

Appropriazione Indebita – identità ed autorappresentazione

of Emanuele Guidi

“Il suo viso era oscenamente comico;
una brutta copia del mio,
con i suoi assurdi baffetti, le lunghe ciocche ribelli
e una boccuccia disgustosamente sottile”

Charlie Chaplin

In 1940 a strangely distorted Adolf Hitler, the exact double of the fuhrer, called out to his citizens and the rest of the world, not to encourage the troops to war, but rather as a hymn to fraternity, to peace and to liberty.

The author of this celebrated scene was Charlie Chaplin, who in *The Great Dictator* was able to interpret one of the most dramatic incidents of contemporary history. Drawing on the spirit of his age and taking advantage of the revolution of sound in contemporary cinema, Chaplin for the first time gave voice to Charlot in order to oppose Nazism and to signal the last cinematographic appearance of his mute alter ego. In this scene the director faces and resolves the doubts related to his cinematographic identity and to his role as an artist in a pre-war society; a scene showing how recognition, identification and a consequent personification with what is “the other” turns, across genres, into the means to investigate the present. Irony becomes an essential idea to address the different aspects which characterise the present. At the same time the concept of identity, in all its connotations, comes to occupy a central role in artistic research from the beginning of the 20th century. With totalitarianism and nationalism on the one hand and Freud's theories on the other, this concept of identity falls into a state of crisis.

Nowadays, in the midst of globalisation, identity maintains a central position in the debate. Above all, in relation to globalisation itself, recognised paradoxically as its strongest challenger but also as “perhaps the most significant force in creating and proliferating cultural identity.”¹ The Internet for example is to be understood as a multiplier of identities. Networks such as *Myspace* and *Youtube* help people to design and proliferate their own representations. Virtual alter egos are also created in games such as *The Sims* and *Second life*. Within such a complex scenario, art can help to understand the social and political consequences of this phenomena. Within artistic practice, the escape from the I and mimesis are in fact expressions of self representation but more than this they become devices; devices to escape their own context in order to reach a privileged and critical point of view towards the very situation which the artists want to investigate.

The escape from the I and mimesis constitute artistic practice, an expression of self representation, establishing devices for the separation of the artists' own personal context and thus allowing for a privileged confrontation with the specific issues which he or she wants to examine. As a consequence, the challenge between art and so-called liquid² or non-liquid modernity is constantly renewing itself; a modernity whose codes become masks for artists.

In New York, San Keller faces these issues by importing a sandstone from his hometown Berna. The stone, initially having the same weight as the artist himself, gets dragged along the streets of the city until it completely disintegrates into fragments. Ironically it is thus transformed into the heavy cultural luggage which everybody inevitably carries with her/himself. As the title *The Great Lightning* already indicates, an inherited social and national identity is metaphorically scattered in a slow, difficult, yet liberating fashion. **Daniela Comani** on the contrary absorbs the entire historical inheritance of the 20th century. With her

¹ J.Tomlinson, *Globalization and Cultural Identity*, 2003

² Z. Bauman, *Modernità liquida*, Edizioni Laterza 2003

personal collection of essential facts of the entire century, Comani gives voice to a self-narrator-come-creator; a victim and witness of this news. Her ***Sono stata io. diario 1900-1999*** is therefore a narration of humanity revealed through a single narrator whose own identity gets lost between the identity of the artist and the identity of the accidental spectator. The diary both reveals and mirrors the notion that history is after all a consequence of "our" actions. **Stefano Giurati** and **Aldo Giannotti** in **Carabinieri – Stazione Mobile** use actual camouflage to question the notion of national borders inside of the European Union. In their performance *Carabiniere* in Munich, the two artists break the borders of their national territory to produce a completely arbitrary space. Modifying and shifting the idea of borders in general, they stage both a comic and political performance. Hence, the soldier turns into a symbol of the Italian cultural identity as well as its protector. The escort and the escorted appear within the same character. This duplicity becomes even more evident within the **Star Shots** series of **Kathrin Guenter**, who, in her photographs, makes use of the aesthetics and the language of the yellow press. As both paparazzo and celebrity, observer and observed, the artist maintains a voyeuristic view of "the other" in order to analyse and portray herself as a distinct object. Thanks to post-production techniques, the artist represents herself according to the canons of the "société du spectacle". This is exactly the society with which **Evil Knievel** surrounds himself, in order to achieve the stature of a contemporary myth. In his performances and fanzine, the artist as stuntman, dressed up in stars and stripes, plays with both cliché and the American imaginary to promote himself and the respective values that he represents. Knievel, with extreme conviction, makes use of ordinary actions such as smiling (**Upstate**) or dancing (**I love America**) to seduce the art public into eventually transforming itself into authentic fans. Codes of mass communication become for the artist a way towards self representation, as both ironic and as a challenge the perception of the American hero. This self representation finally reaches its abstraction in the work of **Jeroen Kooijmans**, who renders the sound of his name within the daily noise of urban traffic. The artist reveals himself through a balance between presence and absence, through reality and irreality. **Jeroeoeoen** is an audio sculpture which introduces the suggestion of a whisper within the ear of the visitor, suddenly becoming memory. A *detournement* becomes fixed in memory and is ready to be revealed through Chinese Whispers and the murmuring of a city giving life to yet another urban legend. Legend and gossip are purely a consequence of this invention of different identities, collateral effects of the separation of the I. In a constant research, reaching and exceeding the limits that the I marks, the artist creates his own myths and heroes so as to destroy them afterwards within the continuous and indispensable process of his own existence.