

I'M DIVINE (Narcissus)

*I am the vine; you are the branches...
(John 15,5)*

According to post-humanist thought, the body enhances itself through its own capacity of reception, through the bonds of hospitality to otherness “insofar as it draws a threshold, namely a welcome and interface point with the external world, and in the moment in which it understands the other’s need” (1), in contrast with what was so far maintained by the humanist ideal of the self-referred body, pure entity, shut and self-sufficient.

Thus very strong is the identity which can combine integrate otherness, rather than that which defends itself by creating barriers and palisades, claiming to preserve original purity; the partnership with *the other from the self* – as theorized by Roberto Marchesini – modifies and widens the threshold of interface with the world and enables to re-project the man-machine, modifying the perceptive inputs, perfecting or adding cognitive functions, extending the performativeness of some compartments. (1)

The hybrid culture “seeks its own identity in the non belonging: in the freedom to challenge and ignore the boundaries which limit movements and choices” (2); hybridization is namely an act of hospitality which is carried out through one’s own dwelling, regardless of the fact that one has a dwelling or what this is like.

These processes of combination take place through technology, responsible for these ‘*rituals of contamination*’, which not only state the bios, also defining important modifications in *soma* and in *psyche*, where technology has an impact even before it carries out defensive measures.

As a matter of fact, our body is the real field of application of technology, which only apparently acts from the outside: this is why any technology is actually a bio-technology.

The work *I'M DIVINE* explores these assumptions.

With the cooperation of the Foundation for Biotechnologies of Turin and of the Botanical Institute of Turin, we were able to create a hybrid cell, produced from the fusion of the human DNA with that of a vegetable, the *Narcissus Poeticus*, a wild bulbous plant of the family of *Amaryllidaceae*, renowned for its particularly beautiful and scented flower.

The cellular culture obtained from this hybrid cell has been made proliferate in laboratory on special supports, so as to obtain some letters formed by these cells, which were then used to write a word, *NARCISSUS*, in a twofold ideal fusion between tissue and text, both deriving from the same etymological root, and between the flower, embodying the myth, and the mythological character, who well mirrors the man of our times, “coiled to his own desire” and unable to accept the fact that he is not alone and that he needs the other, far from understanding that knowledge and truth depend on otherness.

This creature, like the *nymphs* described by Paracelsus, is set between myth and reason, between the ambiguous shadows of the magic-religious formulation and the cold light of common sense and science, hybrid with twofold flesh (neither man nor flower, though both), relating with the concept of life and with its own specters.

Thus *Narcissus*, myth and flower, combined in a single body, a unique cell, “biofact” (according to Karafillis or embodiment (4), as described by Butler, or Plantimal, as Kac likes to define ‘extreme’ living products of hybridization of vegetable and animal, represents the becoming, the being in the uncontrolled multiplicity outside identifying boundaries (5), not in order to say ‘farewell to the body’, as Le Breton would argue (6), not to create new fears, but in order to make comparison possible (7), not in order to express separate judgements on the changes induced by man, but to take part in the working out of a new critical approach. (8)

Ovyd narrates in *The Metamorphosis* (9) '...They came upon a flower, instead of his body, with white petals surrounding a yellow heart': this flower is born out of a permanent bulb that renews its aerial saffron-coloured part every spring, and which dulls one's senses (namely from the Greek 'narkao') with its heavy scent

No classical source explains why the yellow sense-stunning scented flower is the atoning ransom to the mythological character of the pupil unable to open himself to the other. And why just a flower?

Curiously, the word bewilderment (*benommenheit*) is the same used by Heidegger to define the non-human condition of essential subtraction of any perception of something as characteristic of plants and animals which depend on something external, without ever seeing neither the outside nor the inside (10).

Even though in the XVIII century essay *L'Homme-Plante* La Mettrie had already stated the equality between man and vegetable, animal and man have always been considered as superior to plants because they incorporate animate elements which – at least apparently – vegetables do not possess; natural otherness (vegetable state) and spiritual world have been strongly connected in the past humanist cultures.

In Mesopotamy, the Accadian god of wisdom Ea, was considered as a unique entity with citron; ancient Egyptians believed that a divine tree had generated the goddess Osiris; the Druids gave utmost importance to the sacred wood, where they went on pilgrimages or made sacrifices. In ancient Greece some trees were believed to be inhabited by *driads*, actually called nymphs of the trees; in Hebraism JHWH first revealed himself through a burning bush, calling himself 'him who dwelt in the burning bush' and, several centuries later, Christ claimed to be the vine (John, 15,5); in Buddhism, the crown of a tree is the symbol of a self-fulfilled man...

"One who opts for Life, *plants trees* on Earth and in the Heart", said an old slogan (11) trying to make people aware of the importance of the vegetable world for the planet and for man's psycho-physical health; the work *I'M DIVINE* (Narcissus) equals the planting of trees in the heart, it means to become god or sacred vine (the wine) and to spiritually hybridize human nature, inseminating images after uniting oneself to them (12), and doing it with the most beautiful and uncontaminated elements nature should offer: a flower.

This also reminds us that the natural shape of the body has always been a particularly ideological concept.

Dario Neira - 2010

- 1- R. Marchesini; *Il tramonto dell'uomo, edizioni Dedalo, Bari, 2009*
- 2- Z. Bauman; *Vita liquida, Laterza, Roma, 2006*
- 3- Karafyllis; *cercare riferimento*
- 4- J. Butler, *Hors de soi, Paris, Ed. Amsterdam, 2006*
- 5- E. Kac and Avital Ronell; *Life extreme, Dis Voir, Paris, 2007*
- 6- D. Le Breton; *Il sapore del mondo, un'antropologia dei sensi, Ed. Cortina Raffaello, 2007*
- 7- G. Deleuze e F. Guattari, *Mille plateaux, Paris, Minuti, 1980*
- 8- J. Hauser, *Art Biotech, Clueb Bologna, 2007*
- 9- Ovidio, *Le Metamorfosi, III*
- 10- M. Heidegger, *Parmenide, Adelphi, Torino*
- 11- F. Hageneder, *Lo spirito degli alberi, Ed. Crisalide, Saturnia, 1998*
- 12- G. Agamben, *Ninfe, Bollati Boringhieri Editore, Torino, 2007*

13- B.Andrieu, *Le monde corporel, l'age d'homme*, 2007