

## Franco Vaccari. From the Tunnel of Relics to a Place of suspended Identity

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(Translation: Ian Harvey)

*...on Artaud*  
*"The Theatre of Cruelty is not representation.*  
*It is life itself in its unrepresentability."*  
*Jacques Derrida*

An arc of past time and a present which cannot be re-presented underlie the setting conceived by the artist from Modena for the exhibition space of the Centro s'Arte Contemporanea in Ticino. This is the first time that Franco Vaccari has traced a dual space-time trajectory, whereas usually he implodes in a hic et nunc which expands only in the consciousness of *dasein*. In the first room a tunnel of relics lines up the fossil of a life, in the second a café becomes the site for the unfolding of life, presenting itself once again – this is the twenty-third time – as an exhibition in real time whose paternity can only be ascribed to the artist. It is not a happening or a performance, nor even an installation of objects with metaphorical echoes, but is rather the putting into action of a self-sustaining mechanism. The artist puts himself on the line, running the risk of failure should the process deactivate itself once it has been set in motion. "The risk", comments Vaccari, "is the price I have to pay for gaining access to the dimension of the real, a dimension which can be seen in the effect of feedback, that is, a counter-reaction, which is a crucial moment in my artistic activity". This act contains two consecutive phases of temporal spacing: the exploration of the tunnel which, through a sequence of doors, opens onto a selection of sentimental ready-mades, salvaged and displayed on a fin de siècle bookcase; and the second, where reality writes its live reportage. So here at the threshold to the third millennium Vaccari proposes both a backward-looking view and a movement forwards, in short two thresholds, through which he reconsiders his conceptual realism. In a sense this is the dimension of metareality – in other words, a reality which analyzes itself, but also its reflexive disposition towards the past as well as the luring capacity of the present, his relationship with the aura or his way of bidding it farewell, or again the ways in which he enacts or transgresses exhibition rituals. The result does not so much tell the story of models of representation as indicate their limits, calling into question the practice of imitation. It is against this background that his *Omaggio ad Artaud* (1968, Galleria Civica di Modena) starts to make sense. Here for the first time he deployed doors as "finds", using them again in 1996 exhibition *Atelier d'artista* in the Casa del Giorgione in Castelfranco Veneto. Once again it seems appropriate to quote Derrida: talking about the Theatre of Cruelty he writes: "...And it will not be a representation if representation means the flat surface of a spectacle offered to some voyeur. But it will in some way be an original representation if representation also means the unfolding of volume, a multi-dimensional environment, an experience which produces its own space". Here, in Bellinzona, the doors are back again, devoid of any metaphorical intent. They are real doors which open onto an interspace of relics, which in turn are not invested with emblematic values, but are simple objects found in a junk shop, emitting no optical noise, conveying instead personal micro-stories. The reason the doors represent themselves is explained by the artist himself: "When it

opens, each door – a thin membrane between two settings of which one is unknown and unpredictable – generates a micro-catastrophe, the possible abrupt consequence of the variation in a parameter that may even be secondary. It is not accident that thrillers often make use of doors as an element of suspense. The notion of the door contains the idea of surprise”. So they are doors to be opened, not to be contemplated, doors standing a metre away from the wall, delimiting a path through objects of memory, the twentieth century in form of a pill, in a box, on old records, in toy theatres that provoke smiles and nostalgia, far from epic or heroic claims, ready to introduce another door: the door to a café, announced by an outside blue neon sign, just on the lamp-lit corner: *Anche tu qui ?! Caffé (You are here too?! Café)*. These are premises one imagines to be welcoming, relaxing, discreetly lit by table-lamps, by the play of light and shade, red and blue, which a rotating sphere of mirrors projects onto customs ready for an encounter, a conversation, an exchange of looks, a micro-adventure that would make a pleasant change from a workday routine. “I have always been interested in ambiances which I like to call places of suspended identity”, notes the artist. Railway stations, airports, daytime hotels, bars and cafés are places where habits no longer apply. They are places full of expectations, where the ritual of role-determined identity is temporarily suspended, and where one opens oneself up to experiences offered by the city which are beyond conventions, everyday habits, places which make those who visit them flâneurs. The flâneur is an archetypal literary figure that Vaccari revisits in an emotional reference to Aragon and Benjamin. In an age of high-definition technology his ambiances lower the level of the virtual to heighten that of real contact, giving intensity to life. It is difficult not to recall Antonin Artaud exclaiming “...I said cruelty as I would have said life!”. The exhibition in real time, located in a café, continues to interact with the tunnel of fin de siècle relics. From the beginning the artist is absent, so that the device triggered off does not modify its course in the presence of the artist-catalyst. In the second he intervenes with, as it were, snapshots taken from real life, personal choices. As in the 1972 Venice Biennale, here again Franco Vaccari reverses the museum ritual by exposing the risk of real time: as always a certificate of participation gives incontrovertible evidence of its effects. A similar document recorded the presence of sixteen thousand people at the *Bar Code/ Code Bar* during the 1995 Venice Biennale. Sensitive to microdevices that generate catastrophe and to figures that shatter the static nature of a situation, since the end of the sixties Vaccari has precociously and prophetically gone in for evolutionary spaces of intervention. And in these spaces reality – the indisputable protagonist of his exhibitions in real time – involved risk factors which, while on the one hand they might have compromised the success of an exhibition, on the other hand were the key to its success.