

## AESTHETICS PORTFOLIO:

### **“LIQUID HETEROTOPY #1 – PERSONAL DESTINIES” .**

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The “PERSONAL DESTINIES” Photographic Portfolio is part of the “LIQUID HETEROTOPY” project, which was among the finalists at the PORTFOLIO SI-FEST 2019 international award (Italy). The research that led to the development of this portfolio draws its paradigmatic references from the homonymous book "Destini Personali" by the Philosopher Professor Remo Bodei<sup>1</sup> published by Feltrinelli in 2002. The photographic journey aims to help us investigate the "statute of personal identity", whose existence is proven by the subjective experience of unity and continuity of the ego in the course of time, which however immediately opens onto the abyss of necessity<sup>2</sup> and the haemorrhage of meaning. Beyond the subjective experience, which immediately restores to each individual the certainty of being there and having a differentiated identity from all the others, the philosophical problem arises of understanding what personal identity is and how in fact it is realized. This problem recognizes in man above all a social entity whose identity is defined in the name of its belonging to a transgenerational and contextual "We". It is in the name of this “belonging” that each individual becomes aware of himself, reaches and lives his own unique and unrepeatable identity. This essentially means that it is society, with its apparatuses of coercion and persuasion, that provides the social molds from which individuation is defined, and this therefore depends to some extent on them. This "measure" is not predefined, it belongs to social history and varies over time. Having failed, for various reasons that we do not highlight, the religious references to the immortal soul that define individual identity as the immediate effect of divine creation and thereby remove it from the incidence of time and circumstances, the problem of identity arises. currently in terms of a contingent construction that oscillates between two extremes: the hypertrophy of "We", which makes individual identity a simple appearance absorbed by social bonds and duties, denying it an autonomous and stable status, and hypertrophy of the "I" which, exalting individual freedom in opposition to social ties, determines the withdrawal of the individual in the cult of himself and in the search for his own way of being which he must not be accountable to anyone. How can we escape the oblivion of the conditioning that shaped us and the desires that guide us? How to avoid transforming ourselves into farmed men and women, once tamed by the violence of those who proposed the creation of the "new man" and now often satisfied by the easier access to the satisfaction of legitimate needs and desires, but inhibited for millennia: food , sex, fun? How can we relate to the "demon that holds the strings" of our destiny, realizing how we became what we are and what we could still be?

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<sup>1</sup> Philosopher by profession, Bodei has been committed for years to demonstrating that philosophy is not a sterile academic exercise, being able, in the light of its history and with its own tools, to intervene on the most complex problems of the contemporary world. "Destini Personali" is a proof of this commitment and perhaps represents the summa of Bodei's thought if one takes into account the richness of references and philosophical analyzes, and of an imposing apparatus of notes that reveals a long tradition with the aforementioned authors.

<sup>2</sup> «Having come into the world unwittingly, in circumstances that are accidental for us, perhaps our life does not take on the contours of necessity as it advances, due to the irreversible nature of the past and the progressive closure of the future, which immediately narrows the cone of possible, condemning us to an ever more rigid identity?» pp. 7-8, Remo Bodei, "Destini Personali", Feltrinelli, 2002.

Starting from the philosophical earthquake, attributable to Locke, as a result of which personal identity is the heir and surrogate of the immortal soul, Bodei illustrates the parable it has encountered up to our days<sup>3</sup>. This parable recognizes four essential moments, which Bodei identifies in Western culture. The first starts from Locke, who enunciates "personal identity" as a problem, and unravels, through Nietzsche's subversive thought, up to Simmel, who resolves it by adopting the dialectical formula of the individualism of differences. According to this formula, the Western individual, «no longer nailed to a fixed role, as a member of a "clan", of a class or of a profession, differs thanks to participation in eccentric social circles, open and distant from each other, each of which gives rise to "new experiences" and conveys "new paths"»<sup>4</sup>. By virtue of this, social conditioning is transformed into possible opportunities for growth: «Having the opportunity to compose oneself starting from a wide spectrum of combinations and of contingencies, the individual can fulfill himself either by tightening or loosening his ties with others. He can therefore open up to further social spheres or isolate himself, choose - if and when he wants - between a more intense involvement and a more pronounced detachment from his fellow men. Everyone is thus able to measure their own "coefficient" of intimate participation in collective events or to measure their distance from them»<sup>5</sup>.

The second coincides with the radical questioning of self-aware consciousness, which is the foundation of the feeling of identity: «With a crescendo that begins with Schopenhauer and culminates in the first half of the twentieth century, consciousness has often been regarded as an illusion or a mirage, a dependent and insignificant variable of the anonymous forces - economic, physiological, psychic - which act powerfully behind men»<sup>6</sup>. Initiated by Schopenhauer, the critique of conscience was carried out, on different levels and with different intentions, by Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, the "masters of suspicion", and continued until the mid-twentieth century. Starting with Marx who considers the "I" as "unrettbar" - "unsavable", his denigration is constantly growing. Musil lo portrays as a "hole" to be filled as soon as possible with materials taken from the external world; Freud paints him as a kind of "Harlequin" - servant of three masters (the "external world", the "Superego", the "Es"). Lévi-Strauss defines it as a "pauvre trésor" and an "insupportable enfant gâté". The search for the anonymous subject, for the "X" that lies behind the ego becomes pressing in the second half of the twentieth century, when its dependence on universal and faceless factors is insisted upon. Thus Lévi-Strauss himself and the "structuralists" privilege the function of language or of the impersonal rules that preside over social exchanges; Althusser emphasizes the existence of "subjectless" processes that press on the shoulders of men; Gadamer replaces or favors "tradition" over the claims of autonomy of the ego; Lacan's psychoanalysis sees in the "I" an effect of the register of the imaginary; the Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy, suspicious of any form of interiority and private experience, often rejects it strongly<sup>7</sup>.

The third moment is to some extent consequent to the second. If the individual identity is a mere appearance under which there is a chaotic fragmentation of non-integrated parts, the "I" cannot be assigned a power of self-government. The totalitarian assumption of the "I" under the wing of the "We" is therefore necessary:

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<sup>3</sup> Rif.: Remo Bodei, "Destini Personali", pag. 169, Feltrinelli, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, pag. 169.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, pag. 172.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, pag. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, pag. 255-256.

the intolerance towards the individual's withdrawal from the social bond and the spread - in the name of equality - of the rejection of existing hierarchies many (including: Le Bon, Sorel, Gentile and Mussolini himself) to plan the massification, the dulling or the homologation of the vigilant conscience of the multitudes thanks to different strategies: its immersion in the "crowd", the use of "Myth" or the incardination of the "I" in the "We" of the "Ethical State"<sup>8</sup>. The fourth moment, still in progress, coincides with the rebirth of the "I". Subtly, Bodei puts this rebirth in a dubious form: "With the fall of totalitarian states and the entry of their citizens into the area of parliamentary democracy and the market economy, the individual truly abandons the "We" prison-refuge. to be reborn differentiated, multiple, free, capable of reconstructing one's inner citadel from the ashes of the previous human "type"? the "inhuman hardness"<sup>9</sup>.

The doubt remains on the fact that the "contemporary I" is no longer defined in antithesis to its absorption in the "We" but on the register of "mass narcissism". As Bodei tells us, the rebirth of the "I" takes place under the banner of a "me in a balloon", full of itself, eager for happiness<sup>10</sup>, of a "modular I" that can be easily assembled in the manner of a Meccano, of an "I dossier" obtained from the tapping of many other "I's" or a "I patchwork", similar to a blanket formed by the stitching of different pieces obtained from scraps of fabric<sup>11</sup>. A consequence of narcissism is disengagement: "The prevailing interest in one's own person leads the mass narcissist to abandon the terrain of history as an intertwining of "common destinies" of rights without compensation, others are expected to behave in the same way. In the age of "après-devoir" the idea prevails that one should feel free from duties and promises, that it is right to indulge in "non-binding commitments" (commitments that do not commit, if necessary renegotiable, revocable at will by any of the contracting parties). As if the previous decisions had been taken by someone else, every commitment is assumed with the "arrière-pensée" of its future revision based on the change, even the slightest, of circumstances. Personal identity is no longer firmly anchored to the "memories" of past choices, nor is it required to keep faith to projects. In being unfaithful to everything and everyone, even to oneself, in the hibernation of social relationships, the progressive isolation of the individual is manifested, deprived of the supports and points of reference once important (for example: extended family, community of neighborhood, class or class solidarity). "Narcissism" represents the real drive to desertion from the social and public sphere, distancing the individual from the community and thus inducing him to progressively dissolve his social ties (or to make an almost exclusively instrumental use of them)<sup>12</sup>.

Like Bodei, we too wonder if the announcement that the invasion order issued at the time by totalitarianisms has finally been revoked? Unfortunately for us "No" because, in reality, the individual consciousness has been and will inevitably always be invaded and colonized, especially during the so-called "epochal changes". The "ways", the "forms" and the "contents" vary. In particular, as regards the current historical phase, the ever more widespread infiltration and occupation of consciences takes place through the "control" of the mind and bodies, a "control" propitiated by a panoply of knowledge and techniques that require the intimate participation and

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<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, pag. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, pag. 252.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, pag. 258.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, pag. 261.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, pag. 259.

connivance of the subjects, sometimes passive and sometimes active depending on which is the most convenient way to maintain "control"<sup>13</sup>. Even if little observed, the titanic struggle, fought through sophisticated "anthropotechnical" between impulses of domestication and impulses of brutalization, between the use of "hard" methods of psycho-physical control and that of "soft" devices aimed at the emotional and ideal deactivation of consciousness. exposed to the game of random stimuli and legitimately interested in prolonging life and preserving health thanks to the intervention of the welfare state or to the evident ability to move between the pitfalls and promises of the market<sup>14</sup>.

If, therefore, it is positive that almost no one now appears willing to be crushed by an oppressive and uniform "We" and almost no one lets himself be nailed to a pre-established social role<sup>15</sup>, the way to reach an authentic affirmation of identity seems long. In fact, the dichotomy that opposes the "modern" individual to the "postmodern" one must be articulated differently, breaking the self-referential circle of the "I" and reconstructing a "We" capable of strengthening the social bond without undermining the autonomy of individuals, in that is, able to internalize the need for community without canceling individual differences<sup>16</sup>. How do you get there? The solution proposed by Bodei focuses on the possibility that the "I" objective its own condition, recognizing its historical belonging and questioning its personal vocation to be: «The more the individual conscience becomes aware of the "anonymous" and "collective powers" that have shaped it, the more it orients itself in the world of forces which, while marking it, transcend it, the more its potential range of intelligence and action is extended. Only by exploiting this intermediate space of references between the "I" and the "We" to their advantage, the "I" of each one can come out both from the solitude of purely self-referential consciousness and from the identification with a "We" that engulfs it. Only in this way can it find its own way among many, make sharper his critical skills and take on specific responsibilities, only in this way can he further develop the processes of identification and evolutionary differentiation which, in principle, never stop in the course of existence<sup>17</sup>». By becoming more and more aware of the side of universality that is in us and of the multiple historical and social moments that have formed us, our peculiar individuality, the only one that can actively assume this role, expands and is articulated<sup>18</sup>.

If on the one hand modernity has led to the affirmation of the technical abilities of homo faber, on the other one cannot help but recognize in the contemporary age a disturbing tendency towards the erosion of profound vital meanings which, even in the early age modern, seemed to still be able to keep intact the sense of being. Personal destinies is fully inserted among the works interpreting this ambiguity of the modern, following the vicissitudes through which the individual (the "subject", the "I", the "personal identity") was first constituted and it is then shattered, "colonized" by twentieth-century totalitarianisms which, however, it has managed to survive, once again advancing its own request for meaning. The peculiarity of Bodei's approach - highlighted by the reference to the other two works of his «triptych on the genesis and structure of the modern Western individual», that is, "Scomposizioni" (Turin 1987) and "Geometria delle passioni" (Milan 1991) - consists in the choice of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, pag. 259.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, pag. 267.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, pag. 265.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, pag. 259.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, pag. 288.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, pag. 289.

privileging , as an essential philosophical moment of contemporaneity, the dynamic constitution of the human subject, as the only and real point of practical-gnoseological access to reality. However, this dynamic did not take place, in Western thought, according to a univocal path, being able to observe two divergent lines of development: that of the individual and his autonomy and that of the elimination or denigration of the "principium individuationis"<sup>19</sup>. The first trajectory leads from Locke to Nietzsche, from Proust to Simmel and Pirandello, the second from Schopenhauer to Le Bon, from Gentile to twentieth-century totalitarianisms. It is not that here it is a question of choosing the first to the detriment of the second, since the latter brings to the path of formation of consciousness a baggage of objectivity and otherness that the ego cannot do without. It is a question of understanding how today the question of the constitution of subjectivity must not pass «through the enhancement of self-reflection, but through the increase in the complexity of the relationship itself»<sup>20</sup>. Bodei, underlining the essential intersubjectivity of the ego, insists that we move in the direction of an "I-Us" balance, performing «preliminary exercises of perplexity on the signals of the present, putting ourselves more often in the place of others (sources from which the "new"), and then try to imagine ourselves and our world differently»<sup>21</sup>. Indeed, only such a constituted self would be able to face the challenges of freedom and responsibility.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, pag. 37.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, pag. 76.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, pag. 277.