

iamvulnerable

a nonprofit transdisciplinary research project created by IU human intelligences

painting sculpture cinema dance music photography theater publishing

map of the international contemporary scene, from the latest artistic experimentation
to the emerging creativity of European schools and academies

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RESEARCH PROJECT

(Excerpt from the book 'Corpus et Vulnus' by Sergio Mario Illuminato)

In an era of permanent crisis, where the international order is in decline and the laws of the planet have spiraled out of control due to the excessive exploitation of natural resources, the identity of today's artist is well defined, albeit interpreted through alternative approaches and modalities: hybridising, transcending languages and cultures, whilst maintaining a sensitivity that is attentive to the context and its limitations.

Balancing between different creative categories and experiencing a certain restlessness regarding definitions represents the journey of contemporary art, which inherits the torch from the movements of the early 20th century, such as Bauhaus.

We must insist on the demand for a paradigm shift that the new projectuality of contemporary art must face, escaping any form of comfort zone. This research project focuses on unusual perspectives guided by the concept of *transdisciplinarity*, aiming to understand the complexity of the present world.

We move in the unusual space of interstitial zones between painting-sculpture, influenced by the language of cinema, dance, music, photography, theater and publishing, in order to constantly re-signify exhibition spaces and experiment with relational creative practices that reveal connections, affinities, and potential developments with the participating elements.

This is the exciting necessity in the unfinished expressive research of an authorial dimension that, through the «**FABRIC-WEAVE-COSMIC**» of «**ARTISTIC-COMMUNICATING-ORGANISMS**, » is based on «**CO-EXISTENCE**» in creating irregular performative loops, conceived as meeting places and communities, spaces of generation and active knowledge, not just for consumption.

It represents a subsequent reversal of the trend in art, away from exhausted exclusive castes and self-referential systems that are now breathless.

From here, the primordial themes of «**BODY-BEYOND-MATTER**, » «**VULNERABILITY**, » «**NOMADIC ETHICS**» and «**CONVERGENCE-AESTHETICS**» based on the creative mechanisms of *ruins*, intertwine to broaden and divert the contemporary question regarding what is propagated through the paraverse. In this context, the neologism refers to the incessant degradation of virtual worlds towards the superficiality of mirror-worlds in our everyday lives.

VULNERABILITY

Let's take a step forward towards the anthropological reasons for this research.

In addition to the body, what distinguishes the individual and makes one incredibly human, emotional, and self-aware of themselves and the surrounding world, beyond the survival instinct, is their intrinsic VULNERABILITY. The human being is inherently vulnerable. Not only from a biological or psychological perspective but also intellectually and morally vulnerable, in their most intimate nature. And it is precisely this vulnerability that paradoxically makes the individual human extremely strong and resilient, capable of generating quality, well-being, and security in their existence at increasingly higher levels.

A promising sign of the increase in this sensitivity, which introduces the theme of *vulnerability* in the perspective of a more advanced conception of human dignity and the common good, can be found in the Barcelona Declaration of 1998. It was drafted with the collaboration of twenty-two experts from different disciplines in the field of bioethics, initiated by the European Commission and coordinated by the *Centre for Ethics and Law* in Copenhagen.

In this text, not only is vulnerability mentioned for the first time as an integral part of the guiding principles of universal bioethics (autonomy, integrity, dignity, vulnerability), but it is also explicitly linked to the recognition of the constitutive finitude of the human condition and the urgent call for the moral responsibility of the human community.

The signal coming from this integration, which requires a certain propositional audacity, is certainly encouraging. It is encouraging because, in thinking about the present, we tend more and more to associate the concept of vulnerability with something extremely weak and fragile. However, fragility goes far beyond simply being the opposite of strong and indestructible. Fragility is the ability to be vulnerable and sensitive beyond measure: it means understanding the multiplicity of emotions, choices, and tensions that humans face daily and feeling all of that on one's own skin. Humans are not made of steel, they are not indestructible or impenetrable, but they are made of glass: they sway and can break, chip, hurt, and ruin themselves a little. Often, we are not ready to admit the fragility of things and ourselves and prefer to keep it hidden because daily life pushes us to associate it with a negative conception, as factors of personal and communal degradation to be marginalized and treated.

This society, despite all its undeniable progress, fails in the challenge of vulnerability: not only because it fails to generate resources of meaning for a life that appears imperfect and fallible but

also because it proves inadequate in caring for and protecting the most fragile and vulnerable individuals, as if they were inevitably devoid of dignity and reasonably expendable. The recent passage through the devastating pandemic of a largely unknown virus has shown, beyond all predictions, how disoriented, uncertain, and powerless our civil societies, even the most technologically and economically advanced ones, have proven to be in a matter of weeks, plunging us into the delusion of omnipotence.

This awareness perhaps represents the best part, at the moment, of the new anthropological sensitivity that is maturing in this confused and contradictory era of change. The collective consciousness of the wholly special profile of the constitutive vulnerability of the human being – their inclination to be hurt even in their soul by the oppression of others and by their own powerlessness – is a new aspect of our cultural evolution.

Everything suggests that the necessary rediscovery of human vulnerability, initiated by anthropological reflection and imposed by the epochal context, must play a central role, not marginal or accidental, in the reconstruction of a humanistic and civil project – economic, social, political, cultural – commensurate with our intrinsic disposition to be humiliated and even overwhelmed in our dignity as human beings.

COMMUNICATING-ARTISTIC-ORGANISMS

'*Art is loving the mistake*'. This statement is embodied by *Communicating Artistic Organisms* (CAOs), guardians of the idea that art is a process closely linked to life as raw material.

Departing from conventional grammar, these devices are not simple works to contemplate; they lack a fixed and concluded form, more similar to a continuously evolving '*cosmic fabric-weave*', composed of metallic and organic pigments constantly changing through chemical reactions, fermentations, chromatic alterations, and degradation.

The main devices of Performative Practice are the '*Communicating Artistic Organisms* (CAOs)', accompanied by photos, music, videos, and choreographies.

Within the installation, CAOs enter into conflict, between purpose and accident, between aesthetic and ethical nature, between past and present, between what is no longer and what is not yet.

This conflict, emphasized by the dynamic setup, persists, creating a '*tension-filled*' coexistence that permeates the entire experience of the spect-actor.

The active objective sought to emerge from this performative practice, freed from the static universe of symbologies, is to make them become an authentic medium within a relational backdrop.

The experience of CAOs reveals itself in its deep connections with the *spect-actors*, engaging them in an authentic and impenetrable manner through their body.

Recognizing the interconnection between nature and culture, where we produce ruins, we can conceive of this convergent exhibition device as part of an ever-evolving exhibition. It becomes No longer a formal synthesis, but rather a fabric, a weave of a lived experience inexorably connected.

AESTHETICS-OF-CONVERGENCE

Reflecting on Nietzsche's concept of the greatness of man, we can consider the artistic device as a bridge rather than an ultimate end. This perspective becomes particularly relevant in a world that is increasingly losing substance, sacredness, and truth.

Reinterpreting concepts such as *transition* and *decline*, and once again referring to Nietzsche, the pigments act within artistic devices as traces of a path, indicators of movement, and suggestions of passage. The pursuit is not for aesthetic perfection but rather driven by the impulse to destroy any visible form and content that might represent a commercial culture. The tension applied to expressive means manifests through a temporal patina, inducing a rapid alchemical process of decay and ruin, as described by the sociologist Georg Simmel.

As artists, acting as raw material in the invention of the blending of creative practices, we are called to develop the ability to see what remains of the concrete experience of the present, beyond the fashions of art, consumption, and contemporary communication, destined to be constantly consumed in an inexhaustible ephemeral pursuit.

It is necessary to have the courage to assert that the heart of art lies elsewhere. The artistic devices at the center of research, starting from grammar, are not created to be simply observed, or at least this is not their primary function.

Recalling a reflection by philosopher Bruno Latour on *hybrid structures*, once the stable value of form is consumed, it becomes a transparent passage and, consequently, no longer functions as a model in itself, but as a communicating device that seeks to re-establish a complex symmetry between the artist and the other, between culture and nature. Its existence is a *cosmic fabric*, a weave devoid of a specific organic form, which is part of the dynamic ecosystem we share with our humanity.

Through the concept of *ruin* as a creative mechanism, two distinctive, opposing, heterogeneous, and inseparable forces manifest in the devices: the heaviness of matter and the spirit of nature, which meet within the matter itself, creating an *aesthetic-of-convergence* unity. This unity, maintaining the original enmity of the parts, is now imbued with a new ethical significance that generates diverse regions of meaning.

In the simultaneity of intuition and thought, dynamically shifting its boundaries within the device, the conflict between the downward push (of matter) and the upward push (of spirit), between purpose and accident, between aesthetic nature and ethical nature, between past and present, between what is no longer and what is not yet, is never completely resolved. There remains an

unresolved coexistence, a deep tension between their oppositions, manifesting in a dense and permeable unity that opposes the compact and structured unity that no form can ever achieve without opening up to all antagonistic currents.

The active result derived from this artistic device, detached from the static universe of symbolic correspondences, is to become a true medium within a relational background. Despite the lack of harmony, it brings out its deep connections for the viewer, involving them in an authentic and impenetrable experience with their own body.

Recognizing the interconnectedness between nature and culture, in which we act by producing ruins, it is possible to think of this convergence device, within a continuously evolving exposition, as no longer the synthesis of a formal construction but, following a *Teilhardian* vision, rather a fabric, a weave of unfinished experience. This process nourishes a progressive acquisition of dissolution in the artifice of things, as a process of reappropriation and re-signification of the world.

All this represents the result of the transition from avant-garde research focused on abstract categories like space-time, to the subsequent elaboration of a new style of subjective action, reflected in things.

Unfortunately, we must continue to philosophize to create contemporary art, keeping in mind what Pierre Lévy, a French philosopher studying the impact of the Internet on society, supports. Either we fully live our emotions, perceiving them as events of our flow of experience, or we think that they represent reality, and thus we have the task of constructing them as a scene, realizing them. When emotions materialize, continuously generating other emotions and thoughts, when they transform into words and push us to act, they lock us even more in the real prison that we never stop producing the illusion.

BODY-BEYOND-MATTER

CORPUS-AND-WOUND: anthropological reasons *for the research*.

The *body* and *vulnerability* are strong elements of humanity that, excluded from the globalized trade of the present, rightfully enter into the materials used for art in creating *Artistic Organisms Communicating of nomadic ethics* and emancipate the journey of modern man in ruin. Throughout history, in every corner of the Earth, billions of bodies touch and mix. They blend and merge. These tactile volumes intermingle in a perpetual communication and exchange that accompanies the evolution of humanity.

The French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, with his valuable insight into *Corpus*, allows us to grasp with extreme precision how the experience of the body in space and time, here and now, is always a crossing of limits, an extremity that is never closed, where the very identity of the world manifests itself, the absolute identity of that original self-opening towards the other from oneself (singular-plural), in a constant fluctuation between inside and outside in a space that cannot be simply defined as intimate, contained, or concentrated.

The one is also irresistibly, invisibly, always “many” because all bodies weight on one another, gravitate towards one another, and oppose one another, heirs of the world of gravity. The body exists only in this materiality, in this sense, at the limit, at the outer margin.

To simplify, let’s think of the vision of water and rocks, which are interdependent and shape each other: water and rocks, waves and rocks adapt to one another and slowly mold each other, leaving a trace in the world of bodies as matter that blends with itself and with the other, in an unsettling proximity.

The thread of discourse, in its winding, rotating, and coiling, continuously plays with the metonymies of touch, as the philosopher Jacques Derrida highlighted to his friend-disciple Jean-Luc Nancy. The body, which is neither a signifier nor a signified, must come into contact with another to experience its own existence.

The creation of space, the expansion of bodies through contact (where thinking of touch cannot and should not only mean physical contact) allows them to assume new weights, such as that of emotion, moving outward from themselves, an experience common to all bodies.

CO-EXISTENCE

Communicating Artistic Organisms and the sensitive connection with the place that receives them: *site-coexistence*.

The time has come to conceive an artistic action that challenges the dominant current, highlighting its aesthetic and ethical resources and emphasizing a social system that trivializes the body and its fragility, relegating them to a mere consumeristic fiction, nostalgic and functional to a market culture.

The research project focuses on the body and vulnerability, actively relocating them within the ruinous dynamic to broaden the viewer's horizon of attention.

The exhibition space assumes a singularity that transcends its physical dimension, transforming into a mental space outside common conventions.

Let us take, for example, *'the contemporary cathedrals of vulnerability'*: former prisons, former asylums, former slaughterhouse, former hospitals, former boats... abandoned places in our metropolises where we can discover what lies hidden behind the *world-in-function*.

These spaces are deliberately selected to adopt a different perspective on art, where attention is focused not only on aesthetics but also on ethics and political implications. This space challenges the viewer, evoking an emotional impact. This space represents a potential experiential field, a meditative place in its essential nakedness, where the viewer is invited to reflect starting from the vibrations of the *pre-existing* elements, from the very essence of this unique and unrepeatable space, thus creating a new and profound empathic connection with the world.

Therefore, space assumes the meaning of freedom, of opposition to conventions, superficiality, and entertainment that degrade and subdue art. These places are capable of hosting *Communicating Artistic Organisms* that reside on the border between the aesthetic and the lived, enveloped in the silence and patina of decay, becoming guardians of the abstract value of the void between things. In such silence and emptiness, it is possible to listen to the background noise, to discover, see, and feel the space that opens up between the nodes and connections of our habitual mental network. Instead of hastily moving from one fragment to another, from one painting to another in galleries and museums where contemporary art has been confined, here and now it is possible to allow the mind to relax and immerse itself in the interstitial space that opens up between culture and nature. It is the relationship that is established, rather than the form itself, that defines the aesthetics and ethics we experience, transforming into a place of meaning, where art has always resided.