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**SELF-REPRESENTATION AS “SELF-DIVESTMENT”?  
EPIGONISM AND SINGULARITY IN VETTOR PISANI’S  
*THE CHAMBER HERO* AT *DOCUMENTA* 5 (1972)**

*Abstract:*

Harald Szeemann’s fifth *documenta* exhibition of 1972 emphasised not yet canonized art practices, displayed under the heading of ‘individual mythologies’. In this section, a new self-centred attitude unfolded. Since the artist’s authority and authoriality had been widely questioned by then, the selected positions encountered critical reception. Among the most discussed works we find Italian artist Vettor Pisani’s performance *The Chamber Hero*. Staged in the ‘self-representation’ wing of the ‘individual mythologies’ section, in the reviewers’ eyes it embodied a radical withdrawal of art from social concerns. At a closer look, however, the critics’ readings significantly differed from the artist’s intention. Focusing on the performance from different perspectives, this essay reconstructs its multifaceted interpretation in 1972 and casts light on the conception of subjectivity at stake in the work, which intertwines epigonism and singularity.

*Keywords:*

Harald Szeemann, Vettor Pisani, *documenta* 5, individual mythologies, self-representation, alchemy, bachelor machine

In the summer of 1972, the fifth edition of the international exhibition *documenta* opened in Kassel under the title *Inquiry into reality - visual worlds today*. Its curator was Harald Szeemann, together with Hamburg aesthetic professor Bazon Brock and Lucerne Museum director Jean-Christophe Ammann contributing to conceptual development. For the first time in the history of *documenta*, the event was built around a theme, which – having established reality as what we perceive in the form of images – explored the cognitive functions of artistic and non-artistic visual worlds, as well as their interrelations. The exhibition's encyclopaedic approach had the wide scope of a universal visual semiotics: it was divided into numerous sections held together by a three-part theoretical framework of Hegelian inspiration, and included an art exhibition dominated by the dichotomy between Western hyperrealism and conceptual art. Defying stylistic classification was the third section, which Szeemann entitled 'individual mythologies'. With indefinite boundaries in terms of media and form, it seemed to stand outside *documenta*'s rigid pre-established mapping, and appeared focused on the *process* of the work on the one hand, and on the artist's self-representation – or *behaviour* – on the other. "In their exterior appearance," Szeemann explained at the closing of the exhibition, "individual mythologies are a phenomenon with no common denominator; they should be understood as part of a history of intensity in art, which is not oriented solely according to formal criteria, but first and foremost according to the perceptible identity of intention and expression."<sup>1</sup> The term "history of intensity", as opposed to a history of styles, would serve Szeemann as a slogan to fix his personal vision of art and implement it as a curatorial position in the course of the seventies. The 'individual mythologies' exhibited in 1972 were symptomatic not only of Szeemann's canon, but also of the artistic intentions and critical discourses which in those years formed, crisscrossed and sometimes contradicted or transcended this very canon. It is on the ground floor of the Museum Fridericianum, in one of the spaces set up for 'self-representation', that Italian artist Vettor Pisani enacted a performance entitled *The Chamber Hero*. In the mirror of German criticism, his work produced the same misunderstandings raised by Szeemann's notion of 'individual mythologies', accused of anachronistically exalting the figure of the artist as an author – in the years of his conceptual deconstruction. Comparing the reception of the performance with Pisani's intention, I'll attempt not only to reconstruct the reasons that hinder its reading in 1972, but also to clarify the conception of subjectivity discussed in the work in question.

### **“A very short event”**

It was a “beautiful work on Meret Oppenheim and Duchamp”<sup>2</sup> seen at Michelangelo Pistoletto’s studio which led Szeemann to reflect on Pisani’s possible participation to *documenta* 5.<sup>3</sup> The curator received Pisani’s address from the gallery owner Fabio Sargentini in January of 1972. In the brief exchange of letters that followed, Pisani described his project as “a 45-minute action entitled ‘L’EROE DA CAMERA”<sup>4</sup> to be presented once a day during the first week of the event, and of which he sent Szeemann three photographs illustrating “a particular moment.”<sup>5</sup> The title was in fact maintained, sometimes in rather awkward translation (“Held im Zimmer”, hero in the room);<sup>6</sup> the two operators initially envisaged were joined, “in defining the work,” by a third, and for the entire duration of *documenta*, “signs” and “objects” were displayed in the space used for the action, to which the artist attributed the function of “testifying in the space and over a longer time period to a very short event that can only be witnessed occasionally.”<sup>7</sup> What remains of this “very short event” today are, in addition to the critical commentary and to the testimony of the assistants involved, a few photographic and video traces, which allow a partial reconstruction.<sup>8</sup> It seems that the performance set not a material, but a dramaturgical separation between aesthetic space and real space: in a narrow room the audience voyeuristically observed, without intervening, the development of an unequal interaction between Pisani himself, in action, and his sister Luciana, still and nude, tied with a sliding collar to a chain, which was stretched between two facing walls (*Figure 1*). The regime was clearly theatrical, but of non-naturalistic, symbolic character. Exposed in their materiality, the bodies functioned according to a logic to interpret, which includes and motivates the presence of the many tools, which the artist-actor used: a round clock, hung to one of the walls, the liquid colours green, white and red in transparent watertight vases, a drum pedal, a flashlight, an iron heel, a tri-colour flag and a ribbon, a switchblade, the word ‘SPQR’ in metal letters, a white chalk, a dark palette, a wooden measurement tool and a compass (*Figure 2*). The actor’s movements divided the performance in acts that seemed to allude to a precluded intercourse, invoked shaking the colours in the pots, rubbing his body against the wall, hitting the actress’s left or right leg with the drum pedal and painting her foot in white, penetrating the chain links and the carved metallic heel with the knife. The erotic tension towards conjunction, made explicit by the interposition



Figure 1: Vettor Pisani, *L'Eroe da camera* [*The Chamber Hero*], 1972. Performance. Museum Fridericianum, Kassel. Image and photo: courtesy of Mimma Pisani.

of metaphorical gestures, was equally metaphorically contrasted by the immobility of the actress and by the allusion to castration of the actor, who simulated to cut his fingers – strung in latex gloves – with the metallic wire. The palette, colors, and measurement instruments featured the actor as an artist; the tri-color flag and the SPQR inscription, where the compass needle pointed at, designated his geographical origin. Regardless of which interpretation one would choose to follow, the reading presupposes that very principle of representation, which the performance medium in those years tried to overcome by means of a non-symbolic *integration to the real*. Only few walls divided Pisani from Joseph Beuys: in the same section of *documenta* and for the entire duration of the one hundred exhibition days, he was physically present in an office of his “Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum” (*Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung*) set up in the Museum Fridericianum, where he interacted with the audience by integrating his artistic practice in a real political practice. Unlike Beuys’ self-representation, Pisani’s intervention required to be read, what we might call with Jean-Marc Poinot *contrat iconographique*,<sup>9</sup> a horizon of reference common to both the artist and the viewer in which the work must be placed

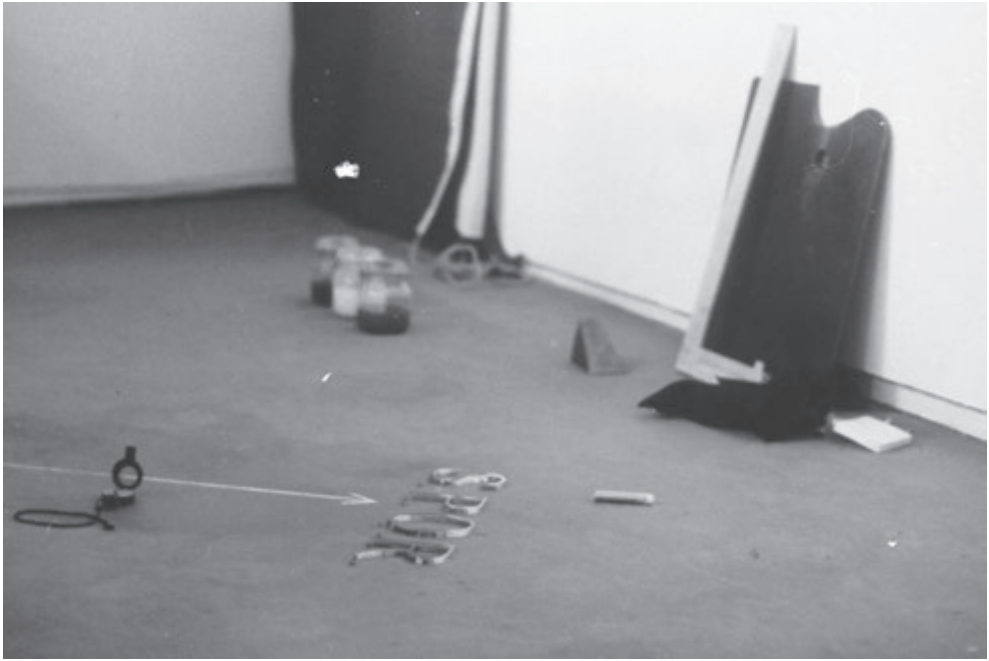


Figure 2: Vettor Pisani, *L'Eroe da camera* [*The Chamber Hero*], 1972. Performance. Museum Fridericianum, Kassel. Image and photo: courtesy of Mimma Pisani.

in order for it to be deciphered. In the context of *documenta*, did the entry into force of such a contract succeed? Which grips did the artist provide to the public in the performance itself and elsewhere to clarify his stance? Which information remained instead withheld from the viewer? In the economy of this symbolic exchange, what was the relationship between explication and omission?

### **“From I to We”**

Among the main attractions of *documenta*, Pisani’s action was mentioned in numerous articles published in the Federal Republic of Germany during the summer of 1972. It is the potential for scandal of the peep-show effect prosaically invoked by the real presence of a nude woman, which ensured Pisani controversial critical resonance. His work collided with the expectations of a public opinion, which for the first time in the history of *documenta* came into contact with actions in real-time. The indignation of the local press resulted in accusations of pornography and seemed to be rather limited to ambiguously exploiting the scandalous potential, pandering to public curiosity. More generally, the performance descriptions that refuse to look

beyond the evidence of the “shock factor” of the nude woman, the imbalance between the man and the woman involved and the latent violence of the gestures were often intentional, put on by detractors bent on denigrating *documenta*.<sup>10</sup> Reinhard Müller-Mehlis dedicated almost an entire paragraph in the *Freisinger Tagblatt* to the work, also mentioning interventions by Ben Vautier, Klaus Rinke or Paul Thek, and describing it as configuration of absurd and meaningless gestures, without delving into the analytical plane.<sup>11</sup> The harsh criticism of single works aimed at investing the very concept of ‘individual mythology’ as a narcissistic and self-referential attitude, focused on the medium and not on the dialogue with the audience, which betrayed the expectations raised by the exhibition title *Inquiry into the reality - visual worlds today*. Here, the object of investigation no longer seemed to be the objective reality, but a subjective one, based on the figure of the artist, dangerously close to a romantic aesthetics hostile to the public dimension expected from art in those years. Where a reading of the performance was provided, opinions generally converged in the hypothesis that it might have been a demonstration of a fascist-style psychological and physical coercion.<sup>12</sup> This track may have been fuelled by the associative potential of the tri-colour flag and the writing “SPQR”, as well as by Pisani’s clothing, as it was formulated in almost identical ways in numerous articles without further explanation.<sup>13</sup> Even in this case, however, the reading focused the attention on the spectacular and aestheticized character of the performance, without considering a possible critical dimension. The editor of the *Konstanz Südkurier* Egon Treppmann referred to it in order to delineate the emergence of a new anti-bourgeois attitude, which he saw as a break with an old *Bohème*, comparing Pisani’s work – with its supposed pursuit of excess and liberal subjectivism – to the brutal practices of Viennese Actionism presented at *documenta* in photographic form.<sup>14</sup> Others seemed to doubt the proposed interpretation, insinuating that it was a pretext invented by Pisani to justify the female nudity, when in reality the horror of fascist torture could have been analogously demonstrated on an (old) male body.<sup>15</sup> The critic Thilo Koch read in Pisani’s work the process of detachment of an unmistakably pornographic nude, which had, if anything, the effect of mocking and trivializing real practices of politically motivated torture.<sup>16</sup>

However, among the entries that reproduced the reference to fascism stands out the mention of an informative leaflet, which Pisani and critic Achille Bonito Oliva had distributed on the occasion of the performance. Although other journalists

did not mention the leaflet, Peter Schille quoted the text, paraphrasing the artist’s intention to shift art “from the ideology of I” to that of “we”.<sup>17</sup> A further dimension seems to open here in contradiction to the issues identified by the critics. Bonito Oliva *a posteriori* confirmed the distribution of a leaflet and certified that the content was later integrated into his text *About ideology*,<sup>18</sup> where the mentioned phrase can be retrieved:

“We believe that the only ideological progress in art is to move the issue forward: from I to We. By now many artists, with a gesture of ideological kleptomania, intervene on the bourgeois culture that is a practice of I, they expropriate it, reducing the value of private property inherent in artistic creation. [...] The conjugation of We consists in reducing language to the only flagrant act of theft (the quote), in the acquisition of a sign and of a non-private language, which means self-divestment of the artist’s own imagination in favor of a model now objective and impersonal.”<sup>19</sup>

Bringing the intent of the performance back to an attack on the subject as a bourgeois category and identifying the aesthetic instruments of this attack in the tendency towards objectivity implicit in the use of citation, the leaflet related Pisani’s work to conceptual practices widespread in those years, placing it in a political context. At the same time, it did not, however, specify the object of the “flagrant act of theft” in the case of the performance: which one was the quote in question?<sup>20</sup> If we consider the textual apparatus as *recit autorisé*,<sup>21</sup> as a report authorized by the artist, the inference from the representation to its content is hampered. Beyond the misunderstandings due to the cultural horizons of the audience, it is surprising that along with the unusual use of the symbolic in the performance medium, no adequate system of translation was provided. The discrepancy between the reading advanced by German critics and the intent of Pisani mentioned in the quoted text attested to the non-establishment of the above mentioned *contrat iconographique*. To what extent was the clouding of representation programmatic here, and how did it inform the self-representation of the artist?

### **“Bachelor Machine”**

Only about a decade later, in 1984, when Helmut Friedel invited Pisani to attend the exhibition *Der Traum des Orpheus. Mythologie in der italienischen Gegenwartskunst*

1967 bis 1984 at Lenbachhaus in Munich, the German audience would be confronted with the solution of the riddle. The catalogue stated that Pisani's *documenta 5* performance cited Marcel Duchamp through the theme of the 'bachelor machine':

"The reference to the bachelor machine follows Duchamp. This becomes evident in works such as Maccina [sic] *celibe. Elevazione della vergine* (Bachelor machine. Elevation of the virgin), 1972, presented at *documenta 5* as an action."<sup>22</sup>

This notion, here mistakenly classified as the title of the performance, closely followed the term 'bachelor apparatus' coined by Duchamp in relation to his *Grand Verre - La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* (1915-1923). In origin it designated the lower half of the glass as a male sphere, distinguishing it from the above placed 'kingdom of the Bride'.<sup>23</sup> In an influential essay of 1954, Michel Carrouges defined the 'bachelor machine' as a category of interpretation of literary and visual arts around 1900, isolating its distinctive element in the – unsuccessful – tension of a male and a female component towards conjunction (*eros*) under threat of death (*thanatos*): "Une machine célibataire est une image fantastique qui transforme l'amour en mécanisme de mort."<sup>24</sup> According to Carrouges, in order to be defined as 'bachelor machine', a fantastic image must imply an interaction of sexual nature translated or accompanied by a mechanical interaction. Filtered by Carrouges' writings, the concept of 'bachelor machine' took on a central role in the esoteric-alchemical reading Arturo Schwarz offers of Duchamp's work. Schwarz ends up characterizing the *Grand Verre* in its entirety as an *alchemical bachelor machine*, as the "unattainable transparency of the Philosopher's Stone",<sup>25</sup> in which the male and the female element tend to converge through transmutation, towards that union that would dissolve their categorization, creating the 'new man'. The artist Duchamp became the hero of this operation: in terms of representation – identified with the 'bachelor' who longs for the 'bride'; in terms of biographical reality – as a brother who desires his sister, Suzanne – and in terms of historical reality. In 1966 Schwarz stated, anticipating the more detailed interpretation he will publish in 1969: "If in a rationalistic, prosaic and fragmented world as ours, one still wanted to attempt an irrational, poetic and humanistic adventure, no one more than Duchamp could be its hero."<sup>26</sup> The postulated equivalence between the generation of 'new man' in an alchemical sense and the "humanistic adventure" advocated by Schwarz was based

on the intimate relationship, which the alchemical ontology establishes between the transmutation of matter and the spiritual ennobling of the adept. Centuries after the historical end of the practice of alchemy, in the early twentieth century, Carl Gustav Jung resumed this correlation in psychology, verifying the occurrence of alchemical allegories in what he calls the collective unconscious. Jung suggested that the deciphering of these images would bring the patient – as centuries before the exploration of the secrets of matter the adept – to *ekstasis*, the total experience of the self.<sup>27</sup> It is Jung himself who related the archetype of the hero to the alchemist, suggesting the identification, which is then used by Schwarz, who applied it to Duchamp.<sup>28</sup> Both Jung and Schwarz thus understood alchemy in its humanistic sense; they actualized its imagery to propose a conception of subjectivity in the fields of psychology and art modeled on the *homo totus*, on a global image of man.

Coming back to *The Chamber Hero* and crossing the reference to the ‘bachelor machine’, which Friedel gave in 1984 with the track of a quote suggested by the leaflet of 1972, it is possible to read the performance as a representation not so much of Duchamp’s ‘bachelor apparatus’, but of its interpretation as a ‘bachelor machine’ filtered through Schwarz’s reading. In Pisani’s work we find both a male and a female actor, the latter is suspended – as Duchamp’s Bride – to the machine element of the sliding chain. The attempts of conjunction shown in the phallic symbols and in the simulated acts of penetration by the Hero do fail; the protagonists remained isolated in the separate dimensions of movement and immovability. The erotic dynamics unfolded under constant threat of death by hanging, because – as Jung states and Schwarz repeated – the perfect *coniunctio oppositorum* is the incestuous and therefore inadmissible one, between brother and sister. From this perspective, therefore, Pisani would add another version to the range of the ‘bachelor machine’ iconographies that retains its distinctive traits, but invents, in the medium of performance, a new form solidly based upon the Italian reception of Duchamp’s work in those years. The German audience, however, was less familiar with the alchemical interpretations of Duchamp’s work. In the context of the exhibition, the performance was furthermore uprooted from Pisani’s oeuvre as a whole, already eminently understood since his first exhibition titled *Maschile, femminile e androgino – incesto a cannibalismo in Marcel Duchamp* (Rome and Bari, 1970)<sup>29</sup> as a “negative tribute”<sup>30</sup> (A. Boatto) to the French artist. In order to decipher the not evident, and therefore opaque Duchamp quote in the summer of 1972, the German audience would have had to travel to Frankfurt,

where on July 11 at the *Kunstverein Plagiat* (Plagiarism) opened, an exhibition created in collaboration by Pisani and Pistoletto and previously presented in Italy. In the catalogue essay the critic Maurizio Calvesi identified Duchamp as the model onto which Pisani based his reflection around the androgynous, which symbolizes, so Calvesi, “the relationship as a composition of opposites: male and female, left-right, that is also limited-unlimited, definite-indefinite, individual-many.”<sup>31</sup> The artist figure that emerged from this process of collaborations, tributes, quotations and plagiarism – which of course would require to be further deepened – echoed with the leaflet distributed at *documenta*, wherein aesthetic “kleptomania” was decreed “ideological”, as intervention on “bourgeois culture”, as expropriation, reducing the “private property value inherent in artistic creation.” However, the alleged denial of originality as property through epigonistic strategies has itself a mythical downside. As we shall see, this negation in fact affirms, at the same time, the emulation as a personal style – or meta-style – reinforcing the subjective categories of intention and invention.

### **Epigonism and singularity**

This ambivalence runs through the performance at multiple levels. The weakening of the artist as author – by the Duchamp reference – is further underlined by the deconstruction of the artist as creator. The act of painting the actress’s foot in white, in a central moment of the performance (*Figure 3*), superimposes on the register of the erotic metaphor a mythological quote, which reverses the creative ambition narrated in the myth of Pygmalion, denying it through the petrification of the woman under the artist’s hands. Finally, it is also the heroic register to be contradicted by both the work title, which reduces the Hero to a “chamber” size,<sup>32</sup> and the self-representation techniques of the artist-actor, which – for the clothing and the tinkering with the tools described above – rather recall an eccentric imaginary. The denigrating gesture therefore intends to strike a precise form of artist subjectivity: the heroic model of the Creator, guarantor of originality and authenticity. In this way Pisani reports on the level of representation that struggle which, from 1968 onwards, invests authority on all fronts, stating “the killing of the self – the teacher, the auctor – as a key figure of the relationship between generations (and therefore of transmission of knowledge), in order to fold into a collective ‘I’, an ‘I’ preceded and inferred from the ‘We’.”<sup>33</sup> The anchor in the representation, the



Figure 3: Vettor Pisani, *L'Eroe da camera* [*The Chamber Hero*], 1972. Performance. Museum Fridericianum, Kassel. Image and photo: courtesy of Mimma Pisani.

refusal to adhere to more current performance practices that integrate to the real, becomes a prerequisite for a reflection on representation itself: the attack on creative subjectivity generates the critical arranger of discursive fragments. Insisting on the interpersonal dimension of language, the artist inscribes himself into the mechanisms of knowledge building, weaving meta-textual nets. But the motor of the epigonistic practice remains, as Bonito Oliva stated at the conclusion of his analysis of the performance in 1972 published under the title *The Slideway*, the “trust in culture and history”: “The slideway is the bachelor machine that promotes the triggering of language, it extends it in an infinite operation that can no more be stopped: here, an additional layer of immortality uncloses, proper to language, which also arises from the artist’s consciousness of being able to oppose to the dissolution of time and matter, and therefore to death, immortality and trust in culture and history.”<sup>34</sup> In the “artist’s consciousness” language becomes the tool to ensure a historical and cultural continuity. In this sense, the meaning of ‘bachelor machine’, which Bonito Oliva referred to, can be related to the same premises as Schwarz’s, to the model –

attributed to Duchamp – of the artist as the protagonist of a return to humanism.

Only the authority, but not the fundament of the subject is therefore tackled: the category of intention, as well as that of conscience, remains intact. The explication of an overcoming of authority, the transposition of a critical intention in the staging of a pre-meditated performance introduced the inventive aspect of imaginative epigonism. Thus it itself established an individual style, which distinguished Pisani's practice from the practices he mentioned and became his personal calligraphy. In this sense, while deconstructing a certain artist model, Pisani did not decree his overcoming *tout court*,<sup>35</sup> but focused on a significant shift within his real and at the same time imaginary and symbolic status, exemplifying what art sociologist Nathalie Heinich defines as *régime de singularité*.<sup>36</sup> the particular 'order of singularity' that characterizes the artist élite in the twentieth century. It follows up on the vocational order of the nineteenth century, integrating the aristocratic legacy of the criteria of origin and affiliation, the democratic component of political engagement and the romantic one of the *Bohème*. Quote and homage perform contradictory functions: if they invoke, on the one hand, a democratization of the concept of intellectual property, a relativization of authorship – and, therefore, a political stance against the authoritarian structures of knowledge transmission – on the other hand they attest to the inscription in a precise, and therefore exclusive, artistic and intellectual tradition, established by reference models (Duchamp). This affiliation was further corroborated in Pisani's practice through the mythicization of his biographical origin and through the blurring of representation in his works, which are clearly symbolic, but polysemic in their reading, positioning themselves on a hermetic register and rooted in a programmatic eccentricity with respect to a culture that in the seventies is increasingly massified. The deprivation of subject authority was in Pisani's performance thus redirected towards a humanistic project in which the artist is involved as an individual marked by a personal style and as part of a community of spiritually related artists, intellectually rooted in the historical avant-gardes. It is the tangle of synergies and energies engaged by this ideal community that forms the core of the "history of intensity in art", which Szeemann aimed at showing throughout the seventies, starting with the 'individual mythologies' at *documenta*: "The signs, the signals and symbols that they [the fools and the thinkers] pose, and the intensity with which they fill them up, constitute for us the density of the world they imagine."<sup>37</sup>

*Notes:*

<sup>1</sup> H. Szeemann, “Individuelle Mythologien” (1972), *Museum der Obsessionen*, Berlin 1981, 87-92, here 88-89. All German and Italian citations in this essay are translated to English by the author. The Italian version of this essay is to be published 2015 in the catalogue of the exhibition Vettor Pisani. Eroica / antierica: una retrospettiva, 21 December 2013 - 24 March 2014, Museo MADRE, Naples.

<sup>2</sup> H. Szeemann, letter to V. Pisani, 2. 2. 1972, box 56 (*documenta 5*), *documenta* archives Kassel.

<sup>3</sup> What is probably meant here is the series of works Pisani and Pistoletto realized in cooperation in 1971, shown at the exhibition *Le quattro dita macinate di Meret Oppenheim* at Lucio Amelio's Modern Art Agency Gallery in Naples (April 1971) and subsequently, in an expanded version, in the shows titled *Plagio* (Turin, Sperone Gallery; Rome, La Salita Gallery, May and June 1971, and Rome, Marlborough Gallery, May 1973). See G. Dalla Chiesa, “Il ‘Plagio’ di Vettor Pisani e Michelangelo Pistoletto interpretato. Il passaggio da Venere a Meret, da Meret a Maria”, *Arte e Critica*, n. 71, June-August 2012, 72-74.

<sup>4</sup> V. Pisani, letter to H. Szeemann, 23. 2. 1972, box 56 (*documenta 5*), *documenta* archives Kassel.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem. The action which Pisani refers to here had never been presented in public, but a first version of the work existed in photographic form, realized with the actress Monica Strebel in Elisabetta Catalano's Roman photo studio. Two photographs taken from the sequence are inserted in the *documenta 5* catalogue with the following caption: “L'EROE DA CAMERA Performance, Incontri Internazionali d'Arte, Rom 25.11. + 18.12.1971”. They can also be found in Szeemann's archive: “Vettor Pisani”, Artist Files, Harald Szeemann Papers, Getty Research Institute. Pisani's work at *documenta* should therefore not be confused with the performance *L'Eroe da camera. Tutte le parole dal silenzio di Duchamp al rumore di Beuys*, later staged at L'Attico Gallery in Rome in a different version (March 30-31, April 2, 6, 7, 9 1973). See M. Pisani, *L'Eroe da camera. Tutte le parole dal silenzio di Duchamp al rumore di Beuys*, 1973, leaflet stored in the Pisani archive, Rome.

<sup>6</sup> See P. T. Hoffmann, “Die aktuelle Kunst und ihre Schaustellung. Sensationen und Verwirrung auf der *documenta 5* in Kassel”, *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 15. 7. 1972.

<sup>7</sup> V. Pisani, letter to H. Szeemann, undated, box 56 (*documenta 5*), *documenta* archive Kassel. The third operator is his wife Mimma, who although not participating in the action, accompanied the artist and produced a photographic record of the work.

<sup>8</sup> Mimma Pisani remembers the staging and the various phases of the action, of which she created the photographic documentation stored in the Pisani archive, Rome. M. Pisani, oral testimony to the author (21. 10. 2012).

<sup>9</sup> “Par contrat iconographique j'entends la formulation des termes du consensus minimum que l'artiste veut voir s'établir avec ses interlocuteurs sur ce qu'il donne à voir dans son œuvre.” J.-M. Poinso, *Quand l'œuvre a lieu. L'art exposé et ses récits autorisés*, Geneva 2008, 145.

<sup>10</sup> On the general reception of *documenta 5* see for example F. Scharf, “Zur Geschichte der *documenta 5* - eine quellenkundliche Revue”, *Wiedervorlage d5. Eine Befragung des Archivs zur documenta 1972*, Exhibition catalogue (Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, November 3 to December 30, 2001), Ostfildern-Ruit 2001, 22-39. The above mentioned violent reactions of protest must be re-contextualized in the debate that preceded the event, unleashed around the changes to the initial exhibition concept that aimed at realizing, instead of a traditional exhibition, a “one hundred days event”, entirely composed of actions. The ‘progressives’ accuse the organizers of supporting, with an encyclopedic show, institutionalizing strategies of artistic practices after the experimentations in the second half of the sixties (return to the museum). More conservative voices instead criticize the simultaneous exposure of art and non-art, attacking in particular the sections ‘pornography’, ‘trivial realism and kitsch’ and ‘imaginary of the mentally ill’. They furthermore accuse Szeemann of sympathizing with Marxist positions, for his efforts, proved unavailing, to exhibit socialist realist works and for having included a contribution of the Marxist philosopher Hans Heinz Holz in the exhibition catalogue.

<sup>11</sup> See: R. Müller-Mehlis, “DOCUMENTA V. EINE ENDSTATION: Das große Grusel- und Absurditäten-Kabinett”, *Freisinger Tagblatt*, 1. 7. 1972.

<sup>12</sup> Maybe the journalists related Pisani's aesthetics to controversial performances such as Fabio Mauri's aestheticized re-enactment of fascist *ludi juveniles* titled *Che cosa è il fascismo*, 1971. See also: F. Boràgina, *Fabio Mauri. Che*

*cosa è, se è, l'ideologia nell'arte*, Soveria Mannelli 2012, 56-61; or to the exhibition of a disabled adolescent by Gino de Dominicis at the Venice Biennale of 1972, read as a critique of fascist eugenics.

<sup>13</sup> On the persistence of this reading in German criticism see also: D. Schwarze, "Bilder nur für den Augenblick. 50 Werke aus 50 Jahren documenta – 1972 zeigte Vettor Pisani 'L'Eroe da Camera'", *Hessische Niedersächsische Allgemeine*, 12. 8. 2005. In the „office“ clock Pisani uses, Schwarze identifies a reference to the "bureaucratic precision" of fascist torture. Pisani's coat reminds him of the clothing of the National Socialists secret services, but the presence of the Italian flag relativizes the reference to German past.

<sup>14</sup> See: E. Treppmann, "Kunst – nicht mehr gefragt. Die Kasseler documenta 5 zeigt Wandlungen auf", *Südkurier Konstanz*, 1. 7. 1972.

<sup>15</sup> See D. Westecker, "Ein Museum für die Maus. Spektakuläres auf der V. documenta", *Solinger Tageblatt*, 1. 7. 1972.

<sup>16</sup> See: T. Koch, "Erforderlich ist eine Anti-documenta", *Hessische Allgemeine*, 19. 8. 1972.

<sup>17</sup> P. Schille, "Kunst, die auf den Leib rückt", *Zeit-Magazin*, 31, 4. 8. 1972, 4-15.

<sup>18</sup> A. Bonito Oliva, oral testimony to the author (24. 5. 2013). See ID., *Autocritico automobile. Attraverso le avanguardie, remake per le nuove generazioni*, Rome 2002, 290-299.

<sup>19</sup> Ivi, 296-297.

<sup>20</sup> It is not possible to determine with certainty whether the text *About ideology* retraces precisely the content of the leaflet. Pisani's work briefly mentioned in the essay is the intervention *The East is red and the West is black*, 1972. If the leaflet had, however, revealed the object of the citation, the information would have been inserted in the press comment as a reading key.

<sup>21</sup> „Ils ne sont ni œuvres ni discours indépendants, mais récits institutionnels systématiquement associés à la production des événements et prestations artistiques [...]. Ainsi, nous ne pouvons pratiquement pas percevoir d'œuvres contemporaines sans saisir du même coup au moins une partie des récits qui les accompagnent. Ce sont les titres, signatures, dates et autres dénominations [...], les déclarations d'intention, recensions et descriptions, les informations, les invitations, les prescriptions..." J.-M. Poinot, *Quand l'œuvre a lieu. L'art exposé et ses récits autorisés*, Geneva 2008, 144.

<sup>22</sup> H. Friedel, "Vettor Pisani. Das Spiel der Irrtümer und Rätsel", *Der Traum des Orpheus. Mythologie in der italienischen Gegenwartskunst 1967 bis 1984*, Exhibition Catalogue (Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, May 16 – July 1, 1984), 36-53, here 37.

<sup>23</sup> See M. Sanouillet, P. Matisse (eds.), *Duchamp du signe*, Paris 2013.

<sup>24</sup> M. Carrouges, "Mode d'emploi", *Junggesellenmaschinen/Les machines célibataires*, Exhibition Catalogue (Bern, Venice, Bruxelles, Düsseldorf, Paris, Malmö, Amsterdam, Vienna, 1975-1976), Venice 1975, 21-47, here 21-22.

<sup>25</sup> A. Schwarz, *Duchamp*, Milan 1966 [no numbered pages].

<sup>26</sup> Ivi. See also the more detailed version of Schwarz' studies on Duchamp, originally published in English: ID., *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, New York 1969; and the revisited Italian edition: ID., *La Sposa messa a nudo in Marcel Duchamp, anche*, Turin 1974.

<sup>27</sup> See C. G. Jung, *Psychologie und Alchemie*, Zurich 1914.

<sup>28</sup> See Ivi, 451 and following.

<sup>29</sup> The exhibition takes place in Rome, La Salita Gallery, April 28-May 30, 1970 and Bari, Castello Svevo, July 15 - August 12, 1970. See *Vettor Pisani. Il Premio Pascali*, Exhibition Catalogue (Castello Svevo, Bari, July 15 - August 12, 1970), Rome 1970. See also D. Viva, "Verso la meta pittura. Quadro e autoritratto a Roma negli anni Settanta", in *Anni Settanta. Arte a Roma*, Exhibition Catalogue (Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome, December 17, 2013 – March 2, 2014), Rome 2013, 54-63.

<sup>30</sup> A. Boatto, "'a' DUCHAMP / 'a' PISANI", *Vettor Pisani. Il Premio Pascali*, Exhibition Catalogue (Castello Svevo, Bari, July 15 - August 12, 1970), Rome 1970, 17-18.

<sup>31</sup> M. Calvesi in *Plagio*, Exhibition Catalogue (Marlborough Gallery, Rome, May 1973), Rome 1973. Calvesi's short essay has been translated to German on the occasion of the German staging of the show, but without being published; it is therefore inaccessible in German except for its printed version, stored in the Kunstverein archives.

<sup>32</sup> Bonito Oliva interprets the title as follows: "If the hero is driven by fury, by eros as an antagonist of the world, here the chamber hero is the one who performs language as a weapon and a stigmata, not facing the world, but the unstoppable threshold of subjectivity", A. Bonito Oliva, "Vitalità del negativo e le sue stanze" in *Autocritico automobile. Attraverso le avanguardie, remake per le nuove generazioni*, Rome 2002,

254-267, here 264.

<sup>33</sup> L. Doninelli, „Io/Noi“, in *Anni Settanta. Il decennio lungo del secolo breve*, Exhibition Catalogue (Triennale, Milan, October 26, 2007 – March 30, 2008), Milan 2007, 268.

<sup>34</sup> A. Bonito Oliva, *Lo scorrevole/The slideaway*, Rome 1975.

<sup>35</sup> One could relate the notion of ‘bachelor machine’ not only to Schwarz’ discourse, but also, following a more radical, anti-humanist perspective of a deposing of subjectivity, to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s psychoanalytic theories, also published in 1972: “Empruntons le nom de ‘machine célibataire’ pour désigner cette machine qui succède à la machine paranoïaque et à la machine miraculante, formant une nouvelle alliance entre les machines désirantes et le corps sans organes pour la naissance d’une humanité nouvelle ou d’un organisme glorieux. Il revient au même de dire que le sujet est produit comme un reste, à côté des machines désirantes, ou qu’il se confond lui-même avec cette troisième machine productrice et la réconciliation résiduelle qu’elle opère.”

In the context of the struggle that began in 1968, the two authors call for a liberation of desire against power. They criticize the reduction of desire to lack and ghost - in the Freudian use of the Oedipus myth - and redeem the productivity of desire by defining the unconscious no longer as a theater, but as a factory. If the desire is production, there aren’t but machines: the ‘bachelor machine’ engages, between the desiring machines and the ‘body without organs’, a “new humanity”, a “glorious body”, producing the subject merely as a “rest”. In Pisani’s work, however, desire remains imprisoned in theater and therefore in representation. Art shows the possibility of a loss of subjection, but without realizing it. G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, “L’Anti-Edipe” (1972), quoted in *Junggesellenmaschinen/Les machines célibataires*, Exhibition Catalogue (Bern, Venice, Bruxelles, Düsseldorf, Paris, Malmö, Amsterdam, Vienna, 1975-1976), Venice 1975, 19.

<sup>36</sup> See N. Heinrich, *L’élite artiste. Excellence et singularité en régime démocratique*, Paris 2005.

<sup>37</sup> H. Szeemann, “Die Agentur für geistige Gastarbeit im Dienste der Vision eines Museums der Obsessionen“ (1979), in ID., *Museum der Obsessionen. Von/über/zu/mit Harald Szeemann*, Berlin 1981, 107-124, here 119-121. The notion of intensity as a manifesto of the anti-authoritarian struggle relates Szeemann’s stance to that of Deleuze/Guattari (intensity is the product of the ‘bachelor machine’) and Jean-François Lyotard. See G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *L’Anti-Edipe – Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, Paris 1972; J.-F. Lyotard, *Des dispositifs pulsionnels*, Paris 1973.

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**SAMOPREDSTAVLJANJE KAO “SAMOLIŠAVANJE”?  
EPIGONSTVO I SINGULARITET U PERFORMANSU  
*THE CHAMBER HERO* VETORA PIZANIJA NA IZLOŽBI  
*DOCUMENTA 5* (1972)**

*Sažetak:*

Peto izdanje izložbe *documenta* iz 1972. godine kuratora Haralda Zemana istaklo je još uvek nekanonizovane umetničke prakse i predstavilo ih pod nazivom „individualne mitologije“. U okviru ovog dela izložbe razmatrani su novi, auto-refleksivni umetnički stavovi. Budući da su autoritet i autorska pozicija umetnika do tada uveliko dovedeni u pitanje, izabrane umetničke pozicije naišle su na snažnu kritičku recepciju. Među najviše diskutovanim radovima je performans *The Chamber Hero* italijanskog umetnika Vetora Pizanija. Predstavljen u delu „individualnih mitologija“ koji se bavi „samopredstavljanjem“, ovaj rad nailazi na reakciju kritike koja ga posmatra kao otelotvorenje radikalnog povlačenja umetnosti od društvenih pitanja. Recepcija dela se, međutim, značajno razlikovala od umetnikove intencije. Fokusirajući se na performans iz različitih perspektiva, ovaj tekst rekonstruiše njegove različite interpretacije iz 1972. godine i ukazuje na koncept subjektivnosti koji je naglašen u delu, a koji se prepliće sa pojmovima epigonstvo i singularitet.

*Ključne reči:*

Harald Zeman, Vektor Pizani, *documenta 5*, individualne mitologije, samopredstavljanje, alhemija, *bachelor machine*