

PERCEPTION , IDENTITY AND ALTER EGOS

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Introduction

This book is not only the latest effort that goes to crown this five years of educational path , that I have undertaken full of enthusiasm, but also fears and hesitations, but above all it's an opportunity to deepen the topic of the thesis itself : my limited perception of reality and of my self, and consequently identity, alter egos.

I always felt a strong fascination for my limitations as human on perciving my self and what surrounds me. Often I have the tendency to modifie and manipuilate what I percive depending on my needs and on my state of mind. And offcourse it's quite immediate the step

to the other side of my subject : the creation of alter egos and second identities.

I have found many artists that have been working with perception, alter egos and characters, in many different ways.

The selection of artists I am presenting here it may look a little bizarre, but what makes me unite them under the same roof, it's related exactly to their diversity, to the different ability they all resemble to have, to approach the surrounding world and themselves.

Of course it's obvious that the reasons behind this artists works seems quite different, but I see in all of them the tendency to detach from a well known personality, to search further.

Both Sadie Benning and Jonathan Meese are sending a very strong criticism to stereotypes and mass culture, but also, through the creation of different characters I feel strongly the urgency of searching particular identities, almost for the need to reach a personal, intimate connection with themselves.

In a different way I see in Sophie Calle work the same dynamics. I found really very inspiring her way to find a connection with a city, Paris, where she suddenly was feeling as a stranger. By following strangers, or being followed from strangers, by having her bed occupied by strangers, she kind of let her identity evolve to a new different level, as a final result of a long search.

Sometime I really find difficult to define where the character start and where the artist his self finish. I realize that, also in my work ,the character is creating the necessary distance to put the artist in a particular position that is giving the streng and the courage to say and do things that otherways, in a every day life context, he/her wouldn 't dare to do . The eye of the camera isn 't judging, there is not worry about being wrong or right, or not understood . Offcorse it 's obvious that later this images are going to be probably seing from someone but in the exact moment of the shooting, this situation is giving the opportunity and the ability to dare more, and in a way to live the identity, to become that person, that the world will not have the chance to see in any other context.

2'CHAPTER

ARTISTS AND WORKS

Sadie Benning

She borned in 1973 in Milwakee from a quite famous father, that gave here a FisherPrice Pixelvision toy camera for here 15'birthday . With that camera she started to film initially mostly the intimancy of her bedroom. She used at that time hand writing, text from her diary,

to create thoughts and images, that are creating a very clear idea of the complexity and the difficulties of her developing identity.

Honest, humorous, desperate, in her works she is openly showing what for her means to become slowly aware of her own identity and sexuality, and of how trapped she feels .

Through the use of the hypnotic effect of close-up, she is almost always the center of the filmed image . But it's often quite difficult to understand when is she playing a part and when she is really opening up emotionally.

In her work "It wasn't love " she staged her own Hollywood movie in her bedroom at home. With the cheap quality of her camera, hand-made subtitles and the space that remains almost the same all the time, she is giving to the viewers the room to follow their fantasy while the narrative is describing the scenes . She made her self the star of her own movie, expressing her desires into a psychological space where there is no judgement. Through the creation of a series of narcissistic self-portrait, she is playing feminine and masculine types: the macho gangster, the drag queen, the vamp, the androgynous teenager.

At one point during the tape, Benning says "Permission? I forgot all about it. Trouble? I got in a lot of that."

In a critic of heterosexual romantic cliché, Benning renders the role of object of teenage female fantasy ironic , her interchange of sexual roles reveal the traditional definitions of femininity and masculinity

as socially constructed facades into which heterosexual desire is



projected.

In "Flat is beautiful" by wearing a carton mask, she became 11 year old Taylor, and this character is discoverinf her sexuality and her interest for the same sex. She lives with the mother, and the gay friend of the mother, that is badly feeling the father-position she is giving to hem. Filmed with the Pixelvision toy camera in the inside



settings, and

with the 8mm on

the outside ones, it 's giving strongly this sense of entrapment that Taylor is feeling at home, and the freedom she has outside to experience and to explore.

Her work breaks down the established sexual codes, not only of cinema, avant-garde film and video, but also the all heterosexual, usually white,critical framework.

Cindy Sherman

She is an American photographer and film director, best known for her conceptual portraits.

The Untitled film stills, it's a series of 69 black and white photos : she poses in different roles and settings, and gives no title to keep the ambiguity of the images.



Through a number of different series of works, she is raising an important question about which role and representation women have in this society.

Sherman works in series, typically photographing her self in a range of costumes. She takes care of all of the technical and visual aspects, before shooting the image.

She does not consider her work feminist, but many of her photo-series, like the 1981 Center folds, put the attention on the stereotyping of women in film, television and magazines. In reality

she doesn't look at her work as a political : it was a way to make the best out of what she liked to do best, wich was dress up.

Unconsciously, or semiunconsciously, she was wrestling with some sort of turmoil of her own about understanding women .The characters weren't dummies, they were women struggling with something but she didn't know what .



In her work Sherman is both revealing and hiding, named and nameless. She said that she feels anonymous in her work, in her pictures she never saw her self, she sometime feels like she disappear. She finded too strange leaving the gallery where she shooted the images to go home and being on the streets of the city as a character other than my self. She felt vulnerable .

Throug an intuitive process, she keeps on changing elements of the image, until she find what she want. She said "I think of becoming a different person. I look into a mirror next to the camera...it's trance-

like. By staring into it I try to become that character through the lens...When I see what I want, my intuition takes over—both in the 'acting' and in the editing. Seeing that other person that's up there, that's what I want. It's like magic."

Occasionally she felt that as she have gotten older she have come to look more like some of her characters , and this make me think of how the creation of this images was a way to let out a part of her self that she couldn't live differently at that time .

Sophie Calle

Born in 1953 she is a french writer, photografer, installation artist and conceptual artist .

At the age of 26, she returned to Paris after seven years abroad. She moved in with her father, whom she did not know well. "I had always lived with my mother or grandparents. I knew my father was a little disappointed in me."

Her father was a doctor and an art collector. "He collected pop art, and a lot of it consisted of photographs with accompanying text."

"I came back to seduce him. I wanted to do something that made him happy for me." This story looks more as a retrospective explanation of an unconscious impulse in reality . Any way, she tells that none of her work is done for therapeutic reasons: "If the work is therapeutic, that is a side effect for which I'm thankful."

She tells another, more plausible story of how she started. She was bored. "I had no friends; I didn't know what to do with my life, so I started to follow people." Why? "Establishing rules and following them is restful. If you follow someone, you don't have to wonder

where you're going to eat. They take you to their restaurant. The choice is made for you."

During her stalking days, a friend asked if she could sleep in Calle's bed. "That made me think it would be fun to have someone in bed all the time." So she asked friends and strangers to sleep in the bed for eight hours; one participant thought there was going to be an orgy. It sounds like a conceptual art project. "It wasn't," counters Calle. "It only became so when the wife of a critic told him about it. He came along. He said, "Is this art?" and I said "It could be" . She took photographs and wrote down everything everyone said. The result was *The Sleepers* . .



In an other project 'The Shadow' she asked her mother to hire a private detective to follow her. Aware of the follower she also wrote about in a journal of the day .

A latest work is 'No Sex Last Night'in collaboration with Gregory Shepard. It is the documentation of their road trip across America, wich end with a wedding in Las Vegas. It's finally a document of a

man and a woman that barely know each other , embarking an intimate journey together.

Her works often evoke human vulnerability, and examines identity and intimacy . She is well known for her ability to follow stranger and investigate their private life .

For her project Suite Vénitienne, Calle went to Venice to follow a man she had met at a party, phoned hundreds of hotels until she found out where he was staying, and then persuaded a woman who lived opposite to let her photograph his comings and goings from her window. The result was a book called Suite Vénitienne, published in 1979.

These works electrified France's art world, even if Calle had not originally conceived them as art. Her pictures were enigmatic; her texts read like detective reports, or a psychiatrist's case notes, or



even

a journalist .

Her father was pleased by his daughter's success, though worried by photographs she showed him of her stripping: she had been working in a Pigalle club. "He said to me" "Never show them to anybody." Why did she become a stripper? "I was very feminist, but then a girlfriend who was a prostitute suggested I do it to make money. I decided not to become a prostitute. I thought it would be dangerous for my relations with men in the future."

Calle needed the money, but it was also a self-imposed test. "I asked myself "Am I refusing just because other feminists would oppose me?" And I realised I feared being psychologically destroyed by the look of others. But why did I think it is OK to be a nude model for artists?" Did she find it degrading? "No. To me they were pathetic, and I looked at them with a look of contempt. I had made a style of this contempt and they were paralysed." Against her father's wishes, Calle published *The Striptease*, a book of these photos, juxtaposed with cards her parents had received from friends when their daughter was born ("They all hoped Sophie will be a nice girl").

In 1983, Calle produced her most controversial work of art, *Address Book*. She had found an address book in the street, photocopied it and sent the original back to its owner. Then she set about ringing the numbers to assemble a portrait of the man. She also took photographs of other people engaged in his favourite activities. When the newspaper *Libération* published the results, the man, documentary film-maker Pierre Baudry, threatened to sue for invasion of privacy, only backing down when the paper ran a nude photograph of Calle. Given that *The Striptease* was already published, this sounds like rather feeble revenge. "He was trying to be very aggressive. He disliked what I did."

In the years since, Calle's oeuvre has flirted with these opposites: control and freedom, choice and compulsion, intimacy and distance. On one level, her art responds to the surfeit of choice in a late

capitalist society; she follows rules as a break from the endless work of choosing. She says "Establishing rules and following them is restful."

To the north pole with mum

Much of Calle's recent work involves her mother, who died nearly three years ago. Last year, Calle joined an expedition to the Arctic, where her mother had always longed to go. She packed a photograph of her mother, her ring, her Chanel necklace, and buried them in a glacier. She wrote of the ritual: "Cried a little. Took a photo. Martha [Wainwright] sang a verse of Marilyn Monroe – my mother's other passion along with the north pole – Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend. Now my mother has gone to the north pole

Calle has exposed herself most in two works catalysed by painful break-ups. *Exquisite Pain* (2003) was prompted by her then lover's failure to meet her in New Delhi. The first part of the work is a series of photographs she took each day, and she wrote about how much she was looking for the day she finally meet hem . The second part of the work is all about the pain of the heart break. During this period of time she asked to other people to talk her about their worst memory. Over the days, her writings became shorter and shorter, as her pain dissipated over the time .



This became a book, which also included other people's worst memories – a woman who had given birth to a dead child, a boy hearing his father had died. "Their stories did have a side effect: they made my pain manageable."

Take Care of Yourself (2007) was prompted by an email Calle received from a lover ending their relationship. It ended: "Take care of yourself." Calle invited 107 women to analyse the email. Is this the result of a simple revenge? "I did not want it to be. I hesitated every day, but ultimately, my excitement was stronger than my hesitation." But it was inspired by rejection? "Yes, but now this man is my friend. He responded so nicely when I told him what I was doing." Calle's current boyfriend of five years (they don't live together, and she has no children) has stipulated that he does not want to appear in her work. "I agreed," she says, "but I may change my mind."

Jonathan Meese

Jonathan Meeses is the leader of a new art movement of newactionists and confusionists. His performance art projects are stirring up false certainties of what power and desire really mean .

Meese was born in Tokyo in 1970, but grew up near Hamburg and studied there at the Art Academy without completing a degree. With his presentation at the first Berlin Biennale in 1998 Meese startled, imitated, impressed and enraged an international audience. Since then, he has emerged on the German and on the international scene. The recent show, entitled *Mama Johnny*, is a kind of homecoming for the artist, who has performed in front of a large international audience, at Arario Gallery, Seoul, Tate Modern, London and SITE Santa Fe, New Mexico, etc.

Meese's installations recall and re-envision squatter's quarters, with labyrinths, narrow halls, and staircases leading to underground passages. The artist incorporates troubling details, including photos, seventies posters, objects, and writings. These installations also form the platform for his obsessive performances consisting of impassioned stentorian monologues that drive him to the point of physical collapse. These verbal collages are a surrealist mélange of historical reflection, diatribe, confession, accusation and word-coinages . In this idiosyncratic universe Meese celebrates heros and anti-heros from Caligula to Stalin and Captain Ahab, from Klaus Kinski to a bevy of porn stars. "I exhume to consume," says the artist. "My body is the reactor in a huge rubbish-recycling-experiment of leaden world and intoxicated images."

For more than a decade Jonathan Meese has seduced and irritated the art world with provocative performances and dense, dissonant installations, full of all sorts of detritus, fragmented photos, graffiti painted surfaces...In all of his projects strong is the sense of urgency—anarchical abandon with a dose of absurdist humor—where art itself and the creative process are the only comune theme. Meese through his works full of feverish, psychosexual energy, criticize mass culture.

The artist is concerned that his complex, interdisciplinary work can, as he says, “put viewers on the wrong track,” and viewers should “slow down” to properly receive the work. His solo performance *The Dictatorship of Art* consists mostly of running around the space, yelling incoherently and periodically giving the Nazi salute, with portable speakers pressed to his ears, upstaging the paintings and sculptures on view.

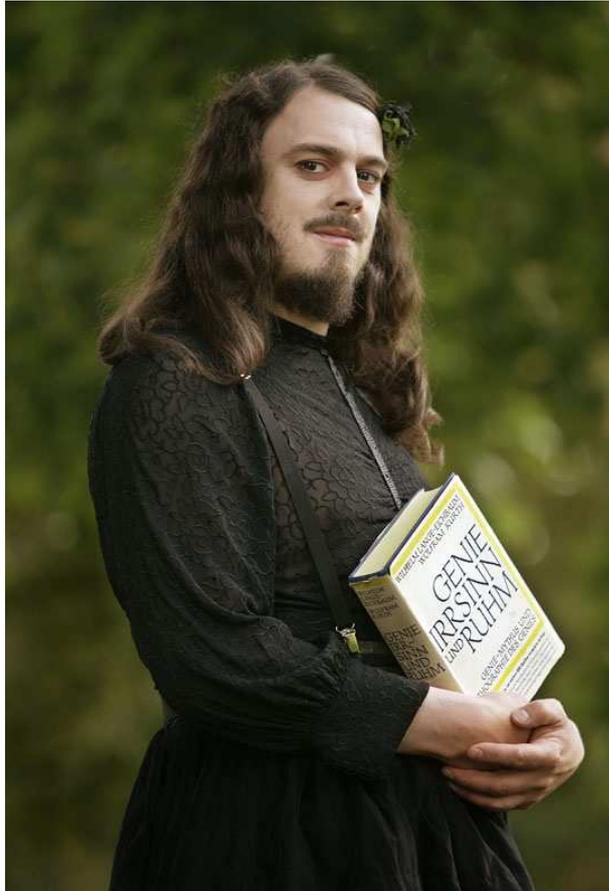
During his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Hamburg, he became friends with artists John Bock and Christian Jankowski. Martin Kippenberger, Franz Ackermann, Daniel Richter and Albert Oehlen (with whom Meese has often collaborated) had studied at the academy in previous years. The college also hosted exhibitions of Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy during the time Meese attended. These shows made a strong impression on the young artist. He also closely studied the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, who would become a major point of reference in his later work.

Meese demonstrated early on a kind of quirky knack for effectively combining textures, colors, unorthodox materials and appropriated imagery.



A serie of pieces with toys led to a series of dioramas set in valises, from 1993-94, which suggest maquettes for large-scale installations and theater pieces. The valise works underscore the importance of scale in Meese's work as he constantly explores the range of bodily and also psychic implications in the notion of miniature vs. monumental. A group of abstract ceramic heads, "Tiermetabolismus" (most of Meese's titles are nonsensical and resist translation), from 2008-09, recall African masks, Kachina dolls or tribal fetishes while also suggesting models for towering, architectonic structures one could imagine the artist producing.

In performances, Meese often inhabits bizarre figure, Alter egos and roles with quite incredible names. He almost resemble an empty mirror where every of this images want to get reflected, he become the "Man without qualities" to whom any quality can be attributed .



The performances are intense and aggressively noisy, an intoxicating mixed-up mixture that is able to give birth to strange fantasies, and where the artist walk between reality and fiction, autobiography and imagination, humor and tragedy, past and present, art and life .

Jonathan Meese can tell a story in such a way that nobody will ever doubt that it is actually the true, and on the same time he is able to change as a chameleon, open to anything and everything , enable to create completely different realities .

He doubted always the role of artists today and the confining, introverted position of contemporary art, in his words " I think art is in danger of becoming predictable and superficial. Many artists lack a critical mind. They act like followers and me-toos. I am of the sentimental belief that art is still something powerfull, something individual, that opposes the immense bureaucracy that threatens to take over everything .

Marina Abramovic

Her performance art has featured repetitive actions, physical injury (including self-mutilation) and long periods of inactivity. During her retrospective at the Museum of modern Art in New York (March 10 through May 31, 2010), she sat almost motionless opposite another participant for her piece "The artist is present" whenever the museum was open: 736 hours and 30 minutes.

Marina Abramović was born into a high-profile Yugoslavian family. Her parents were both well known partisans.

Her home life was extremely strict and restrictive. Even in her twenties, when she performed her earliest pieces, Abramović obeyed her mother's 10:00 p.m. curfew. She moved out of her family home at 29.

Marina recalled in an *ARTnews* interview: "My mother never kissed me or told me she loved me, because she didn't want to spoil me, and now I have to do so much to deserve attention. You have to get past the private suffering and translate it [in]to something universal, and then you detach from it."

"The hero" (2001), an installation, displays a black and white 17-minute video of Abramović sitting astride a white horse holding a white flag high above her head, while her long dark hair flies freely in the breeze. Next to the video, a glass case of her father's personal effects and medals are deployed for study. This work is dedicated to her parents, who separated in 1964. Her father died in 1999. Her mother died in 2008.

How then could a young woman who inherited this heroic DNA express her own courage and self-worth? While painting compositions of clouds, she began to question her direction. The emergence of Performance Art in the 1960s and 1970s through such

artists as Joseph Beuys, Vito Acconci, Chris Burden and Bruce Nauman answered her need for a more visceral expression.

Abramović's Performance work focuses on the body's stamina, strength, ability to endure pain and powers of concentration over long periods of time. Her work also follows her family's code of ethics: the mind and body should be resilient, disciplined and able to endure extreme hardship - testing one's will to survive.

"Room with an ocean view" performed from November 15 through 26, 2002, tested her resolve to live on only distilled water in three tiny rooms in Sean Kelly's gallery space in Chelsea, New York. She could not speak, but could sing. She was on public display during all the gallery hours and had to attend to all her bodily needs in public. This work, she claims, demonstrated her desire to suppress the ego through humiliating circumstances - inspired by Eastern philosophy.

Abramović began her career in the former Yugoslavia. She attended the Academy of Fine Arts, Belgrade (Serbia) from 1965 to 1970, completed her master's degree at the Academy of Fine Art, Zagreb (Croatia) in 1972, and taught at the Academy of Fine Art, Novi Sad (Serbia) from 1973 to 1975. In 1976, Abramović moved to Amsterdam.

Abramović's career (so far) can be divided into three periods:

- 1973- 75: Early Solo Pieces - primarily about the body - during her professorship in Novi Sad.
- 1976- 1988: Relation Pieces with the German Performance artist Ulay (Frank Uwe Laysiepen), performed all over the world.
- 1988-Present: Solo Pieces, primarily about her identity.

The early solo work features repetitive actions that last for hours.

In other works she danced nude until she was exhausted, screamed until she lost her voice, and vigorously combed her dark, thick hair

and face with a metal brush while intoning repetitively, "Art must be beautiful. Artist must be beautiful." This hypnotic ritual was painful. Her work touched on feminist issues. Often performing in the nude, her slender body appeared quite fragile and vulnerable, calling attention to the symbolic use of the nude in art to indicate beauty ("Art must be beautiful...") and/or eroticism (in "Trade exchange" 1975, she switched places with a prostitute in Amsterdam).

It is significant that Abramović left Yugoslavia to fully achieve her true potential. Her major breakthrough occurred with a partner. She met Ulay in 1976. They share the same birthdate, though not the same birth year: he was born in 1943.

Their work together emphasized raw physicality and human connection.

The breakup of Abramović and Ulay in 1988 and the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s – plus the Balkan Wars of the late 1990s - directly shaped the third period of Abramović's career. Her performances of dancing alone dealt with revising an artistic personality as a soloist. Her references to the Balkans dealt with her revised national identity as a Serb and Montenegrin, now two different countries. This transition inspired a constellation of works about her parents, her native country and war.

"Balkan Baroque" won the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale in 1997. In this work she scrubbed off the flesh and blood from piled-up cow bones. She performed this piece all over the world for four years (1995 to 1999). In 1999 this installation presented still images of her mother and father flank a video of the artist dressed in a white lab coat, wearing black glasses and lecturing on the killing of rats. It ends with the artist tossing off her coat and dancing wildly in a sexy black dress to a lively Balkan folk tune.

The triptych video, "Balkan erotic epic " (2005), features women in babushka dress running around in the pouring rain on an open field

on the left screen. They kneel down occasionally and lift their skirts to touch the ground with their naked bodies underneath. The right screen shows naked men humping the grass. On the middle screen, Abramović stands alone, in close-up, her breasts exposed. She, too, is dressed in Eastern European peasant clothes, a scarf tied under her chin. Looking up toward the sky, she massages her full breasts continually during the film. All these activities, Abramović claims, come from ancient Balkan fertility rites.

At the Guggenheim Museum in New York from November 9 through 15, 2005, Abramović paid homage to the history of Performance Art in "Seven easy pieces". Each piece lasted seven hours. She re-enacted the following and introduced one original work:

- *Body Pressure* by Bruce Nauman, 1974
- *Seedbed* by Vito Acconci, 1972
- *Action Pants: Genital Panic* by Valie Export, 1969
- *The Conditioning* by Gina Pane, 1973
- *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* by Joseph Beuys, 1965
- *Lips of Thomas* by Marina Abramović, 1975
- *Entering from the Other Side* by Marina Abramović, 2005

In addition, Abramović has visited and studied extensively in the Far East, most notably Tibet and Laos. She practices a purification of the body to prepare for her performances and required the artists who re-enacted her performances in her New York retrospective to undergo a similar regime.

Over these last few years, Abramović has been developing a school for Performance Art called the Marina Abramović Institute in Hudson, New York. She has declared herself the "Grandmother of Performance Art."

Referencies

Scream and scream again : film in art . (2006) Chrissie Iles . Museum of modern art Oxford.

Video art collection - the Castello di Rivoli Collection. (2005) David A. Ross .

Mama Johnny(2007) Jonathan Meese, Robert Fleck, Annette Sievert.

3 CHAPTER

Initially I had the idea to create 2 different chapters, for the philosophy and my personal work issues.

I later decided to change my plan, because I realized that complex issues like perception, identity and alter egos are quite difficult to explain and to understand when extrapolated for real, tangible context. That's why I decided to adress the issue in form of interview for the psychological part, and to put together the parts about philosophy and my own work . I hope in this way to offer a easier way inside the object, since I give as a starting point not anymore a theoretical research, but a real life experiences, that hopefully will take us to the discovery of the same issue, but in a more understandable way .

PHILOSOPHY AND MY WORK

I'll take few works of mine as example :

False memory

I get out from my door,
and on the step of the
sidewalk, I notice an empty
packet of sigarettas, an
empty cup of coffee and
an open newspaper.
The space that
could
be occupied by a human body
divides and defines them .





1985A12



I am using this 3 works to get into the philosophical issue of perception, identity and alter ego, because in all of this pieces I had a strong feeling of how time and experience are changing our way to percive reality and our self . But also how our presence is actually changing the reality, and how we are able to give new, different meanning to things, situations, actions...

In the work "False memory", we find a very simple writing, that is creating an image inside the mind of the viewer. It's like as an action made by an unknown person, has let a tale, a shadow, that thanks to our previous experiences, we are able to visualize .

For Immanuel Kant (d.c.1804), what the mind supplies is not a "fiction of the imagination" but a concept, a "category," that, *a priori*, is necessary for the coherence of the world. Kant's own theory is that experience and phenomenal objects themselves are generated by the activity of the mind, reflecting rules without which consciousness would not exist, and which are then sewn into the fabric of the tangible world.

Thus, when we go about our lives and ask, "Is this the soap that was here earlier?" or "What makes this shoe a "pump'?" we presuppose that the earlier soap is a durable object that can be identical to the present one, and that there are features that make a "pump" what it is. The "fiction of the imagination" is that there are some "unchangeable objects" which undergo some, but not all, of the duration that we perceive in experience. The underlying, unchangeable reality is itself invisible. It is not enough that it looks the same, for we know that, as we turn our back on the pool table, our trickster friend can, behind our back, switch the original cue ball for one from another table. Examining the ball, when we may not have paid very close attention to the original one, may not reveal the truth.

To the nature of the world that makes these sensible questions and presuppositions realistic we supply the concepts "substance" and "essence." What is really behind the appearances, what is really enduring, we cannot say. Concepts of substance in Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz are of *indestructible* and eternal substances: matter, soul, God, and monads. Substance, however, does not necessarily require indestructibility. Aristotle's substances come into being and pass out of being, which is what happens with shoes and other ordinary objects. The basic meaning of "substance" thus does

not resolve some of the most important questions about substance, e.g. whether there is a soul, God, etc. Indeed, it doesn't even answer the question whether there is "matter" in the sense meant by Democritus, Descartes, or materialists since them.

Not only we become able to somehow see the action of this person drinking coffee, smoking a cigarette while reading the news paper, but all of these objects themselves are becoming part of the scene, they get a new meaning, a new essence, given by the action of that person.

In fact not only humans have an identity, but also objects. This identity, that we can call "essence", is determined by their relation with other objects and humans. For example the same cup of coffee I mentioned on the work, in another context will have a completely different essence: in a supermarket it will be a simple merchandise, at 7:00 o'clock it will be for me a divine gift from the gods, or it will become just trash later on. On the same way objects and actions are able to give us a certain idea of who a person is, just like steps in the snow.

Antic Greeks used to call the unique characteristics that are defining this identity ESSENCE. So things that have the same essence are the same thing, and way around a different essence makes two things different.

The Greek word for "substance" was *ousía*, from *oûsa*, the feminine participle of "to be" (infinite, *eînai*). Thus, the word looks more like Latin *essentia*, "essence," which is from the infinite of "to be," *esse*. Terminologically, Aristotle does not seem to have clearly distinguished between substance and essence. On the other hand,

as *substantia* in Latin appears to mean "stand" (*stare*) "under" (*sub*), there is a word corresponding in meaning in Greek:

hypokeímenon (as a neuter passive participle), "lie" (*keîmai*) "under" (*hypó*). In Greek philosophy, on top of substance and essence, we get the issue of the *ontôs ónta*, the "beingly beings," i.e. what things most truly exist. For Plato, that would be the essences of kinds, the **Forms** (an *eîdos* or *idéa*), in the World of Being; for Aristotle, it is the actuality of the individual, in the **form** again (*eîdos* or, in Latin, *species*); and for Descartes, just so we move across the board, it is, for natural objects, in the **matter**, which is essentially extension. Although the Cartesian view of matter now seems the most natural and obvious meaning of "substance," it nevertheless is the conception that has suffered the most from developments in science. While Descartes believed, as many still do, that matter is a solid plenum of *stuff*, in physics matter has disintegrated into a blizzard of abstract features in largely, or entirely, empty space. Since Einstein made mass equivalent to energy, we might say, to the delight of Aristotle, that matter has disintegrated into *enérgeia*.

Substantia becomes the term for *ousía* in Latin, perhaps with the sense that what endures may undergo superficial changes and so "underlies" such apparent changes. Such changes, indeed, are what we still say are not "substantial." In terms of essence, superficial changes do not change what the thing is, and so the changes are merely "accidental" rather than "essential." While the contrasts between "substance and attribute" and "essence and accident" are now standard, the original combination of substance and essence in Greek *ousía* we see in the occasional use of the expression "substance and accident." To fully untangle them, we need to be clear that essence is *defined* by attributes. What makes the thing what it is are certain characteristics, and these inhere in the durable and separable substance. Indeed, they *identify* it, as a member of its kind. At the same time, the meaning of "essence" does not answer basic questions about essence. What makes something what it is, may not involve any necessity or causality within the object itself. Thus, human artifacts are meaningful only in relation to human

purposes. A shoe is not a natural kind but an object that will decay and disappear from the world unless we use and maintain it. The essence of a shoe only exists as an artifact of human consciousness. At the same time, there *are* natural kinds, and what makes a deer a deer or an igneous rock an igneous rock depends on causation internal to the things. The features of an essence must be *held together* by something, and it seems like this must be the different modes of necessity. Thus, the laws of nature make many things what they are, but logic and *a priori* metaphysical truths underlie more fundamental things. Truths of value, of justice, goodness, and beauty go beyond these, into modes of purposive truth. At the same time, a definition of something can just be made up and stipulated.

Different and more difficult issue is when we add time to the idea of identity: a human grown, aged and died, but the memory of the identity that stays is referring to what? To the physical or to the mental characteristics? John Locke (1632-1704) said that isn't the body or the soul to define the identity, but is the consciousness, and that a person have the same consciousness in the past, in the present or in the future, of his thoughts and actions. So the body may change, but the person still the same. I don't completely agree with this, but it makes partially sense.

He also argues that we can't judge a person for the actions of the body, if he is not aware of them, getting into the Insanity Defence issue. The very big difference is when this person is creating an alter ego on purpose or not. For me the issue itself of the Insanity Defence is not very relevant, but I find important all the aspect about the awareness or unawareness on creating second identities, since also in art, and my work his self, the creation of characters isn't always intentional. Thinking for example of Sadie Benning, her work based on the re-evaluation of the daily experiences, where it's clear

the need of a different identity, become finally a self made from a third person reinterpretation of her, in the latest works . Is that because she became aware of that need ? or it is because the analysis became easier if made from an outside point of view ?

In the work 1985A12 it is obvious, I guess, that my initial fascination was how differently we relate to the exact same action, depending on moment, from our state of mind and from our experience .

The characters that came out, are not playing a role, but they are just living again something already experienced many time, but always differently . That's probably why I can talk about characters, even if it is just me .

Also in this case the essence , in here of the action and of the human, are changing each other : when we relate the action of masturbating in public for example, to a 7-8 year old kid completely unaware and to a grown up, we directly look very differently to the action it self, and so do also the character on the video .

In the work 38,5 a simple write on a wall evoked in me many different images and ideas, and of course most of them were related with my own personal life experience during those days . The writing 38,5 changed completely its previous meaning, it became mine : his essence got new characteristics, which were given from me and all the connections that the measure 38,5 on the wall have created in my mind.

4 ' CHAPTER

SCIENCE AND PERCEPTION

There are millions of things to see and discover, in the immensely big (cosmo) and also in the infinitely small (molecules), which we are unable to perceive with our simple, imperfect senses.

The biological theory has revolutioned religious, political and social views completely, but it has not been accepted entirely yet. One of this theory's ideas states that our senses evolved in relation with our needs, for example the sense of taste is different in kids and adults because the necessity of their different bodies are different as well: a kid will always prefer sweet food, on the other side the adult develops a preference for minerals. Bitter food is usually found unpleasant because we relate this taste to poisons or, more in general, to dangerous substances. Also according to the biological theory everything in nature has evolved according to some needs, for example a fruit on a tree will develop a particular smell and color only when the seeds contained inside it are ready to be consumed.

Our limited perception doesn't allow us to acknowledge all that occurs in nature and this fact prevents us from fully appreciating every thing that surrounds us.

A very clear example for this is to be found just in our own eyes: they are able to perceive only a certain amount of visual data; the waves of light are almost unlimited while human eyes are only able to see the few colors of the rainbow. We are constantly contained in an electromagnetic field and we hardly perceive any of it. When we do, this is caused by small movements (incompressible) that create different waves, which become more or less perceivable. This can be illustrated quite easily with a situation that has very likely occurred to anyone who's reading: that is the realization of the fact that you are not able to hear all of the notes played by all of the instruments at the same time while you are at a live concert.

In human history these perceptive limits have somehow partially been challenged and partly overcome. With Galileo's creation of the binoculars, humans discovered and understood that things were quite different from what they used to believe and that they had been constantly looking to reality with the wrong assumption. Of course this happens all the time in science, whereas new discoveries make us realize that we based some conclusions on incorrect or incomplete information. This is a state of things that scientists live with.

As it always happens with the introduction of revolutionary ideas, not everyone was ready to accept that new version of things revealed by Galileo and even when set in front of clear evidence, people kept on denying what Galileo was showing, which was such a difficult and

remote thing to understand. The answer was often that it was not possible to see more than what God created for us to see.

Not only our perception is limited, but we also tend to read and interpret the few information that we are able to get subjectively. We quickly come to a wrong conclusion, even though it has been based on “facts”. Why does this happen? Our brain seems very easy to trick. On a visual level, our brain has the tendency to look for movements (this is a result of our history as hunters), and it sometimes happens that it sees movement also when there's no movement at all. In addition to this, every brain often comes to a different interpretation of exactly the same phenomena that it perceives, and consequently each one of us could potentially see things differently even when we are experiencing exactly the same facts. So, to summarize, our brain doesn't follow natural or grammatical rules while it perceives. That would explain the amount of mistakes it makes: we are not made to perceive the truth, we are made to survive .

Nevertheless, the human ability to understand with all its limitations is the first and more important tool we have, just like the poison to a snake or the horns to a bull. Our intellect developed over time in order to fulfill our most basic needs.

Our brain needs to be trained continuously. For million of years it stayed the same, than suddenly culture started to evolve, until today. For million of years humanity simply focused on what the surviving needs were, eat, get warm, reproduce. The first finds that are actually signs of an existing culture (drawings and written language) are dated around 8000 years b.C.

If we look at a table what we see is just a table, but we now know that every object is constituted by molecules that are kept together

by electrostatic forces, and kept on the ground by gravitational forces. Through science, we are able to see much more and consequently we can see much more of the beauty that is in the world around us. Curiosity is what pushed us to ask certain questions, in front of a certain phenomena we automatically ask what and why this happens .

In the case of a scientist, the questions asked will bring him to new questions, and will lead him to the search for answers through experiments and their results. But his challenge will be to understand and interpret those results. Every discovery consists in seeing what everybody has already been looking at and thinking something that nobody thought about before, so it is a matter of interpretation. Newton said that we can consider a scientist as a child, because he is always looking at the world with curiosity.

What we perceive? How ? Why?

Darwin understood that we are biological machines, and that our eyes are the critical point of evolution. The eye has three color receptors, other mammals have only two receptors. This is because in the past we were also fruit eaters, and plants attract with fruit colors in order to reproduce. Some insects and crustaceans have eight color receptors. I really wish I could know what and how they see... amazing!

Some plants have developed a different way to reproduce: they use the wind, that's why they don't need the fruits' and flowers' colors. Other plants have developed other signals to show the way to insects (think about orchids' shape, they are in fact landing lanes for insects!). Some other plants that use bats to reproduce also don't need any colors, but they have some sort of system to amplify the sound of the bat and attract it.

Our eyes love and are attracted to colors because our brain connects colors with food, and this thought can be very interesting if we relate it to art. In nature, colors are used for sexual purposes, to seduce the females or to keep other males away. It is also a risk to use colors with these intentions, because predators are also attracted by colors. In other cases some animals, like snakes, have put on the typical coloration of poisoning animals to defend themselves.

Our surviving methods are not that different. In fact we are attracted by exactly the same thing that a fertile female will find attractive (think about the amazing colors of some males during reproducing period!).

Is human aesthetic sense exclusive?

Is human art exclusive?

The aesthetic sense is as human as it is other animals', in fact we have almost the exact same way to express our preferences. But is art an intellectual creation that is exclusive for human beings?

There is a particular kind of bird, the bowerbird, that puts a lot of effort in building very elaborate nests, and if the bird isn't a very attractive one, it will put even more effort into building an extra beautiful nest, since the females will be attracted by it. These birds are creating something beautiful and elaborate with a very precise purpose. The bowerbird creates real chromatic variations in the nest, very similar to typical still life chromatic ranges.

Already during '800, humans understood that it was possible to select characters inside animal species, and by exaggerating them they managed to create new variations on the same species.

Unfortunately, this resulted in the creation of animals that are absolutely unable to survive on their own in nature. In the UK during the 19th century it was common among the nobility to create a huge variety of pigeons for their own entertainment, just as today's "nobility" likes to purchase expensive cars. This "hobby" triggered a mutation in the pigeons' behavior. Some aren't even able to fly or to see.

But behavior can also change without being directly caused by a physical change. Both aspects are somewhat contained in our DNA and can therefore be selected and reproduced to a certain extent. In some cases new races have been created starting from the natural mutation of a single individual: it can happen that a single individual presents a form of mutation, an evolution of a typical character of his race, for example the carrier pigeon, was created from a particular behaviour showed by just a few individuals of the pigeon classic species.

Behavior is also directly related to natural selection, and therefore to esthetical and sexual selection. The paradise bird attracts the female not only with very colorful and exuberant feathers, but also with a very complicated dance. In this way he shows to the female his ability to perform a particular series of movements, to synchronize and to keep balance. In this way the female can understand that he will be a good choice, because of the physical ability the bird is showing through the dance. We can notice a similar occurrence in humans (ballet or disco-dancing).

Behavior can also be a direct consequence of others: a type of fly, the flesh fly, needs to capture a prey, once it brings it to the female they

can reproduce. In case the prey is absent, also the sexual act will be absent.

Social animals are divided in many groups :

- Groups without hierarchy : like sardines. They have no social ambitions within a group, they are simply perceiving each other on the same level.

- Groups with a social hierarchy : humans, bees, ants . We tend to form groups and create hierarchies. In humans, a less favorable position within social hierarchy is a direct cause of stress and fears.

Instinctively human beings have the tendency to hunt, and if we look at sports in general they are a parody of the hunting action, and good athletes are often seen as heroes within a larger group .

Love and sexual desire are human behaviors that in fact are triggered by particular substances in our brain. These substances can make us “miss” someone or can give origin to obsessions. This doesn't take any beauty away from the sensation, especially when you think about the thousands of years that were needed to perfection this amazing reproductive system that we have.

I think it may be interesting to make a parallel between what just said and some art works of mine, in particular I decided to choose two works "False time" and "Walkingman" .

In "False time" a white paper is colored with a black marker for two times: first with a very fast movement, then with a very slow movement. The illusion created is based on the perception that the

viewer have of time and the two different action : in reality the exact same ammount of time is used in both cases, but because of the different speed of the movements, the time will be percived differently.

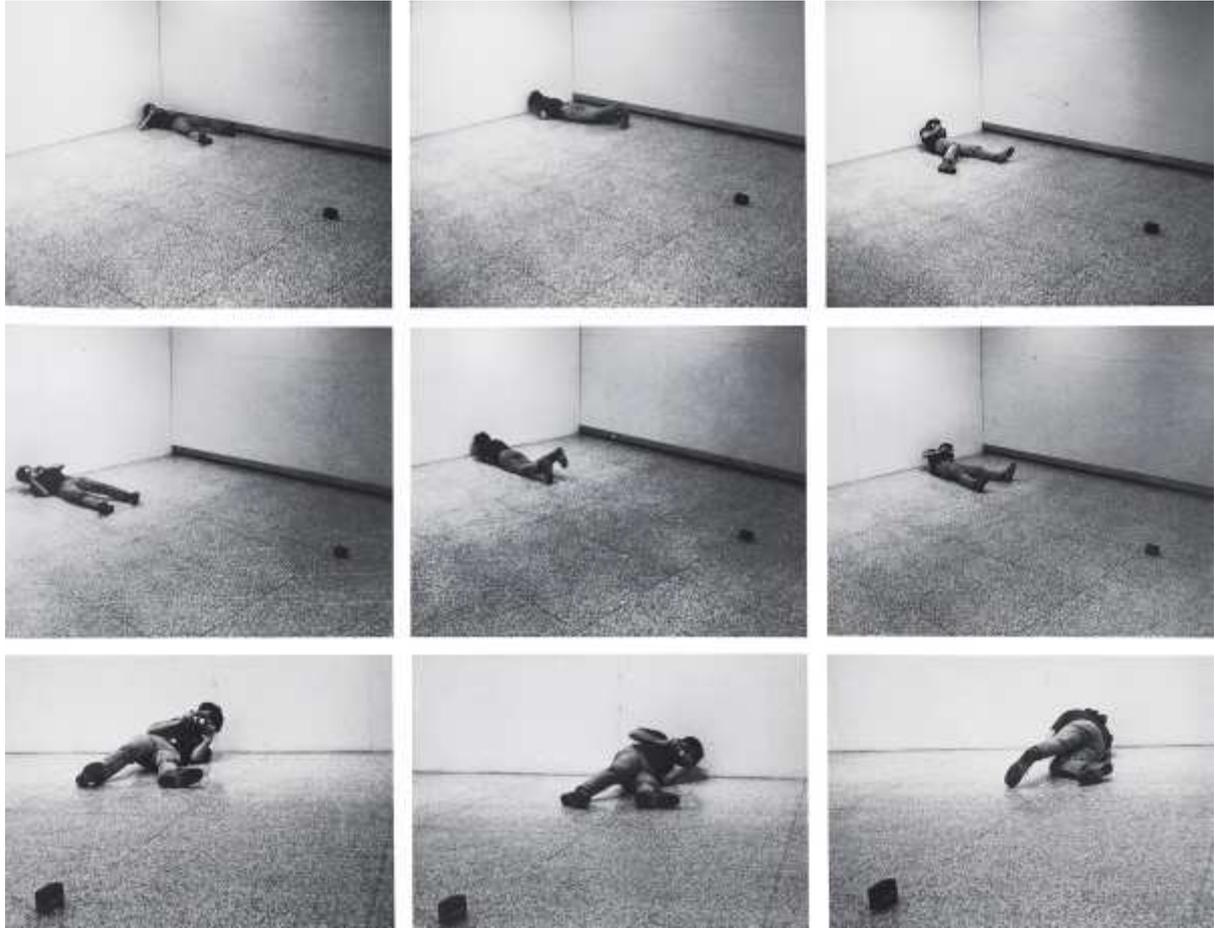
In "Walkingman" there is no illusion created, but the exact same action is filmed over and over from many different point of view. In this way the same action is percived differently. In fact the idea behind is to present with images many different ways and levels of sadness .



False time



Walkingman



Dan Graham "Roll"

Graham examines the parameters of human perception through live performance and video. In "Roll," two video images dramatize the ambiguous relationship between two views of the same action: the disorienting, subjective, "private" vision produced by a rolling camera; and the more objective, "public" view of the artist's independent movements across the floor.

Conclusion

I have been working with what perception is for the last four years, and during this period I got into this issue in different ways. I guess I can say that with my work I am investigating what identity is and where it is coming from. With identity I mean my own and also the identity of what surrounds me: objects, actions, situations.

What I find really interesting is how these identities are changing to my eyes depending from my state of mind, from situations, from my needs and from the experiences that time is bringing. Finally I never perceive the truth, but just what my limited brain decides it is more interesting and useful.

Are my limitations as a human being really limiting me? Or they are just giving me a chance to survive?