be found in the place where the boomerang goes and moreover the boomerang speaks to us of a journey, of a trajectory of several spaces and several times that flow together in a concatenation. Zacharopoulos also recalls causes and effects in the game of billiards: that reciprocal concatenation of the balls' bumps and rolls across the green pool table.

In this essay's acumen and eloquence the greatest Greek philosophers are called into play, all figures that are part of Zacharopoulos's thought since he was born in their same land. His intellectual and critical militancy is widely international and European and yet his origins have served to further emphasize an innate musicality in the spatial operation carried out by Esposito. Indeed Zacharopoulos evokes the procedure of musicality with regards to a positioning of elements of equal value, which in music are diversified according to where they are placed. Clearly the continuous relationship that Zacharopoulos establishes between disciplinary elements as well as the evocations of linguistic aspects which are different from those of plastic spatiality or visual spatiality are continuously referred back to Esposito's work in order to make an indirect system of emphasis, of denotations that are able to render, in a fruitful way, the meaning of this boomerang effect.

Seeing that the authors are present, I just wanted to give an account of these two contributions - we can all read the texts and make up our own minds - so that we can start right away to weave a dialogue, a discussion with these guests. Unless they call upon me to do so, I won't make specific considerations about the show since I curated it. The job that Diego and I have done together is submitted for your judgment while our guests are here, if necessary, to correct some of our readings, to make some observations that can bring greater clarity to the epistemological task instigated by an exhibition and a critical essay. So I would begin by handing over to our first guest speaker Denys Zacharopoulos.

Thank you.

**ZACHAROPOULOS** - Firstly, I would like to thank the City of Pistoia, my friends, Palazzo Fabroni for having offered me several occasions to meet with you. This is not my first time here and it is not the first time that I find myself in a situation where art and creation, debate, criticism, thought are brought together, here, among people who have accompanied us along these twenty and more years that Bruno Cora has spoken about. So the boomerang effect is tied to these occasions and we never know how they happen, but they bring us together in one place which is obviously a place for art - I like to think this - but this place for art is also a little more than what is usually defined as a place for art. It is much more than an architecture that is empty of people and full of objects. Rather I would say it is a place full of people and full of artworks and it is rather difficult to know whether or not there are objects. By the same token it is difficult to know,

at least for me personally, how and to what degree a person is a person like all of us. The fact that at a certain moment in my life, our life, we decided and threw this boomerang - which allowed a trajectory in space that we cannot follow physically but rather mentally - makes it clear that certain people, when they return, don't come back as commonplace individuals like ourselves, but as artists, intellectuals. When we hear them speak, see them move etc., they move in another kind of space; they use another level of words; and they have a different kind of attitude than the one used in the real life that we live every day and in which they probably live, too. But they live when they take off. When they come back towards us it is in another kind of space, in another kind of trajectory.

As I was thinking about writing this text, the first thing that came to mind with Diego Esposito, for example, was that over the last twenty years I don't know where or how we met up, and the same is true for Carlo Severi. I don't know how we managed to do it without following what seemed like the Contemporary Art train or airplane that carries people from one place to another in a professional concatenation, as if it were a direct train; we have followed an indirect train, as you yourself have said, meeting up in places, sites, situations that map out a geography. But in this geography the path is not marked: it is different for each person because each one has different reasons. And here lies the wealth of artistic situations.

When Dr. Stanley goes to search for Dr. Livingstone in Africa, he knows Dr. Livingstone is considered dead and gone by the rest of humanity. Dr. Livingstone is taking a walk in the African forest and he sees someone coming towards him. In this encounter we can't put the two parts together because Dr. Livingstone is unaware of what is going on, being absolutely alive and active, occupying his own territory while the rest of humanity thinks that he has disappeared, has been eaten by cannibals, etc. and that he no longer exists.

This is the case with most artists: every now and then they disappear like Dr. Livingstone and everyone thinks that they have been eaten by some cannibalism on the part of the art market, collectors, museums, the press. Or else that they have probably been devoured by themselves. However they continue to live, like Dr. Livingstone, in a territory which is theirs alone. Somehow you get there without really knowing how: you go to Africa and ask yourself how to find Dr. Livingstone.

You go to Africa, but you don't know where to go, you don't even know where to begin searching and suddenly you see him in front of you and with the greatest naturalness in the world you say to him, "Good morning. Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" Mr. Diego Esposito, I presume.

In Dr. Livingstone's case it really happened once, generating a metaphor, an allegory, an anecdote about the century's history. Yet in the context of art history and cultural life this kind of thing happens often in the course of a lifetime. So it happens that certain things, certain places exist as if they were a geography, but these are geographies that come

back, not places where we go. They are places that fall on top of us. In Greek we have a common expression used for when you fall in love: a roof-tile falls on your head. You don't know how it happens to you. It seems to me that this is very close to what happens in art. There are feelings, situations in which it happens that something falls on your head and you don't know where it comes from, how it works. But it does work. Well or badly, but it works. It is this well or badly that makes you present. And here lies the question, which is not anecdotal in this whole story I am telling because we can say that I am telling it in an easy way and we don't know - and I want to say this as something polemical, declarative - we don't know if these situations are addressed to us personally. And this is, for me, art's greatness: when it happens to you you have to be conscious somehow that this act of presence, that makes you present, at the same time makes you absent to the idea that we have of ourselves, of our identity. It could have happened perfectly well to someone else who was here in this place. So here in this show - where I have seen some works I already knew, others I had seen only in photographs, others that had been described by the artist as projects he wanted to make but now I see them finished they look like something else - there are a whole series of levels that finally exist in reality this reality that art produces, creates and that is not to be confused with the reality of nearby furniture.

So I am very happy to take a plane or a car and come to a city that might be more beautiful than other cities, but beautiful like all cities, so full of people and life, in order to find things, situations that are not found in another city because they are works, ours, made by artists and that, at a certain point, have nothing to do with beauty or wealth. They have to do with situations that occur and we haven't prepared them; we can only presume they will happen. We are the ones who need to be prepared to grasp them, to receive them, but we can't prepare for them. They fall on our heads. So when you say that I am Greek and I have something to do with Greek philosophy, I think I have so little to do with Greek philosophy, and it's a great pity for me and for all Greeks. It's just like saying that all Italy has to do with the Renaissance: if all Italians took Dante as their model then Mussolini would have won and this would be a Fascist country. Every time someone says that since we are Italians we are cultured, since we are Greek we are philosophers, since we are French we are elegant, it ends there; there is no more room to reason, there is no more room to create, there is no more room for doing anything. All these are, if not military, then parlorroom identities.

However, seeing that there are many speakers, I would prefer to pause here and let someone else speak. Later we can pick up the discussion on another level. It seems to me that the exhibition offers many openings, many readings, like a complex of non-linear things, so it would be interesting to have more comments.

Following my personal ethics, I would propose to go not to the right but towards art.

**CORÀ** - Taking Denys's lead, we'll pass to Marco Bagnoli. Let me take a moment to say that my mention of Zacharopoulos's relation to Greek thought was tied to the fact that at a

certain point in his essay he talks about Aristotle and Plato.

Now it is Marco Bagnoli's turn.

**BAGNOLI** - Those who wear their own vestments consider what has been conferred them a loan while the work of those who have abandoned their vestments has been exchanged from disinterested to obligatory.

I turned my thoughts to Diego, to his exhibition. It was hard for me to find an exact point of reflection that could also be useful for all of you. So I also read an interview with Diego by Bruno Cora and there I found something that really struck me. It is the term "*moralisticamente eccessivo*" (moralistically excessive) used in reference to those formative years when, with regard to color, Diego Esposito felt the real need to choose between immersion and emergence, an aspect that I find typical in his work. I felt and shared, in those years, that emergence from color, that same difficulty in expressing anything as an art object. I am reminded of a room in Milan: I crossed it diagonally by means of an oblique ladder on which I had balanced a sentence: *nel giallo faremo una scala o due al bianco invisibile* (in the yellow we will make a step or two to the invisible white).

The same monochromatic yellow reappeared in a modest room in Rome where I had arranged the names of artists who had an assignment of the place to be done according to the rules of the ancient theater of Bharata, translated from the pen of the extraordinary author of the *Monte Analogo*. Several times that subtracted color has consented a correspondence with Diego's art.

I am speaking of an immersion and an emergence of color as if it were a rhythm of breathing. And so I see the typicality of Diego's work expressed in an emblematic manner in the same color that is lost in the sea in Istanbul or that returns to the surface of the waves in Venice. Above all my memory goes back to that extraordinary image that I heard about in Venice: a Greek statue came to our sight for an instant but then immediately dissolved, lost its character: for those few who were lucky enough to see it, it was simultaneously a vision of the Terrible and the Sublime. They say the statue portrayed a warrior who, distracted on the field of battle, looks towards the sky.

**CORÀ** - Thank you. Carlo Severi.

**SEVERI** - This is certainly an anti-rhetorical exhibition. For the visitor it is a moment of discontinuity in his daily anxiety. A moment for listening. This is due above all to the penetrating discretion of Diego's work. A never-loud way to attract the attention that belongs to these pieces. And then there is a more technical aspect, something close to a visual method. It is not just an invitation to capture one's attention, to explore with the gaze, to seek - in the space surrounding the artwork - some visual correspondence .... It is an invitation to look far off, to look beyond the limits in which the artwork is materially circumscribed. The show is titled *Passaggi*. Among the other works *Cascata* is a good example of this going be-

yond the gaze. In the work the cascade of water has become unmoving color. Yet, in the same moment, it has become light that changes continually. The interior movement remains. It seems that there is a wish (this time on the part of the work and not the artist, but it does regard him as it regards all of us rather closely) to extend itself far.

So, thinking about the development of the group of artists we are speaking of this evening, I would say that, over the years, many of the things that I could have observed about these people have gradually become characteristic elements of their artworks. For some time now Diego has established this intimate contact with his art. Something that we probably shared or found together, without openly declaring it, is this discrete desire to go beyond. It was, I repeat, something not declared. There is, however, in this discrete desire an open debate. When we showed several works together in Paola Betti's gallery in Milan, it was a time of great crisis of invention, of very strong vertigo in the art world. The idea (although undeclared, it was no less clear or less lasting) was to respond to this crisis by using discretion in a determined way: counting on time, counting on the contemplation of space; counting also on the search for far-off references, the most remote analogies, facts of independent visual invention; to remove the horizon line even farther without losing the thread while, of course, continually risking to lose it.

Once Diego and I visited an exhibition together. It was a show of African musical instruments and it had an interesting subtitle: *Forme Sonore* (Sonorous Forms). We liked it very much. I remember that there was a large drum with a kind of face etched at the base where the stretched hide was wrapped under. The accompanying label read: African drum with anthropomorphic decoration. Now anyone believing the label would have left the museum thinking they had only seen a decorated musical instrument. But we said to ourselves (inspired perhaps by the face): imagine the sound made by that drum. It was very big so the sound was bound to be deep, intense. Is it possible, we wondered, that there is no special relationship between that anthropomorphic figure and the drum's sound? What if this object, instead of being simply a decorated musical instrument, was an attempt to imagine the face from which this sound originates? What if the object contained an attempt to transform a sound into a voice?

The question presupposed an implicit hypothesis: that one could construct a mental device able to move far way, to go beyond labels, to the point of trying to hear that sound in the pure presence of the drum, as well as in that lightly-etched face. I remember we had a long conversation about it. One object after another, seen in this light, revealed something new. The museum filled with sounds.

Some time later we found another series of objects in the horrible colonial museum that unworthily decorates the city where I have been living for twenty years. There were African harps (Zande, to be precise) that could not be touched, let alone try to play them: as in all shows, they were shut up tight in their display cases. However these harps, like the drum, used other images to prolong the instruments' pure forms,

their devices designed to make sound. Again, faces. These faces seemed alive, they embodied not only the sound of the rhythmically plucked cords but also the voice of the person playing them. Open lips, a song just hinted at: it is in this way that a sonorous form is generated, through the prolongation of an image in sound; through the simple, commonplace, profane, and daily ascertainment that inside a visible form one can always glimpse an invisible one, to which one can add the idea of producing sound (present, nearby, familiar, yet always one of the forms of the invisible) through a particular relationship among visible clues. A face, a stretched skin or several chords, closed eyes, a trace of the lips where sound issues forth.

This special relationship between clues offered by the eye - in African art but elsewhere, too - creates a kind of invisible presence that doesn't have anything especially sacred about it yet it remains literally miraculous.

In my opinion, Diego goes after visual situations of this kind. Borderline situations in which - even in a kind of lightening flash that can be seen from time to time in Venice more often than elsewhere - one searches for a particular configuration in which a visible image cannot sustain itself in perception without the very acute perception of another invisible image. Generally, these images occur spontaneously, they are literally without an author. That the world is full of works like this, without authors, is certainly one of the first discoveries of an artist's work.

A third aspect that I wanted to address with regards to Diego's art is the musical element. Music, as I mentioned before, reserved for visual forms. But the analogy here is so strong that we have cried to use even the same notation as music. The emphasized note, the parallel insertion of different rhythms, the crown, the sign that we put on a note to show that the player must avoid interrupting its development and let it fade: all these draw something which, with other means, Diego does fairly often. He lets the chromatic vibrations reverberate around the work spreading the surrounding space with echoes.

**CORÀ** - Thank you. Let's finish this first round with Gianni Pettena.

**PETTENA** - I've known Diego Esposito for many years and, for me, this exhibition represents the synthesis of my thoughts when meeting and speaking with him. Unable to attend the inauguration I came the next day, Sunday in the early afternoon, when no one else had gotten there yet. I walked by myself through this place, this palazzo which I have been through other times with friends or visitors, but never like this, alone, listening to the sound of my footsteps and discovering a sequence of completely new spaces, different from what I had always imagined to be Palazzo Fabroni. So Diego had taught me a lesson in spatial perception, an unexpected lesson because of the unforeseeable nature of its wisdom that allowed me to listen to the sound of my own footsteps and to perceive the transfer of outside places into interior rooms. Yet the sequence of interior rooms was

very close to my way of highlighting, in a space, the possible symmetries - or their absence - or the possible reflections that a wall or a path can have on the facing wall or on the next path, connected to the preceding one. When Diego arrived and we began to walk through these spaces together, I was reminded of something that had already happened to me many years before with another artist, Smithson; in spite of our different training (art school for him, architecture for me) Smithson and I found ourselves working on the same ways of defining, of understanding a spatial event or else of recognizing ourselves within it. We usually sought out places that spoke in low tones and helped them to achieve a normal tone. In our conversation published in 1972 in *Domus* magazine, Smithson and I spoke about our intolerance of *beauty spots*, of those spectacular postcard-like places, of that way of relating to or choosing a spectacular backdrop for one's own uncertain formalized pondering (just think of how artists use Forte Belvedere in Florence). Instead one can emphasize, by underlining it, the absence of quality in a place that has never looked for quality, not only of an aesthetic kind.

Esposito helps me to look in a mirror. He makes me feel the remorse of not concentrating enough on making a thought physical and of letting myself be distracted by education. Even if sometimes when I listen to a student illustrating his work I get the feeling that, in designing, the student is trying to get away from the force of gravity and fundamentally this is just what Diego is trying to do or what often I try to do when I work on space: to investigate its · logic, structure, intimate connections.

I discovered that Diego Esposito has spent days, even weeks in Palazzo Fabroni. He has studied and understood what was expressed and unexpressed in that sequence of spaces. And the result is clear, tangible, because when one walks through these rooms, gravity, the usual manner of perceiving a space, no longer exists. We cross through this space but, as in a drawing by Moebius, we cross it without any predefined references or limits.

**CORÀ** - I think these contributions rival each other in poetic strength and incisive reading. So at this point we would like to ask you, Diego, to go beyond the exhibition, to make a further effort and tell us your own feeling about your work, about what the others have said with such poetic intensity, about this experience at Palazzo Fabroni.

I have heard you say so many times that this place stimulated new conceptions in your work and would have stimulated even more had you stayed here longer - maybe even changing some rooms in the days after the inauguration, maybe developing another work, continuously, just like the works that have been especially created for this space. Maybe you could comment on the works you conceived for the Palazzo and that have, together with the ones generated by imagination, given proof of the boomerang effect that Denys talked about; or you could speak about the always latent invisibility that the place inspires and that is the object of Carlo Severi's reflections or about the elements that from outdoors were brought inside the space. I remember that at times you spoke

to me about the light entering the rooms, the presence of the church of Sant'Andrea and other aspects, all elements that look very similar to the gaze of the warrior that Marco Bagnoli mentioned. Gianni Pettena's words are so recent as to not need repeating. I wanted to ask you, at this point, to add your thoughts on the exhibition to those of our friends.

**ESPOSITO** - First let me thank you, dear friends, for having accompanied me on this path and I would especially like to draw attention to Marco Bagnoli's presence at this table since, over time, there has often been a sort of fleeting convergence between us.

I am moved by this talk about my work as a fact of life and of things that have happened while spending time together, as in Carlo Severi's story recalling our visit together to a show of African musical instruments in Paris. An important visit which gave me the opportunity later on to make several works as *Sound Form*. Denys Zacharopoulos has spoken of events even farther back in time. Pietro Montani and I experimented, still adolescents, with our first paintings. With Bruno, over the years, there has been a continuing relationship. I hadn't meet up with Gianni Petrena for many years but the architectural values of my show in Palazzo Fabroni immediately brought up several affinities. In this sense Palazzo Fabroni has a very particular quality: the fact that it is composed of two buildings gave me the chance to insert *Arco* as an element of unification in an absolutely fascinating structural dimension.

I went to Palazzo Fabroni many times. Immediately I imagined a situation, not a fixed point but many points, many surprising situations that all, however, come together under a single direction of passages, slippages, a crossing of gazes, thoughts and time.

In Japan I discovered the meaning of *ma*: in ancient China it was used to indicate *space* but in Japan they added *time* to the concept. *Ma* is also the interval between two things ... it introduces the idea of a pause. A space like a musical instrument in which you can hear the echo of its sound, the theme I had spoken about with Carlo Severi.

One thing that greatly intrigued me was the view of the church of Sant'Andrea through the Palazzo's windows. A presence that one can't pretend doesn't exist. For *Dialogo* I built a wall in wire reinforced glass in order to let the light filter through in a softer way; at the same time, although you don't see it any more, you have the memory of what is behind the wall.

Then there is the wall made in MDF, suspended, fluctuating with the yellow light that filters in from the sides, *Passaggio*: ambiguous even in its terminology, taking into account the elements and how they have been used.

I also want to mention *Cascata*: an eighteen-meter-long work made for a show held in an Amsterdam shipyard. The extraordinary effect of the succession of doorways in Palazzo Fabroni created a kind of river bed in which to lay out the work. The doors have changed function; they are no longer to be walked through but to be crossed with one's gaze.



*Il volo dell'uccello notturno* (The Flight of the Night Bird), shown at Paola Betti's Milanese gallery many years ago, has found a rather extraordinary setting. After taking off from Patmos it has alighted in a room that is similar to the little churches found on Greek islands. The insertion of *Congo blu* in PVC recalls the dark blue of night-time while it reflects *Cascata*.

**CORÀ** - Thank you. We have completed this first round of thoughts and here in the room I see some friends who are very fond of Esposito's work so I invite them to say something about it, too. Let me present them to you: Saretto Cincinelli, Pietro Montani, the artist Alfredo Pirri, Laura Vecere, Siliano Simoncini, the photographer Carlo Cantini, invite them, together with anyone else, to speak. Simoncini.

**SIMONCINI** - Two things: the first has to do with the fortunate opportunity we had to speak with Diego Esposito during a visit to his show with the Art Institute students. We hope, next year, to be able to develop the experience of his work as we have done for other artists who have shown at Palazzo Fabroni. The second refers to the character of Esposito, the man, to his discretion and reserved nature, which has been pointed out more or less by everyone this evening; a nature that demonstrates, above all, his way of offering himself, of putting himself forward ... one feels a kind of gentleness, of tenderness in listening to him which is missing not only in the world of art but in our everyday reality. We are grateful to him for this.

The foremost thought that came to mind, as I listened to the speakers here, has to do with the sense of the sacred and myth that is present in Diego Esposito's work. The impression that we receive most strongly from visiting his exhibition at Palazzo Fabroni is precisely the invitation to walk through a sacred place. The word "echo" which the anthropologist rightly mentioned, this kind of physical relationship made up of continuous synesthesia leads us to think of a humanist's work and thought; we receive a message of remarkable wealth and depth yet Diego Esposito's work is concrete! It seems to me that we can interpret his art in these terms. It is not up to me to make clarifications about this but I wanted very simply to express this feeling I have.

Another thing I wanted to ask Diego Esposito: he says, practically, that if you find the orientation you lose the form. However I understand that it isn't lost but it is gained in another way. This became quite evident as, with the students the other day, I was going through the exhibition rooms: the great lesson I learned 'was to direct the students to reflect profoundly on the nature of the form.

The real nature of the form! Excess and repetition, we know, are all an essential part of the educational experience since abundance is the most demonstrative, most explicit expedient. To synthesize and reduce to minimal terms the inversely proportional relationship between the given problem and the given aesthetic is undoubtedly the most difficult solution to evaluate.

This led me to have the students observe things about the

quality of form at a level I had never had to use with works by other artists, where the exuberance of the form is probably closer to their aesthetic taste. Thank you.

**ESPOSITO** - It's difficult for me to answer you in the sense that I know your involvement with your students, you are an artist of great sensibility and depth and, at the same time, as a teacher you want to make certain things understood. I don't feel this preoccupation, I like this diversity. I don't want to talk about my work as a formal, rigorous, explicable apparition. When I was talking to your students the other day, I tried to put myself in their shoes, to get near them without lying to them ... Because, in my opinion, there are different passages and everyone must live them according to one's own sensibility.

**MONTANI** - Listening to you has made me want to join the discussion and I do so without any preparation and in the hope that sooner or later there will be another and better chance. This has been a wonderful evening. I fully agree with all the things that have been said. Maybe the one defect, if there is one, lies precisely in the fact that I agree with them all. It's been said for instance that art is something that falls on us like a roof-tile. Of course! Art must be something absolutely unpredictable and incalculable! The incalculable cannot be anticipated, it must be met. Be careful, though: this roof tile - it has also been said - must be something like a boomerang, that is something that comes back to its place, something that belonged here already (and to which we belonged): therefore this tile that hits us full force is also, paradoxically, something that belonged to us. Something that takes us back to where we always were but we were there without knowing it. This is what I got from listening to Zacharopoulos.

Severi, then, said another important thing (maybe he had Merleau-Ponty in mind): he said that art is always a way of making the invisible appear in the visible. That is, to use another terminology, a way of making the verb *being* appear in the noun *being* or of capturing transcendence in the senses ( this too was said, using the image of a gaze that moves *elsewhere*). Finally it's been said that in art it's a question of linking spaces, creating transit between non-isotropic spaces.

All this is very correct. I like it a lot. It coincides with my own idea of art. However, and this is the reason I have decided to speak, it all rather cheats Diego Esposito's art. It is all very general; it is true in general for the art we love: that is, it hits us full force and yet it takes us back to where we already were, it is the gobetween the visible and the invisible, it looks elsewhere while keeping us well rooted on the ground, it joins and invents spaces. These are all views I share completely but they are completely generalized.

Instead, the specific reflection that I would like to raise (to develop maybe on a more structured occasion) regards Diego Esposito's work alone, that is what is singular and unique to be found in his art. We really need these singularities ( which are also, of course, pluralities) in order not to be flattened, leveled by the current regime of the image and more gen-

erally by cultural fashion. We need unique proposals as well as the incalculable pluralization derived from it.

I will try to indicate a single aspect (I'm a reflective person and it's difficult for me to quickly formulate my thoughts about what I see), a single but salient trait which I happened to capture while looking at the works that Diego has presented here at Palazzo Fabroni. It is a trait that I offer up to discussion, proposing it as one of those things that Diego Esposito's work helps to identify; so it is like a trait that has the effect of augmenting the pluralization, of fomenting and spreading it. Looking particularly at the treatment of color, I was reminded of a very short essay by Walter Benjamin published in the 1920s and titled *Zeichen e Mal*. It is quite difficult to translate. *Zeichen*, sign, is that thing that, by signing, defines a border, delimits. Think, for example, of those scratches that Diego spoke of. *Mal*, painting, is the surfacing of color, its spontaneous efflorescence, a little like the blush that appears on one's face. *Zeichen* is the boundary, the defined area. *Mal* is that which knows no boundaries.

Is there a relationship between these two elements: between the severity of the sign and the fluidity of the brushstroke, the spacing of the *Zeichen* and the fullness of the *Mal*? Of course there is a relationship, or better the relationship is a necessity. One requires the other. But there is also - and this is more difficult to capture - a space between one and the other, a crossing of the border or even a dialogue between the two. And so this is my thought: I believe that Diego Esposito has worked essentially on this reciprocal crossing of borders. Not so much on the sign or on color, on the border itself or the emergence, as much as on that which puts them in relation, on the passage (of course invisible) that connects them. Here then is a point - one of many - that is singular and unique, typical of Diego Esposito's recent work which I think can be understood (or begin to be understood) in the context of that general definition of art which I like very much and which I have heard represented by all the talks made up to now.

**PIRRI** - Let me take advantage right away of Pietro Montani's words, to say that I, too, feel the need to grasp in a more specific way the meaning of what has been said about Diego Esposito's work here this evening; a way that keeps closer to his work. I would like to briefly tell the experience of my visit to the exhibition this evening, going among the works with Diego. I have seen the show, I have lived this experience the same way a cobbler might visit the workshop of another artisan, colleague and friend. First he asks himself if the shoes he is seeing are well made, if the leather used is of good quality, if they will stand up over time and if they are comfortable. The questions I asked Diego, maybe more than once, were always about the same issue: am I standing in front of a work in wood? Is it solid wood? Or instead is it empty? Is it heavy? Is it light? What is it made of inside? This is important for me because it communicates the reality of that work in that moment, a kind of... let's call it ..... *perceptive* trick, that sets us in front of a *perceptive doubt*, so that the nature of that artwork escapes us.

Naturally, to ask ourselves something about the *constructive* nature of a work does not mean limiting the discussion to

technical problems, especially if that work - as it seems to me is the case with Diego's pieces - insists heavily on this ambiguity and, at the same time, on the utilization of a material which is, by its nature, ambiguous as is the case for Medium Density. Rather, it is maybe even this material's color which reminded me of a cobbler, for its chromatic similarity to leather.

So what leather do you use for the shoes you make? What does the use of this material tell us? I thought of how a material comes to light in certain circumstances, about the expressive needs it answers. When canvas was first used, painters were finally able to paint a single image in large dimensions. Earlier, on wood, this wasn't possible. This material, which isn't wood, but neither is it paper nor even aluminum, is used in workshops because it is easily worked. This makes it, for many people, the ideal support, with no surface defects, easy to use, a material that asks to be painted. Its use gives me the idea of an invocation. of painting which in the work exhibited here, *Colore verso suono*, seems to me to be expressed in a clear way, right in the piece where the support is not discernible, where painting entirely covers the surface.

This painting seems to me to represent the synthesis of the tensions that move the show. There are materials waiting to be painted but this work really is painted and it is in the last room of the show. It's as if we were witnessing the completion of a divine - or if you like, satanic - project which gives definite form to the souls in Purgatory. Souls in the balance, neither lost nor triumphant. Souls with neither form nor color. In this task's necessity, I believe, there is something like a gesture of responsibility. That is what I saw in Diego's work, this evening, and I thank him for this gesture. Thank you.

**ZACHAROPOULOS** - I think it would be appropriate, as I said before, to make another round, taking our comments to another level and perspective with regard to Diego Esposito's work and exhibition. After having listened to Pirri and Montani, it seems to me even more necessary to move on to the other side of what has been said. It's obvious that when we are confronted with an exhibition - an exhibition that is not a retrospective, but somehow gathers twenty years of work and is very logical, more eclectic than exhaustive but also exemplary in some way - certainly we are always tempted to see two sides: the unity of the work as well as the unity of the sentiment creating this work in front of a viewer. Friends have followed the art through various contradictory phases, including all the doubts, debates, etc. which in a show are never seen, said, rendered explicit. On the other hand, the great pleasure (which I consider a pleasure of historic, ideological and political dimensions) is to witness the work by an artist who has always been present (even if we never know how an artist is present in our lives). This pleasure has always been for me - in my idea of art, in my way of seeing what is happening in my time as well as in our historical, ideological and aesthetic era - to see that this artist has finally been allowed a space, offered a space so that he can open his wings and fly; he is no longer confined to existing in the rather narrow, rather irrational passages that we as friends and artistic directors all know but never see in public space.

Here at last is an exhibition by Diego Esposito in Italy, in a large institution (even if it seemed that Italy doesn't have any large institutions because it is not an Italian concept). Palazzo Fabroni is, however, one of the rare attempts to make a space that brings together at the same time art in its most sensitive element and art in its public manifestation. With joy I see this space being devoted to an artist who is not exalted by trends, the art market, an ideology. This artist has finally come, no one knows how, to Palazzo Fabroni well knowing to have come here for art, for history. In this sense, hearing you speak of the cobbler makes me think that when one goes to the cobbler's workshop, one looks at the shoes. I am not a cobbler. I cannot live without shoes. I can assure you that Dr. Livingstone - I don't know what kind of shoes he wore, I don't know what kind of cobbler made his shoes - but he had good shoes which allowed him to go far. So the discussion of how shoes are made is certainly an interesting one. It is what makes Diego Esposito an important artist in my eyes and what ends up - not only in his intellectual presence but in his work and its role in the Italian scene of the last thirty years - making him a completely public, historical, political, artistic figure of the highest international level. Internationality doesn't mean the commercial stock market that decides the values of how much something costs, but international in the meaning I learned growing up: there is an internationality that exists as a project of life, as a project of society, as a project of exchanging ideas, of opening onto the world, and as public space and not as a space only for the circulation of goods and privilege.

So I must say that in this story Diego is not alone. Not only is he not alone, indeed the situation is even more unique because he is not alone, because this unique quality exists at the center of his debate with other artists and with a situation that has been absolutely dramatic, not only for art but for the whole of European society from the 1970s to today.

The Pistoia exhibition has been described in what I would call a kind, phenomenological, intimistic, friendly way - which is the reason we are here this evening - but it can also be described in other terms. It can be described in terms that uncover massacres, absolutely terrible betrayals. So this discretion is not the result of polite education; it is not a fact of conceded culture being received by someone because their grandmother played the piano or their father took them to England. It has been extremely hard work, not like a craftsman's but like an intellectual's, working on himself, together . with other people. It has been a job of continuous mutilation in order to create these passages. So in this sense I feel the absolute obligation to say that if, after so many years, Marco Bagnoli, Diego Esposito, Carlo Severi as well as myself find ourselves here today, in this room together, it is to find - I would say in a looser way because by now much time has passed - a history that has continued voluntarily for each of us but which has been a public history and a public debate. The fact that Francesco Clemente isn't here with us this evening, for example, is a fact that Francesco decided in 1979 when he didn't come to a show in Milan where all these people were present alongside Pier Paolo Calzolari, Ettore Spalletti, Remo Salvadori, Mariella Simoni, etc .. The fact is

that these other people, even if they aren't here this evening, have called to say that they are intellectually present. Little does it matter what kind of shoes are worn by cobblers, or Ettore Spalletti, or Remo Salvadori, or Mario Merz: they have the shoes that have finally allowed each of them to follow his course into the world, into the wide world; into the world as a project which from the mid-Seventies on was no longer able - in Italy probably as in the rest of Europe - to conclude one circuit where one knew how, where, what conditions could be found. Encounters were made by chance and finding a friend is always a miraculous event; the fact that you find a friend at the point where you find him isn't a calculation: the incalculable is already in itself a scientific method. In this sense a certain number of artists, in Italy more than in other countries, decided to not let culture develop either as a bourgeois fact of easy efforts, wild German-style talents and emerging Expressionists or, on the other hand, as an academic, scholastic fact. They wanted culture to be a kind of investigation, to continue to interrogate in a more precise way even art's categories. Here we are speaking about painting but all of Diego Esposito's work is made through this investigation and by refusing craft in order to be able to find the form's own way.

This is not meant to be a polemic addressed to anyone. I am only saying that if today some younger artists can aspire to an opening towards art it is because an investigation has been carried out by certain artists who have in some way put the evidence between parentheses. This way of placing in parentheses the evidence of categories, ideologies of painting, craft, training, information, etc. functions as a generalized methodology. We know how it works as a precise methodology for a single work, for Diego as for other artists. I should say that, if in the field of science in 1904, Max Plank didn't know what Einstein was doing and Einstein didn't know what Heisenberg was doing, this was probably because they were looking for similar things but using different methodologies, looking for things that they couldn't even name but knowing they had to look for them. They had to stop using certain words, they had to stop using certain ideologies, they had to stop using a context of knowledge.

To sum up, all this has been said in a nice, poetic, irrational way by everyone in the first part of the evening. I would say that this "irrationality" has nothing to do with magic or poetry; it is rather an awareness of the lack of instruments and of the need to build new instruments in order to make ourselves understood about certain things. If Carlo Severi takes off for America or Oceania, if Diego Esposito leaves for Turkey or wherever else, if Marco Bagnoli is busy with his stories of mathematical and medieval calculations or whatnot, these are not givens of sensibility, they are givens of knowledge. But in some way knowledge can also be sensitive. This is the important thing that has been completely overlooked in the face of a so-called "Italian" art; the seemingly artistic transavantgards have completely blocked any possibility of discussing art, at least over the last twenty years. Not only in Italy but in the rest of the world, too, because - together with a new rising bourgeoisie which has determined that an entire society, Western society, has become a society of



services - it has shifted the identity of the artist to that of a provider of services: the artist decorator, the artist who entertained the bourgeoisie, the artist who puts himself on show, the artist who presents his talent, his beautiful eyes, his beautiful woman, his car as his identity. This has all blocked any approach to the essential issues. Even artists who make money have overlooked the fact that, for the first time in I don't know how many years, it's possible for artists to make a living. That the artist has moved closer to the idea of business is a bourgeois ideology that has excluded the possibility to finally be able to think that the artist has an important role to play in our society, even at an economic level. So then, here we are, dealing with these rare producers. In this sense I grasp at the idea of the cobbler because he is a producer and not a provider of services. He is a producer because his shoes aren't made to be compared with the ones made by another cobbler - they are made to go as far as possible.

**CORÀ** - I knew that inviting Diego Esposito to make an exhibition at Palazzo Fabroni would stimulate interesting reflections on today's art. Analogously I knew that inviting these speakers to this table would lead not only to the considerations already made but also to those which are about to follow. There would be a lot to discuss but I don't know if we can go on all night long!

I was very struck when Zacharopoulos first brought up the figure of Dr. Livingstone, because I thought of the root of his name: this "living stone" which establishes an analogy with Diego's identity. I think of it like a stone in the garden of Rvoan-ji, that is a stone which "moves" according to a Zen concept.

The words that Zacharopoulos added afterwards explained the meaning of the figure evoked by Livingstone. I am grateful to him because he has exempted me from a hard task, a task that indirectly (in the choice of this artist and in the work of presentation) I have already carried out to a certain extent in the published catalogue. However the most important feedback is the evaluation others give our job. So I am grateful to Zacharopoulos for jumping into an important debate that must be held here in Italy before anywhere else, here among ourselves. It is a reflection regarding certain years, certain artists, certain work, certain choices, certain issues. He has indicated them in more exact terms as massacres, mutilations. That is a very vast territory that perhaps we are not able to go into this evening. Anyway it was very important and correct to anticipate it here in this discussion. It is an issue that only about a month ago I raised again feeling the need for a meeting among Italian artists on the problem of identity and on the problem of the artwork. With "*Rendez-vous des Amis*" I emphasized the need to verify (I am not saying to weigh the balance, but to ask oneself) what has happened in Italian art in recent years, where is it going, what are the identities that gave form to the debate, what is the art scene and what contributions were made by the most important artists. In view of this I had no doubts about Zacharopoulos's courage I had no doubts nor indeed did I question his sincerity and direct way of taking problems head on; problems that, in art, are not only of a linguistic and aesthetic nature but are, by extension, more generally

cultural and civic. So I thank him for his words. Being very close to the end of the whole century we feel the need to verify, count identities, weigh them, observe what they have achieved. So anyway I thank Denys and ask if there is anyone else who wishes to speak.

**SEVERI** - In order to look more closely at this political aspect of things, I would like to go back to a feeling I had in front of the works in the show. As I said before, many things that I recognized in the character of these friends have, over the course of almost twenty years, become characteristics that I can read today in their artworks. A withholding, a reluctance to speak out, silence, a way of staying to listen to what happens in the contemplation of things - these are all aspects that I see in the art. There is a kind of transcription that makes them become inner elements of the piece.

This said, I would like to try talking about poetics. About poetic choices and the situation of that period when we worked together on a poetic project for which Paola Betti had come up with some decisive elements. First let me make one premise: usually when speaking about poetics, it is supposed that there are many legitimate poetics. This is not untrue but it easily implies an unacceptable consequence: that in poetics nothing is illegitimate. Instead I believe that poetics follow the destiny of all disciplines concerned with discourse so, in poetics as elsewhere, one can commit serious errors.

The art situation twenty years ago has been brought up. As I think this over it seems to me that we found ourselves living a paradox. The problem, one of the problems, was that the image of the enunciator of the image, of the artist became ever more unfindable, elusive, abstract. So abstract as to become imprecise, blurry. The problem that we all more or less felt was: what do we do with sensibility? A wide-ranging sensibility that no longer found space in the artworks. One could get much more technical but suffice it to say that, if a certain number of formal premises were admitted, the works wound up being irreparably narrow.

At the same time, paradox or betrayal, we were hit by a kind of avalanche of sentimental painting. We found ourselves, in a way of speaking, victims of a surprise attack on one flank and having to react to the abuse of sensibility. To the background noise, to the hellish din where for several years it seemed that painting had become a subsidiary form of journalism: hackneyed stories, hackneyed colors, uncertain drawings - all yelling loudly and selling at high prices.

I (and I speak for myself) almost despaired. My idea was to go looking elsewhere, to create a distance, to move again; a project made of reconnaissance and waiting, lasting years, and it is not over yet.

**ALLERUZZO** - My question refers specifically to one of Diego Esposito's pieces. I visited the exhibition and saw *Cascata*. To my surprise, as I looked through the catalogue, I discovered that *Cascata* had been made in a real waterfall. Almost as if they were two works, with two different musicalities, one silent and the other less silent. I wondered if you would

comment further on this relationship, on the connection between the two pieces.

**ESPOSITO** - The work originated almost by necessity on the part of the collector, in the park of the villa on Lake Orta belonging to Paolo and Marcella Jucker. They had already bought other works of mine over the years. In the park there was a stream of water that had been ruined by disastrous works. One day Paolo and Marcella asked me to make a piece for them. It was an extraordinary opportunity for me to be able to design a work for a natural site which was splendid in its own right.

I began to make some drawings. My idea was to create a lively and changing waterfall, arranged over seven levels. (Paolo is a great music lover and president of the Wagnerian Association.) I carved some slabs of local granite with parallel lines between them in order to channel the water so it would fall, separated as if through the teeth of a comb, and create different sounds, like the strings of a harp. The last fall was hidden inside the basin. I had the upper part of the pre-existing basin removed and two colors of stone set in so as to form a crown of sunrays: the lower part leaned towards the outside, the upper part towards the inside .... In one point, next to the pool, I had a bamboo grove planted, a place for satyrs, nymphs, a place that could host benevolent spirits. This thing grew inside me. When I was invited to do a show in Amsterdam, I created a cascade that no longer brought water but light.

**PETTENA** - I'm glad that Zacharopoulos has said clearly something that, although we all had it in mind, none of us had succeeded in expressing.

It is easy now to speak of those times, in the 1960s, when

artists who were used to expressing themselves through visual means connoted their works with a mixture of the different disciplines they felt were congruous to their way of operating. I myself, although studying architecture, spent much more time in art galleries - at Attico or Toselli's - than in the classrooms of the Architecture Department. Or else with Chiari we found ourselves improvising and playing in the MEV (Live Electronic Music) studio where many visual artists used to meet, feeling themselves involved and seduced by the music.

Again I built and played with Chiari a magnificent harp where the strings were tied to the cathedral belltower and were stretched down with weights in the piazza below; together with Davide Mosconi at the Triennale in Milan, after having set up contact microphones, we played the entire atrium with this instrument.

So in those years there was a total absence of borders between the most diverse disciplines. We were anything but providers of services, we didn't have clients or reimbursements for expenses. Rather, through our itineraries, we held *jam sessions* that used sound but also visual instruments and this was a way to make emerge, to bring to the surface - just as we have this evening - what was not yet able to be expressed. The man who tries to express himself by jumping from an airplane and then of course opens his parachute crosses a period of his being, of his living, without gravity; without a relationship with the everyday, with the real world that attenuates the ability to understand one another.

Diving in, from the moment you leave the diving board until the moment you touch water, the jump from a plane until you open the parachute, are ways to acquire identity, a state of quality of one's physical being without the weight of physicality.

## BAGNOLI

x Diego

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( la richiesta )

l' arciere da un occhio

e mezzo

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al bianco invisibile)

- e in una modesta stanza romana  
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Alla luce del sodio monocromatica

Con un contratto di cessione da farsi  
secondo le regole dell'antico Teatro di Bharata  
tratto e tradotto da R. Dammal.

- colore di luce ( sintesi sottrattiva) Goethe

- Infine però il guerriero che emerge  
dal mare greco per un istante.....(la distrazione

Marco

**CORÀ** - After Bagnoli's contribution let us bring this fruitful meeting to a close. I thank all those present and a special thanks goes to Diego Esposito who accepted this open conversation; to Marco Bagnoli who has generously added his contribution about friendship as well as an active reflection on the exchanges among artists; similar thanks go to Pirri and Alleruzzo, to Zacharopoulos who made the trip by plane to come share with us his stimulating thoughts on the reopening of old files as well as on very contemporary problems; to Carlo Severi and Pietro Montani whose contribution, as original as it was unexpected, I greatly appreciated. Thanks finally to Siliano Simoncini for his constant presence and the intellectual stimulation that he activates in the young people he involves more and more in Palazzo Fabroni's activity.