

Artist. One of the
founders of the Jarlot
Centre for Studies, he
is coordinator of the
Oreste Project.

Monday, Any Day

I wasn't able to wake up when the alarm clock rang; I got up about ten minutes afterwards (7 am).

I'd had an erotic dream, but I wasn't able to remember it (7 am).

I wasn't able to close the shower door without making noise (7:10 am).

I wasn't able to take the tea out of the packet without ripping it (7:20 am).

I wasn't able to put the lock on the shutter without completely opening the window, and so too much air came inside (7:22 am).

I wasn't able to dunk the biscuit well in the tea (7:25 am).

I wasn't able to coordinate the times between waking up my daughter and preparing the rice for her lunch, and at a certain point I had to turn it off and then start cooking it again a little later (around 7:35 am).

I wasn't able to find my eyeglasses in my jacket; they were in the room on the bedside table (7:36 am).

At first I wasn't capable of doing up the button (which is a bit too big with respect to the buttonhole) on the cuff of my shirt, and then while doing it I kind of hurt the index finger of my right hand (7:38 am).

I wasn't able to convince my daughter to put on her vest, nor to find a T-shirt that would suit her, and therefore I took one from the hamper of dirty clothes (7:45 am).

I wasn't able to put my backpack on my shoulder because I felt pain in my left shoulder (8:10 am).

While I walked down the stairs I turned to look at E.'s legs, but I wasn't able to because she had already turned the corner (8:12 am).

At the bar I didn't find the type of croissant that I wanted (8:45 am).

I wasn't able to withdraw money from the ATM because both the machines on Corso Vittorio were out of order (8:55 am).

I wasn't able to buy the little tape recorder when I wanted to because the store was still closed (8:56 am).

I wasn't able to remember to take the vitamin C pills from home and I bought a new box of them (8:57 am).

I called S. at 9:15 and it seemed that I wasn't able to be polite enough and to convince her that the reason I couldn't come to her dinner was that I really didn't feel good. It seemed to me that she was displeased.

I tried two or three times to call C., but it was always busy (around 9:20 am).

I wasn't able to finish recopying the phone numbers into my diary: I got as far as the letter L. Nor was I able to find a position for writing that was well lit but also comfortable, and so afterwards my neck hurt a little.

Moreover, while I wrote I had the sensation that I wasn't able to read without squinting my eyes (between 9:20 and 9:45 am approximately).

On the phone with the pediatrician, I seemed unable to adequately explain what type of reddening my daughter had on her hands, nor was I able to remind him what creams he had given us on a similar occasion (9:48 am).

I tried to reach S. on the phone, either on her mobile or at home, but I wasn't able to find her (9:55 am).

I wasn't able to find a regular parking space near G.'s studio and so I parked in the bend near the trash bins (11:25 am).

In the rotisserie there was a bum who wanted a croquette. He had the money to buy it, but the person working there didn't want to give it to him. I thought he would have wanted me to buy it, but I didn't do it (12:25 pm).

I wasn't able to cross when it was my turn because of a green Yaris car that passed me unfairly when an ambulance went by (12:40 pm).

I turned to look at the legs of a girl walking on Viale Parioli, but they were hidden behind other cars and I wasn't able to see them (12:41 pm).

I wasn't able to cross with the green at the stoplight on Corso Francia near the viaduct (12:43 pm).

I wasn't able to convince C. to get off the phone because I was driving and at that point there were also some policemen. C. hung up a few minutes later (around 12:50).

I wasn't able to find a clean tissue in my pocket and I blew my nose with a used one (12:51 pm).

I tried to put the car into sixth gear, but because my car only has five, I wasn't able to (12:59 pm).

In taking the tape recorder (on which I was recording this list of all the things that I'm not able to do), driving with only one hand, I wasn't able to avoid making a gesture that made my shoulder hurt a little (12:30 pm).

(...)

Thanks for being here. I would like to begin with a premise, and with a quotation that is perhaps a bit naive: a poem by Catullus, which surely you all know.

Odi et amo

Quare id faciam fortasse requiris.

Nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior

I hate and I love

Why I do so. You might perhaps wonder.

I don't know, but I feel it, And I am in torment.

I have often thought about the dichotomous subject who declares and makes a poem of the fact that he loves and hates at the same time. I thought that when one hates it is in a radically different condition than when one loves, and that a subject who hates, like a subject who loves, is very convinced of what he is doing. And yet, as Catullus teaches us, both of these two subjects are present inside us.

There could also be another subject then, who asks himself: "How is it possible that I am as much the one who hates as the one who loves?"—an interrogative subject, let's say. We normally attribute a function of uncertainty or disintegration to doubt. Instead, perhaps it's just the opposite: only when we ask how it's possible to be simultaneously a subject who hates and a subject who loves, do we in some way integrate the two aspects, and this could not be done if not in a condition of interrogation, if not thanks to the function of doubt, if not by wondering how it could be possible without giving ourselves an answer.

The "solution" that Catullus proposes seems very beautiful to me because, of this question without an answer, of what remains inside the inquiry, he makes a poem. I don't know if you consider it beautiful or ugly, however it is surely an important poem for the history of humanity.

The premise of this intervention of mine is therefore to propose the hypothesis that interrogation, doubt, asking oneself a question without giving oneself an answer—all of this carries out a function of integration and not of disintegration.

The subject that instead refuses such a function and that convinces himself that he loves and that's all, or that he hates and that's all, is a subject that puts into action a mechanism opposed to that of integration, which is the mechanism of splitting. I love and that's all? Am I only loving, generous, available and good towards the world? Fine, all the bad parts are no longer parts of me. They are split from me; they are somewhere else. And vice versa, obviously, for the subject who hates and that's all.

Second premise and second dichotomy:

I inform (I produce) / I participate (I am in a process)

The etymological meaning of the term *information* is not the same as that which we normally attribute to it. To inform the other, in the original meaning of the term—and in many languages this meaning sometimes appears—means to give material form, not to give a piece of news. It means to shape the other, to modify them, to adapt them to the will of the subject that informs, and not

to give them a power, to put something in their hands.

I would like to propose the hypothesis that a linear dimension and a recursive dimension exist in the production of meaning. In the first case, a subject produces a work, a text, which goes to another. If we take, as an example, television and we consider the programmer-program-observer relation, this will be necessarily unidirectional. When the attention is placed on the author or on his product, the work, and not on the response of the addressee, the other, we have a production of meaning that has a linear direction.

Conversely, if I pay attention to the relation between one subject and the other, I can hypothesize a function of the circular type. If S sends a message to A, and A responds to S, who in turn responds to A... what happens? At each passing there is something of the other that enters inside of the one, which is to say that if A has responded to S, S after A's response is no longer how he was before but will have a part of A inside himself, and in the same way, after the successive message from S, A will no longer be the same, because he will know that S has something of him inside, and so on.

To clarify what it could mean "to have the other inside of you" or "to know that the other has me inside of him" I will give a very banal example: it's easy to understand that I could be in love with Nicole Kidman—and therefore have a bit of her inside of me, because obviously I have received cinematographic, televisual, advertising suggestions, etc. But I am sure that it is not reciprocal: I am not there inside Nicole Kidman. On the other hand, if I came to meet her one day and in this encounter I perceived a look, an attentiveness, some type of response on the part of this person, I would think that at that point there were something of me inside of her.

It's clear that my condition would be changed...

What normally happens is that we verify, even without realizing it, that a bit of us is inside the other, that a bit of the other is inside of us, that a bit of us-with-the-other is in turn inside of him and so on.

In this case the production of meaning (the relation) carries itself out according to a function of the recursive, circular type.

Why do I say all this? Only because I am convinced that it is an interesting exercise, above all in group dynamics, to stop now and then and ask ourselves: how much of me is there inside of him? How much of him is there inside of me? How much of him-with-me is there inside of me? Or even, seeing that the group is composed of more than two people, how much of him is there inside of her? How much of him-with-her is there inside of me? Etc.

So-called "relational" dynamics are dynamics of this type.

For simplicity's sake, and to proceed in a mode that is a bit abstract, I thought of giving this meeting a thematic scanning for pairs of oppositions.

I am good / I am bad

Both of these affirmations are true.

I believe that a dimension of interweaving exists between these two "positions" of the I, one that is much more respondent to the subject's reality with respect to the dimension emerging from the attempt to divide the good components from the bad components. Fundamentalism of any type—the religious type, first of all—is the extreme manifestation of this division: "I am always and only good." And one's bad components that become hidden, and that in some way must be worked out, where do they go in the end? Always to the other: I am Christian, I am good, the other is Jewish, he is bad; I am Muslim, I am good, the other is Christian, he is bad. The division of one's own negative components that one is not able to accept inevitably determines their transference onto someone else, be it subject, community or religious group, and this is the typical manifestation of that which is called *paranoia* in psychiatry. The other, who acquires all the baggage of badness that we project on him, becomes our persecutor, that is to say he who spies on us, controls us, and is waiting behind every possible door ready to make an attack to harm us, to kill us.

It's true that the concept of "good" is an ambiguous concept, perhaps paradoxical. After all, if I admit to being even a little bad, don't I appear, for to those to whom I have made this admission, perhaps a little more good? How can I assume the right to say that I am also bad? Isn't it perhaps a trick of the argument?

In a certain sense it's true, it is that. But it's also true that the perception of being inside a contradiction, which is often called a paradox, is substantially different from the condition in which one finds oneself when a division is carried out. To be inside the paradox, to search for the elements that render it a paradoxical situation, to put one's finger right in the wound, is exactly the function that I propose as the possibility of an artwork opposed to, or at least different from, that of the splitting.

Normal defects (2001)

Installation at Galleria Primo Piano, Rome

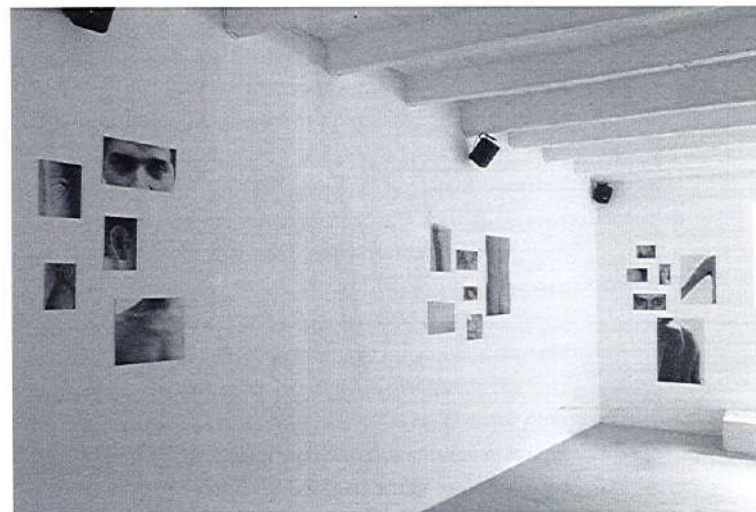
I have located on my body about thirty physical imperfections that, for various reasons and also in a small measure, cause pain, discomfort, embarrassment. In the exhibition, the photographs of the relative parts of the body are on view, accompanied by a series of audio recordings that describe each defect.

Now I want to propose to you another opposition:

I am generous / I am greedy

This is also an opposition that we often find ourselves having to make. Also in

CESARE PIETROUSTI,
*DIFETTI NORMALI/
NORMAL DEFECTS*,
2001, ROMA



this case I am convinced that both the affirmations are true. In my artistic research I am very interested—probably for temperamental stratifications that have to do with my formation or with the fact that I was an only child—in that border territory in which altruism becomes masochism, that is, that point in which the positive and unselfish attitude towards others, made extreme, slips into a perversion, in a drift of isolation and of turning on oneself.

How can I help you? (1994)

Galleria Primo Piano, Rome

From October 28 through December 5, 1994, I executed a series of useful actions. Anyone who came to know of the project, even by chance, could during this period request me to do something that would be useful to them personally. All requests were considered and, if possible, fulfilled.

Olga asked me to give her the anti-influenza vaccination shot.

Stefano asked me to find him a military doctor who would draw up for him a certificate of health and robust physical constitution for the fitness-to-serve test.

Antonio asked me to empty a cellar for him and to send some of the cases it contained to Milan via courier.

Sukran asked me to translate from Italian to English a text she wrote.

Rosa asked me to walk her dog.

Anna asked me to do bibliographic research on the subject of psychology.

Carla asked me to accompany her to some lamp and lighting stores to help her choose some things for her new house.

Paolo asked me to bring an art critic to the opening of his exhibition.

Fabio asked me to go around to bookstores to check the distribution of his recently published book, and to demonstrate interest towards it.
 Maurizio asked me to pose for a photograph.
 Helen asked me to check the translation in Italian of the regulations of a Swiss penitentiary.
 Ermanno asked me to run with him in a park.
 Roberto asked me to introduce him to Stefania.
 Augusto asked me to write a harshly critical review for his contemporary art magazine.
 Luca asked me to record two CDs of "Area" on a cassette.
 Mario asked me to bring him ephemeral glory.
 Rita asked me two things: to recite poetry for guests at a dinner at her house and to distribute 100,000 lire of hers to bums and window-washers.
 Andreina asked me to help her collect signatures for a petition in favor of temporary nursery school teachers.
 Giovanni asked me to do a critical reading of his research on fifteenth-century drawings of geometrical figures, and to find a title for it.

The following requests were, for various reasons, unfulfilled:
 Two people (separately) asked me to find them an apartment to rent.
 One person asked me to find some collectors interested in acquiring artworks she was selling.
 One person asked me for documentary material about an Irish contemporary artist.
 One person asked me to disinfect a house with fleas.

Another opposition:

I am capable / I am incapable

This is a thing that relates very much to artists, and certainly very much to me, as an artist. The artist, as I see it, is very fortunate: he has the possibility to cross disciplinary fields, therefore to appropriate now and then from sociological, psychological, anthropological, or maybe chemical-physical or bio-medical or legal or engineering or whatever other research, and to insert them, to make them become part of his own work. The artist does not have an academic career that must be continually verified to others via publications or other productions appropriate to and coherent with his "specialization."
 The other great fortune of the artist is the possibility of using technologies in an instrumental way and so to employ video today, graphite tomorrow, stone the day after tomorrow, and a photograph the next.
 These two elements—that is, the possibility of crossing disciplines and the

possibility of using technology in an instrumental way—if they are carried out to their consequences, in my opinion delineate the figure of an artist as a perfect dilettante.

I believe that it is interesting to work on one's own incapacities. I believe that the dimension of attempting to do something that one doesn't know how to do is more poetic—even from an anthropological point of view—than the dimension of demonstrating knowledge through the mastery of technique in an adequate and perfect way.

The artist can explore the territory of inabilities and work on the attempt to surpass them. Of course the idea is not enough; it is also necessary to try, to give the weight of authenticity to the same attempt, and maybe, ever so often, to obtain some unexpected or unordinary result.

The artist-perfect-dilettante doesn't know how to do anything, but can do everything, can try everything.

Practical Skills (2002)

"Generosity Project," CCAC, San Francisco

In the period between January 31 and February 11, 2002, anyone who wanted to could teach me a manual skill, or in any case something that involved using hands. Each instruction was carried out only once, for the duration of one hour. Altogether I received eighteen "lessons," mostly from art school students from San Francisco. Each of them received in turn an instruction from me, chosen from a previously compiled list of my manual skills.

Among others, Anne taught me to cut hair; Mary Elisabeth taught me to weld metal; Susan to make small animals in clay; Carolyn to use Photoshop; Stacey to transfer an image from a photocopy onto another surface; Shane to make a serigraph; Josh to play basketball; Evan to remove my vest without taking off my overcoat, etc.

Another opposition:

I am free / I am bound

Until the eighties and onwards, what is today called relational art was then marginal and a minority. Often, when I went around to galleries, it seemed to me that I was doing something completely different from all the other artists. Now the situation has changed and I have the sensation that

CESARE PIETROIUSTI,
PRACTICAL SKILLS,
 2002, SAN
 FRANCISCO



a certain research and artistic practice—which I don't even want to define too much, but in which however I have participated and contributed—has become a “trend.”

Attention must be paid when something becomes a trend.

At present we often find ourselves in front of complex artistic projects, that consider the context, that involve subjects other than the artist, that use diverse techniques and methods, that intervene in social dynamics, that mingle with the community, that confront architecture and urban planning, and that today are called by some very bureaucratic and not very poetic names: *public art*, *relational art*, *social art*.

At times these projects ring a little false, a little celebrative. They want to demonstrate that whoever has made them or promoted them has done a good and righteous thing. Well, when this will to do a socially useful and politically correct thing emerges too much and comes to obscure the content of the artwork, then in my opinion that project is not complex but rather has complexes. It carries out a mechanism of splitting because it requires hiding the inevitable bad, unjust or at least contradictory elements that in some way surely exist in every human behavior, above all when the context is full and articulated.

I want to propose another opposition, the penultimate one.

I eat / I renounce

This opposition interests me very much, even if I don't know exactly why. In daily practice it seems to me that it offers a very important dimension of sense. Does eating benefit us or cause harm? If it were only the physiological response to a vital demand, eating would surely benefit us. But if we consider the fact that food represents, at least in the culture of the rich world, the principal goods that the human subject not only acquires in exchange for money but also includes inside his own body, incorporates to be precise, I believe that it is easy to realize how much eating is also dangerous for one's health—it's useless to say the reasons why here—and perhaps even for our critical capacity.

I am convinced that a significant analytical and critical activity can be exercised daily by working on the paradoxical equilibrium between incorporating and renouncing, between eating and not eating.

Here it can be asked: I, as a subject, *am* in how much I incorporate—certainly, if I didn't eat anything, indubitably, I wouldn't be anything—or *I am* in how much I feel the stimulus to eat? I perceive the stimulus of hunger like an inconvenience that has to be eliminated as soon as possible. But on really thinking about it, to feel hungry is also a demonstration that my body is functioning. Perhaps I am, as a subject, not only when I can manage to incorporate some-

thing—to buy some goods, to eat, to be satisfied and sated—but also when I feel a desire, also when I am lacking something, when I am a little unwell.



CESARE PIETROIUSTI,
SLOW FOOD, 2004,
LJUBLJANA

I grow old / I stay young
and
I die / I am immortal

Slow Food (2004)

Performance, Skuc Gallery,
Ljubljana

On March 13, 2004, from 2:30 pm, together with three other volunteers, we each ate a slice of pizza weighing approximately 200 grams, trying to take as long as possible, but without ever stopping. The actions ended between 6 and 6:15 pm.

And here we are at the ultimate—double—opposition:

Unified thought (2003)

Performance executed in the Saletta Comunale of Castel San Pietro, March 22, 2003.

Starting at 6 pm, I sang, alternately and without interruptions, the first verse of the song *Giovinezza* (whose lyrics are translated as “Youth, youth, spring of beauty”) and *Vincere* (“To win, to win, to win, and we will win in heaven, on earth, and at the sea. It is the password, a supreme will”), with the intention of ceasing only when I lost my voice. The action ended at 11:45 pm.

As perhaps is normal, the theme of death represents in our culture the strongest and most dramatic—perhaps the most dangerous—of splitting. Death is a prohibited theme in our culture, a taboo. One barely manages to accept the ritualization of other people's death, but even the *Festa dei Morti* (Day of the Dead in Italy)—perhaps some of you remember that November 2 was a national holiday—no longer exists, and is about to be supplanted by a new consumer carnival called Halloween.

In any case, to speak of death as one's own prospect, as the destiny of the living, is prohibited. Or it seems bad, which is to say that it is an element that incites the superstitious imaginary, or it is a symptom of depression. Whoever speaks of death is necessarily a jinx or is depressed. This splitting has deter-

mined in our culture—according to the schema that I proposed to you before—the shift of the idea of death onto the other, onto another culture, onto the radically different. It seems to me that today the kamikaze Islamic terrorist and the African baby that is malnourished or sick with AIDS are the two figures, the two icons of death: as different from us as we can conceive of.

The white man does not want to know about death; death does not concern him. To give substance to this division, he even entertains the idea of immortality—the earthly type, obviously. I think of the development of military technology (intelligent bombs, bulletproof vests, shields), of plastic surgery, of genetic engineering, of stem cell cultivation. All of it affirms that the idea of invincibility and immutability pervades the white man's imagery.

Perhaps this mechanism of removal of the idea of death is just the cause of every other splitting, in first place that of the positive aspects from the negative ones of the self and the subsequent incapacity to deal with one's embarrassments, with one's pains, with one's own internal unwellness.

A place in Bolzano to reflect on death – Homage to Ludwig Feuerbach

Some months ago I worked on a project, for the exhibition "Multitudes – Solitudes" in Bolzano, on the theme of death. My intention was to choose, on the basis of suggestions collected from the citizens of Bolzano, a place in that city and to propose it as a place, available to everyone for the exhibition's duration, to reflect on death. The work was an homage to Ludwig Feuerbach and to his book *Thoughts on Death and Immortality* (1830), from which I offer a quotation:

"Only if man will know again that death is not a mere semblance, but rather is something real and really taking place that completely ends the life of the individual, and if he will return to the conscience of his finiteness, then he will find the courage to begin a new life over again, and he will feel the cogent need to do that which is absolutely true and essential."

For a while I have been toying with the idea of making the following work of *public art*: to restore the national holiday of November 2, not as a commemoration of the deceased, but rather as a reflection on death as a prospect for the living.