

An analysis of conflicts evoked by some forms of art which can bring us back to schizoparanoïd and depressive positions of infancy.

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There are various forms of contemporary art which are often considered to be provocative, violent and unpleasant. They may be hated or idealized but seldom leave us indifferent. My hypothesis is that these emotional reactions may be considered as a defence against depressive anxieties evoked by them.

Particularly I believe that certain artistic expressions are a potent stimulus for us to go back to infantile positions and to make unstable the relation of our internal objects. Whether or not this art succeeds in helping us to reemerge from depression, is the most controversial point. On one hand it brings into discussion the degree and stability of our internal object and on the other the artistic value (either classical masterpiece or conceptual, minimal, narrative, behavioural art etc.) and its formal expression.

I take the opportunity from a recent book by Franco Fornari (*) to attempt an analysis of that tendency to produce art using one's own body as an object to manipulate or what comes out from the orifices of the body as objects for communicating, provoking and irritating.

The most interesting artists belonging to *body-art* are: Hermann Nitsch, Gunter Brus, Rudolf Schwarzkogler, Urs Lüthi, Gina Pane, Giovanni Pisani, Chris Burden, Vito Acconci and others.

Hermann Nitsch carries out performances where animals are killed and sectioned, have their bowels cut out and blood spread over naked human bodies. Vito Acconci masturbates in public and throws his sperm on the ground confusing it with dust. Gunter Brus evokes images of sufferance with his body banded up like a mummy and dragged into the dust. Urs Lüthi appears as a provocative symbol of bisexual ambivalence and polymorph perversion. Gina Pane wounds herself deeply with the thorns of a real rose and uses her blood and the image of the rose to represent the transformation, due to pain, of the flower into a female sexual organ. Gianni Pisani, in the morning after shower, puts around his abdomen a cow's bowel, inflated with a pump and goes among people bringing this symbol of the fundamental link with his mother. Rudolf Schwarzkogler bandages himself and throws blades all around, while blood stains his genitals. Chris Burden puts inside his body two electric threads which explode and burn his skin, but prevent him from being killed.

Hermann Nitsch may be considered the most important body-artist of the Viennese group. His book « Orgien Mysterien Theater » represents the spiritual will of this group of artists. There one can read a constant instigation to kill, to profane, to rob. The phantasies and the behaviour of these artists recall the death instinct as Freud has defined it. In all their expressions the object relationship is clearly narcissistic and ma-

sturbatory, sadistic and masochistic, exhibitionist and perverse.

I believe that the reactions to this kind of art can be considered a defence against the invasion of our genitality (adult sexuality based on the « exchange ») from pregenitality (infantile sexuality based on « appropriation »). In fact, in all of us the conflict between genitality and pregenitality is always present and the compulsory tendency to repeat what it has already been, a tendency which Freud connects to death instinct.

The representation in body-art of this conflict in favour of pregenitality and perversions would stimulate in us the old conflict which has been kept under the ashes (rimotion) by the development of our genitality and would up set our sexual identity.

I believe it is important for a deep understanding of this form of art to know what psychoanalysts, after Freud, have written about art and the symbolic expression of depression. Hanna Segal says that in order to understand and express his depression, the artist must recognize the death instinct, in its aggressive and destructive aspects and to accept the reality of death for the object and for himself. The artist's aim would then be to give the most complete expression to the conflicts between life and death instincts.

These concepts recall the dream, since it is in the dream that an instinctual fusion between life and death instinct takes place. In the dream, in fact, aggressiveness may be neutralized by Eros under the pressure of the pleasure principle. Dream and art would then have in common the possibility of containing the conflict between construction and destruction, between life and death.

The contribution of child psychoanalysis has given us the opportunity of exploring creativity from the psychoanalytic point of view and understanding the connection between art and our inner world. Child psychoanalysis has shown that the child builds his internal objects under the stimulus of pulsions (life and death instincts) the mental expression of which is represented by unconscious fantasies.

In his earliest life time the child lives the death impulse as envy, aggressiveness and the desire to destroy his primary object of love, namely his mother's breast, on which he depends entirely for pleasure, love and life.

These feelings give rise to persecutory fantasies which the child faces with defensive mechanisms: splitting between good and bad parts, negation, idealization, omnipotent control.

In this time of his life the child lives an object relationship typical of the schizoparanoïd position (SP) with feelings (anxieties, anguishes, defenses) which, although modified, will last all

through his adult life. The SP position is followed by the depressive position (D) in which the child recognizes his mother in her whole. The destructive feelings felt against the mother now causes guilt and mourning in the child together with the desire to repair and recreate the destroyed object. These reparatory feelings will form the base of the creative activity of the adult Ego.

In the same time the feelings of guilt and mourning tend to drive the child again toward schizoparanoïd positions with their typical defenses. The various SP and D positions are never definitely reached and maintained. So, schizoparanoïd and depressive modalities persist in everyone of us together with the tendency to re-experience feelings and conflicts of infantile life in a continuous oscillation and in a kinetic, characteristic for every one of us, and represent by Bion's scheme $SP \rightleftharpoons D$.

Psychoanalysts believe that the nature of the creative impulses is strictly connected with the depressive position and its related repairing feelings. By creating the artist reveals his infantile depressive emotions and his anxieties regarding the stability of his own internal world. By overcoming his depressive position he recreates his internal objects and by separating them from himself, gives them an autonomous life. He has to create a new reality.

An analogous process takes place in people who make use of art through identification. To enjoy art means in fact to let ourselves be dragged into the artist's internal world and to agree to put in crisis with him the stability of our own internal objects with the aim of reemerging from depression and reaching a new stability, also integrating the split parts of ourselves.

In this prospective, there are no aspects that art in itself could not embody and integrate.

The limit between art and non-art can be so traced, beyond any formal aspect, by the possibility that art has to allow us the integration of split parts, identification with the artist's internal world, particularly with his depressive struggle and his reemergence from it.

All forms of art which we have taken into consideration can therefore enrich us in the sense that may favour a contact with our inner world and our unconscious without pathological defenses: i.e. negation and repression. On the other hand, any expression of sadism, masochism, hate, violence, perversion, may drag sick parts of ourselves into suffering and mental pain without necessarily giving us the possibility of reemerging in an improved state.

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(*) FORNARI, Franco - *Genitalità e Cultura*, Feltrinelli 1975.