

-ALL THE THOUGHTS OF ALL-

I like to imagine our thoughts as concrete fragments of reality, just like water and stones are. When we upload data on the Internet, we transfer them in a spaceless and timeless state; there's no warehouse that stores them, there's no order of time. It's only when we retrieve them that they return to our configuration, resurfacing in space and time in the order we want, Napoleon first, then Julius Caesar, or however we like, with no necessary historical order.

I similarly like to think that in the spaceless and timeless world of particle physics, particles use their intelligence to gather up all the thoughts of all the people, the tangible and intangible both real and reassembled in a different configuration.

I like to think that the Canticle of the Sun, the Ninth Symphony, Olympia, Dionysus, and Gilgamesh are all real themselves, existing outside the material media that store them—the book, the sheet music, the painting, the memory. And that just as real are the thoughts and feelings of all the people who have read them, seen them, heard them, and remembered them, realities belonging to the world, and not just something personal and intimate.

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When I realized—it was 1968—that painting could be done with gestures belonging to any hand, it was essentially an intuition based on mixed up reasons, and I can assure you it wasn't a polemical stance against the traditional view of the creative act as the highly personal, inimitable, unique, and sacred gesture of the artist's hand. If anything, it was a gamble on arriving at that by other means.

With the privilege of still being alive fifty years on, today I can hazard some explanation to help me find the connections between my personal growth and what is happening around us and inside us.

Starting from the deconstruction of the sublime system of perspective, which no longer reflected new knowledge, to the drip painting of Pollock—a hundred years, that is, from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century—painting progressively abandoned the canons of the past, while continuing to produce great painters. The phenomenon would later spread out of all proportion, up to the three days Beuys spent living with a coyote. It's the apparent

chaos of our own time, the dark forest in which we need to step, recalling Dante.

It's a journey into complexity in which I intend to follow a path to the end of the principle of domination, although it will still take a few centuries.

Mine is not a theoretical stance of opposition, but the observation that the principle of domination has become too dangerous, and sooner or later it will need to be replaced.

That principle has never been an absolute evil. On the contrary, the principle of domination has not just generated the brutalities of the thousands of Tamerlanes that history has known, it has also generated unthinkable progress in knowledge, changes and incredible progress in daily life. It generated the sublime domination of space in Piero della Francesca's *De Prospectiva*, and the sublime domination of the unknown in Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

But that's not the point. The means of domination have become too powerful and too destructive—Hiroshima and Fukushima, whales and codfish, the Amazon forest and global warming.

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As part of humankind's domination of nature, a consolidated distinction is made between the inorganic, inanimate world and the organic, animate world.

Yet with quantum mechanics, that distinction no longer seems to hold, because it seems to me we can say that life is everywhere, intelligence is everywhere.

A photon of light crosses paths with an electron, in a painting let's say, and the electron gobbles up the photon and emits another photon in turn, in a phenomenon we call light diffusion.

I see life and intelligence in that, copulation and parturition, where the photons born from the painting emanate its colors. In our previous culture, such an aspect was unthinkable and so the arts were tasked with giving life to the inanimate world. That a piece of music, a poem, a painting, and a sculpture speak and listen to each other is a common experience.

With all that, even in the quantum world cows still give birth while stones don't, so the arts continue to be configured as an intermediary between the animate and inanimate world. Nevertheless, the artist can still begin to take a different approach other than the domination

of matter and choose another principle, standing in a relationship of interaction with the intelligence of matter, in a relationship of equals among means, instead of dominion over them.

It's the hand of Pollock at the service of the color that drips, the hand of Penone at the service of the intelligence of the tree, the marble, water, leaves, potatoes, thorns, and skin.

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Another aspect of domination concerns the hierarchical system that strictly serves it. In archeology, it's been shown how space, as used by primitive matriarchal societies of gathers and farmers, came to be organized so very differently with the arrival of populations of shepherds and warriors (Cain and Abel), which ushered in the start of the principle of domination. With them came the tomb of the hero, the house of the prince, the castle of the sovereign.

The hierarchical system did not end with the organization of space, but became generalized in society, with men above women, one population above another, the sovereign above his subjects; in thought, with the main argument and minor corollaries; in painting, with foreground and background.

But at the start of the last century, it started slipping. In poetry, the perfect hierarchy of Dante's cantos gave way to the destruction of all hierarchy in Pound's Cantos, and the great thousand-year-old Chinese Empire learned to live with corner stores and public expenditure accounts. In music, the perfect hierarchy of the symphonic orchestra was shattered by the jazz concert. In painting, Matisse and Picasso completed the deconstruction of the perfect hierarchical system of perspective, first started by Tintoretto in the age of Copernicus.

All that came by no coincidence, with the growing, if perhaps unconscious, sensation that the principle of domination had to be abandoned.

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The matter of the relationship between domination and the unknown is more complicated, because reason doesn't have the right means to dominate it.

In this regard, I have to say I find it incredibly beautiful how humans carry within them this

awareness they have of the unknown, of the existence of a hidden part of the world and of ourselves, probably ever since they started giving identity to the world.

We have no way of knowing what the first approaches to the unknown were, whether shamanic, animistic, earthly or vegetable, sacrificial or other, but I believe it can be said that human reason looks for ways to overcome its limits and approach the unknown, to make contact with that part of the world it cannot identify.

Those ways are religions and the arts.

They cannot belong to the principle of domination because they concern unknown lands, and as such they cannot be dominated. But they have often been used at the service of power, and in that way transformed into tools of propaganda and obscurantism, whereas their rational function was completely different, it was to draw energy even from the hidden world, the fruit of gentile reason.

Religions are obviously theocratic, but they are also democratic because they give answers, they offers means to approach the unknown. That gentile reason has put together an extraordinary set of means able to harness energy from the hidden world, to draw strength from meditation, silence, rhythmic repetition, controlled breathing, prayer with or without an addressee, the mandala—from an infinite number of sacred gestures, through to the humble lighting of a candle. Even that act is a product of reason, a gesture that takes the place of the word, where the word would make no sense.

The positivist scorn that reduced all this to ignorant superstition dug its own grave by bringing the hidden world into the sphere of science, as we are seeing.

The arts, instead, are aristocratic. They don't offer answers, but ask to be chosen and known, limiting themselves to opening the door to the hidden world by using signs, words, and sounds of the known world. From there, you're on your own.

For positivism, the unknown was simply what was yet to be known, but the extraordinary progress of science driven by new systems and tools ultimately came to the somewhat paradoxical point of spreading its reach into the unknown, but only to incorporate it as a constituent part of scientific knowledge.

That's Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, from around 1930, which gave rise to the great quantum mechanical revolution, which within a few decades would lead to a fantastic boom in our knowledge and our awareness of the unknown. Who would ever have said that 90 per cent of the Universe is dark matter?

Going back to the arts and religions, I find it hard to consider as a religion Greek mythology, from the parricidal Cronus to a rape-intent Zeus. It strikes me more as an extraordinary metaphor, a poetic picture of the human condition.

Then Orpheus stepped in and physically descended into the unknown in search of Eurydice, the creative part, the feminine part that gives life.

When science rediscovered the unknown, it came closer again to poetry, as happened in the Greek world with the infinite numbers PHI and PI, which reach into the unknown together with Orpheus, and as happened at the time of our own Renaissance, with Piero della Francesca and Leonardo.

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It seems to me that this attempt of mine to explain my poetics is incomplete, fragmentary, and anything but organic—it couldn't be any other way.

I should add that the folds in the canvases are not a formal choice, even though the result is highly formal. Stripped of the hierarchical order that relegated them to the status of mere medium supporting a work, to become a means themselves, on par with the colors, the paintbrushes, and the hand of the artist, the canvases preserve their ancestral memory, which to begin with is that of being folded over and over again. And the folds can fade away with use.

And then there is their unfinished quality, which allows me to avoid putting a final touch on the work that projects it into the past, allowing me to leave it open to the flow of reality.

That should do it.

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Anonymous signs belonging to any hand bear within them at least thirty thousand years of memory and, left indeterminate, set no preferences on the past. My personal memory fades when faced with theirs. To forget myself.

Painting has always told us about the world through the knowledge of its own time, while also telling us about itself.

It seemed to me, at a certain point, that it had become necessary in my work to bring together what signs tell us about themselves with an external reference, in much the same way as the tradition that made use here and there of the Bible, of Olympus, of decorations taken from mathematics, of ideograms, and much else. That's what gave rise to certain series in my work.

In the series "Three Lines with Arabesque," each work contained three lines and an arabesque, as well as a progressive number distinguishing each from the other, where the first was number one, the second, number two, and so on.

In the series "Numbering," the numbers indicated each time the order in which the signs were placed on the canvas.

In both those series, an order was given, where each number marks a before and an after in time and in space. I'd say that these works mark the passage from indeterminate thought to our configuration of space-time.

Whereas, I'd say that the later series "Golden Ratio" and "Shaman" mark the opposite passage, from the known to the unknown. Both look towards a logos, towards a gentile reason that leads us beyond its boundaries and those of our configuration.

Through the golden ratio, reason produces an irrational system that progresses without rules, which nullifies time because it will never end and which nullifies space because it neither grows nor diminishes, fixing the mysterious image of that timeless rectangle of archaic beauty. The infinite sequence of numbers leads us beyond the boundaries of reason.

With shamanic thought, it's always reason that proceeds beyond its boundaries, this time by devising a logical system to penetrate the hidden world, the world we cannot give identity to, where the system consists precisely of using words which similarly have no identity. I believe that path emerges from archaic thought, for which every identity is a limit. The shaman murmurs incomprehensible words to overcome the limit, to penetrate the hidden part of the world.

In turn I'd say that in the series "Transparencies," which I began with "Dionysus" in 1980, there

is no boundary, but rather, a compact intermingling of the known and unknown. The signs overflow the boundaries of their individual identities to overlap and merge with each other, in a dynamic conformation destined to change its aspect time and time again.

Finally, with the series “Dilemma,” there seems to be a shift in focus onto our daily lives, another channel of reason. If we let poetry overflow the boundaries of the identity of words and spill into excess, as is its task, the dilemma is dissolved.

The horns of the dilemma, where you have to choose between one or the other, are two clearly precise identities. But if I set out to go beyond the boundaries of those identities, the two horns can live side by side, duality is restored its unity, and the dilemma fades away into a new configuration, just like how in quantum mechanics opposite phenomena can co-exist—and that’s what often happens, too, in daily life.

Giorgio Griffa