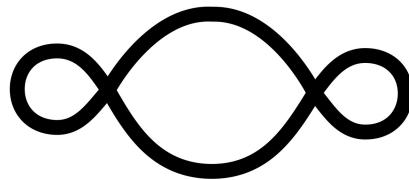


Michelangelo Pistoletto

Omnitheism and Democracy



edited by Ruggero Poi

CITTADELLARTE EDIZIONI, 2012

This is my last manifesto.

The manifesto of a human being, at a point in space and time.

A being in part natural and in part artificial. Natural in so far as shaped by nature and artificial in so far as shaped by art.

An artfully made human being.

The aim is to reconsider the foundations of sociocultural structure, specifically religion and politics, reinterpreting them through the new dual concept of *omnitheism and democracy*. It is my conviction that democracy cannot coexist with monotheistic dogmas. To make this clear I intend to follow the course traced out by art.

In 1964 I published an essay that marked the beginning of the period of conceptual art, spearhead of the artistic avant-garde in the second part of the 20th century. In it I declared “[...] a thing is not art, but the idea of that same thing can be.”¹ For example: an apple is not art, but the concept of that apple can be art. The fact that the concept, the idea, determines the passage from non-art to art, is an initiation equivalent to the kind found in society, by which one leaves an unrecognized condition and enters a publicly recognized one. The essentiality of “concept art” finds, therefore, the nodal point of connection between art itself and the conceptual conventions that structure the entire social fabric.

Following these reflections I began to wonder what could be a possible next step after Conceptual art. And I thought that this might consist in the development of a spiritual art. The cold conceptual enunciation would acquire warmth with spirituality and bring the method of my work to fruition. In fact spirituality, while stimulating the concept, still remains free from a translation into definitive rules. So it is precisely its spiritual component that allows art to avoid being bound by rigid and definitive formulas, unlike what happens in religions.

Advances in modern and contemporary art allow us to define as spiritual a dynamics of research that brings together freedom and responsibility. Spirituality pervades human sensibilities, and is expressed by following our rational and emotional capacities, which are combined to produce effects that are always different. Art is able to pick up and express the broad range of variations essential to spirituality.

In 1978, in the manifesto *Art Takes on Religion*, I declared:

“[...] Art takes on religion means that art openly takes over the part represented by the structures that govern thought (such as religion); not with a view to taking their place, but to come up with a different system of interpretation as a substitute for them, one intended to enhance people’s capacity to exercise independently the functions of thought.”

At that time I was already working on the interaction between art and society, with the result that the quest for a spiritual art and my involvement in politics ended up coinciding. Now, after a long and carefully-considered period of gestation, I have arrived at the manifesto of *Omnitheism and Democracy*.

My engagement starts out from an exercise of truth that has accompanied, from the

1 Michelangelo Pistoletto, *I Plexiglass*. Turin: Galleria Sperone, 1964.

outset, all my artistic activity. The mirror has been the principal guide on this journey. So I propose, first of all, to share this exercise with you.

Exercises of Truth

The Mirror

What is the function of the mirror?

To reflect what is in front of it.

If no one is looking at the mirror, does the mirror exist?

The answer is no, because the mirror only exists in the eyes and the thoughts of the person who looks into it. The functioning of the mirror can not be separated from reflective reasoning.

The mirror reflects you and exists because you look at your reflection in it. Only the exercise of thought makes the mirror work. The mirror exists solely if you recognize yourself in it. The mirror is an optical prosthesis that the brain uses to investigate and know itself.

Mystery

What is hidden in the mirror?

Are there mysteries hidden in the mirror?

The mirror has no secrets or mysteries, because it does not hide any part of reality. The mirror gives the lie to any arbitrary interpretation that we make of reality. No sign that we utilize to describe our thinking (be it a line, a point, a color, a word, an image or any other form of representation) can give a guarantee of being true, and so it can lie. The mirror presents the images of the things that it has in front of it exactly as they are. So it cannot lie.

The mirror is the truth about reality.

The word truth implies, in fact, truth about something.

The mirror is the truth about things.

Illusion

But isn't the mirror an illusion?

In the first place, the mirror in question is perfectly regular and does not distort.

Our perception of the mirror can, however, be veiled by the culture that has preceded and shaped us. There are cultural conditionings that deceive us in front of the mirror; if we want to see ourselves clearly in it these veils need to be stripped away.

The mirror has always been regarded as something magical, because it captures the

image of the person, rendering it intangible and impossible to grasp. Magic applied to the mirror feeds superstition, leading to the belief that to break a mirror is to shatter one's own identity and the certainty of one's existence.

Relativity and the Absolute

Does the absolute exist?

Life viewed in the mirror appears to us to be totally encompassed in the phenomenon of relativity. The flows that lead to the formation of an image in the mirror are incalculable. Figures arrive from everywhere, approach one another, meet, intertwine and dissolve. In the mirror no form is privileged and the combination of the images takes place through the endless workings of chance, which generate the phenomenon of relativity. The mirror bears witness that the system of relativity is all-embracing. The absolute, in fact, does not exist by itself, detached, distinct and distinguished from relativity, as the latter occupies the whole of time and space.

The absolute, therefore, is relativity itself. This is one of the principles that derive from the truth of the mirroring work: relativity is absolute since it has no terms of comparison.

Chance and Chaos

What is the difference between chance and chaos?

Chance is the height of punctuality, never early or late, just like every instant that is reflected in the mirror. Chance is the combinatorial principle of all images that determines relativity. Chance does not intervene just once but operates always and everywhere, constituting the vortex of chaos. The imponderability of the scene in the mirror represents the chaos that is not disorder, but the only order possible. The singularity of each accident is comprised in the vast vortex of chaos.

Chance can be symbolized in physical terms by a ball thrown into a group of people. Many of them will begin to push it in one direction or another, starting a game. The actions of play, in fact, are designed to steer chance toward the objectives of each player in a head-to-head with the will of the opponent: from tennis to football to the random nature of roulette in which the adversary is chance itself. The game, therefore, is an attempt to coerce chance. Just as people try to guess the number that will come out of the roulette wheel, hoping in an unlikely win, they will put their trust in chance for a miraculous cure when sick.

Life and Death

Does the mirror give us any indication about the question of life and death?

The mirror tells the truth about life and death. Every image that appears immediately disappears. It does so by taking the place of the previous one and then yielding it to the next.

Thus every image that is born simultaneously dies. The mirror always reflects the present in which life and death are inseparable.

The birth and death of images in the mirror corresponds to physical life. Without realizing it, we are passing, instant by instant, through life and death.

The incessant dynamics of life and death pervades the entire duration of our existence and stretches out before and after the journey of our existence on this earth. The phenomenon of life and death has to be metabolized mentally, just as already happens in reality at a physical level.

We emerge from the universe for the term of our duration in this world, acquiring knowledge and consciousness. In our life on earth there is the possibility of understanding the universe on the basis of the micro-dimension of the continual cycle of life and death, of which the mirror is a witness.

The Possible

Is anything impossible?

Impossibility is relative to the possible.

Everything that exists comes from the possible and in turn creates possibility. The possible ends when it becomes manifest reality.

The mirror contains all that is possible.

The image that presents itself in the mirror today was not there in the past, but was possible. The one that will be seen in the mirror in future is not there yet, but is possible. My presence in the mirror today was already possible when I did not yet exist. In the same way someone who will be born in the future is already within the possibility of the mirror: he just has to come into the world. All the past and all the future are a possible present in the mirror.

Paradise

What is Paradise?

Let's put the world of today in the mirror.

Now we live in an artificial paradise that we have created for ourselves; a paradise that came into being at the moment in which human beings began to detach themselves from nature by developing their inventive intelligence. So we can say that the First Paradise was the one in which human beings were totally integrated into nature. Then came the Second Paradise, i.e. the artificial one. A period of slow growth, which has accelerated exponentially over the last century, has led to unprecedented progress; this has been accompanied, however, by environmental degradation and consumption of the planet's resources. Today the whole of humanity is faced with the need to conceive a new paradise on earth, through the connection and integration of the two earlier paradises, the natural one and the artificial one. We are in a moment of epoch-making transition. With the expression

Third Paradise we are indicating a possible course for the entire human race: a new world. Aware of the symbolic function of art, I decided to propose a symbol that could be used to represent this course. It is based on the mathematical symbol for infinity, composed of an unbroken line that intersects itself to form two circles. In the *Third Paradise* the same line forms three circles instead of two. The central one represents the womb of the new society. The word paradise derives etymologically from the Persian word for garden, a place sheltered from the rigors and dangers of nature with the help of artifice. Thus the concept of paradise was born with artifice, and has subsequently been used for its ability to evoke a state of wellbeing free from worries and filled with beauty and pleasure. This was the invention of the First Paradise, in which primitive human beings, believed to lack the capacity for autonomous thinking, found themselves in a blissful state inasmuch as they were untouched by the suffering that comes from wanting to understand and having to choose. They were not the creators of that Garden of Eden and for that reason it was attributed to an omnipotent god. The architect of the Second Paradise, on the other hand, was humanity itself, which through its own knowledge has attained power over the world; a power so great that it has also become destructive, to the point of contradicting the very meaning of the term paradise. So it is evident that we cannot go back to the state of the First Paradise, but need instead to go beyond the Second, becoming gardeners of the next Eden, i.e. of the *Third Paradise*, which will put the age of knowledge to good use and usher us into the age of responsibility.

Omnitheism and Democracy

Theisms

“[...] During a performance in 1976, I wrote on a wall ‘*Does God exist? Yes, I do!*’ This declaration deconstructs the pyramidal structure at the top of which is set an absolute master, typical of monotheism. [...] The monotheistic religions have contributed to the hierarchical and political structuring of the various peoples, between which monstrous conflicts have then arisen.

“*Yes, I do!*” signifies that everyone is God, and thus there is no longer just one god, as he is found in all people: the concept of monotheism has been replaced by that of omnitheism. If my daughter or my nephew were to ask me “*Does God exist?*”, I would answer “*Yes, you do*” [...].”²

In *Omnitheism* the concept of god is not excluded, but neither is it exclusive. Indeed it is inclusive since it coincides with each person, that is with everyone.

Deism, or the concept of the divine, has ancestral origins and it has been perpetuated to the present day in innumerable forms and through different practices.³

Over time deism has hardened into a number of religious systems that are more extensive and powerful than the others. The religions that have conquered the greatest space in the history of the last few millennia can be classified into several major *isms*.

Pantheism. Literally “God is Everything” and “Everything is God”: a religious or philosophical doctrine that identifies god with the world.

Pantheism recognizes in the multiple forms of existence an all-embracing divine principle. Originally, in fact, an attempt was made to give meaning to the whole of existence.

A supernatural reasoning.

Polytheism. A form of religion characterized by the worship of many different gods, each of them with power independent of the others.

Polytheism was conceived as a way of getting the contrasting religions born with the growth of different communities to coexist in a single domain, placing them under the authority of different gods. This served to avert interreligious conflict and promote a single social project, put into effect in the policies of pharaohs or emperors.

Monotheism. A religious system that admits the existence of only one god.

Monotheism was generated as an expression of resistance to power, a phenomenon that can be recognized in the great struggles waged by peoples enslaved and tyrannized by dominant powers to obtain their rights and the revolutions they have staged all over the world. The religion of the one god became the hope of liberation

²Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Il Terzo Paradiso*. Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2010.

³Looking back at the past, the essential function of religions in the great processes of anthropological formation and transformation of the whole world is evident. Religions are true grammars of behavior that comprise the practical rules, social rituals and costumes of small communities as well as of large populations. A micro-religiosity of the tribe or village has always existed everywhere, and has gradually been extended in its idioms and rules to the national and international dimensions of today's world.

for the weak and oppressed in every land. A single thought, a single desire, a single faith for all those who cry out for justice, who are seeking salvation, dignity, understanding, equity and respect.

Atheism. Denial of the existence of any god.

Atheism stands in opposition to Monotheism and any other form of religious belief. This position has become ever more precisely defined over the course of the centuries, and began to find open expression with the development of science. Atheism rejects any abstract entity and any transcendence precisely because it makes the verifiability of any phenomenon its guiding principle.

Omnitheism

This manifesto presents an artistic and spiritual philosophy that subdivides the concept of god into the singularity of each person: Omnitheism.

Omnitheism combines the ancestral principle of pantheism with the modern atheistic vision. There is, however, a basic difference with respect to both, which needs to be made clear.

Pantheism brings the existence of each thing back to god and the existence of god into each thing. All this irrespective of human thought. Omnitheism neither denies nor asserts the existence of god, either as a distinct, unique and supreme creative entity or as an entity integrated into every element of the universe, but is founded on the responsibility that derives from a person's ability to think. In fact the only statement of fact possible is that human thought exists and the perceptible world exists. Just as it cannot be said that the mirror knows that it reflects, it is not possible to assert that the rest of the universe is aware of its existence. Omnitheism is concentrated in the capacity of the human mind to process information, so that the person assumes in full the responsibility of his or her thought and action.

Atheism asserts the need to verify every phenomenon. Owing to this need for verification it has not been possible up to now for us to deny or affirm the existence of a cosmic divine principle. However, I consider it necessary to continue research into our relationship with the universe in order to seek answers to questions that have always been at the center of human life; questions so fascinating that they have made thought soar beyond what it is reasonable to think. Yet, even if taken to extremes, the questions are still of a scientific character and we cannot respond to them in mystical terms. Such an unlimited way of thinking, understood as a form of spirituality, cannot in any case leave us indifferent, but needs to be brought back within a complex sensibility comprised between knowledge and personal responsibility.

Art

For me any reference to spiritual sensibility is the subject of art. In modern art the religious *isms* have been replaced by artistic ones. Beginning with the

Impressionism of the late 19th century, we have passed through Expressionism, Abstractionism, Cubism, Dadaism and Surrealism, before arriving at the Abstract Expressionism of the 1950s. Through this process art has progressively developed its own intellectual independence. In the fifties the avant-garde artist concentrated on the creation of a form of his own, a sign of his own, and encapsulated every spiritual, cultural and social meaning in it.

All religious and political symbols were compressed and fused in the unique, individual, subjective and autonomous sign of the artist. Thus art no longer represented god or any other power and neither did it set out to document ordinary life. The artistic sign has become the symbol of a self-referential thought, free from any subjection. In this way artists have withdrawn from the established systems of power, culturally underlining a sympathy with all those aspirations to freedom, independence, liberation and regeneration that, over time, have promoted forms of popular justice. My thinking is profoundly linked to the modern conquest of autonomy by the artist. But, as a consequence, I have wanted with my work to transfer this artistic autonomy from subjective and personal engagement to engagement with the community. It is in this way that art opens itself up to comprehension, sharing and participation by all. Following the radical intellectual revision carried out by the artistic *isms* of the 20th century, art has arrived at a reappropriation of the concept of spirituality, identified with Omnitheism, which can be seen as an artistic movement no longer focused solely on artistic introspection, but extended to the practices of social life. The autonomy of the artist is made up of freedom and responsibility in equal measure. Since liberty by itself is dispersed in open-endedness it has, in fact, to be balanced by the determination of responsibility. This quality of art ought to be brought into society through a greater personal assumption of freedom and responsibility. Omnitheism does not exclude the metaphysical side of thinking current in society, but keeps it within a controllable dimension of brief vibration, in which human beings take on themselves the value traditionally assigned to the deity.

Among the exercises of truth proposed earlier emerges the phenomenon of relativity, revealed by the mirror. In relativity are defined both Omnitheism and Democracy, as a principle of identity for both.

In Omnitheism individual thought is constructed through conscious interpersonal relationship, just as in Democracy political action is shaped by participation, exchange and dialogue among people.

In Omnitheism and Democracy the interaction between community and individual takes place on the broad and complex plane of relativity and not on the top-down one based on the absolute.

As I live amidst the creative labor of people in the world, I have to make use of my art to bring divinity down to a human dimension and cooperate in the formation of a society made up of conscious and responsible people.

This is how art creates Omnitheism and connects it directly with democracy.

Democracy

Democracy signifies “power of the people.”

How can the people exercise power if it is not taken on individually by each person and then extended to everyone else?

It is vague and specious to speak of democracy in a merely populist sense. What is needed is to set in motion practices of understanding, awareness and discernment on the part of the individual in the direct relations between people, and then spread them out to encompass the whole of democratic society.

The election of political representatives to govern them by citizens is the best that the democratic system offers us today, and yet nowhere has full democracy been achieved. What is getting in the way?

Research into behavioral economics has shown the extent to which the factor of individual fraud can estrange the terms of reference in any social, economic or political relationship. For example, the greater the distance that separates the elector from his or her political representative, the less possibility there is of the former being able to keep tabs on the honesty and correctness of the latter’s actions. When the number of steps between the two increases, the opportunities for fraud increase too and the sense of guilt diminishes. It is in this light that the system that regulates the relationship between vote and governance should be reformed. Transferring this observation from the political plane to the religious one, it becomes clear that the distance that is interposed between the believer and god by all the intermediaries that stand between the two makes the possibility of fraud extremely high. Hence the invisibility of god favors the deceit of those who add to this distance. The religious phenomenon, in a *reductio ad absurdum* argument, could therefore be considered an accepted swindle, as everyone is willing to accept the impossibility of verification and control.

So closeness between people is a prerequisite for a genuine rapport, which brought down to essentials takes the form of a one-to-one relationship. Let us look, then, at the case of the mirror, whose division generates two mirrors; and when these two reflect one another they produce an infinite number of mirrors within themselves. All duality is formed by division. This is as true for the mirror as it is for cellular proliferation: to divide is to multiply. Thus multiplication is consequent on division, and the fact that it is a consequence means that it cannot be a principle. Yet the great economic, financial and political interests treat multiplication as a principle. In fact, on this basis, they have up to now produced accumulation of wealth on the one hand and exclusion and poverty on the other. Democracy, by contrast, can only be founded on the true principle, that of division, which economically and politically finds expression in what in Italian is called *condivisione*, or sharing.

In essence the term *condivisione*, “dividing with” or sharing, applies both to the omnitheistic spirit, as subdivision of the divine in each of us, and to the practice of Democracy, as subdivision of responsibility in social relations. “Dividing with” means bringing to the other one’s own conscience, consciousness and cognition. In

addition, if doing things for gain and without asking for anything in return are both present in equal measure, in a balancing of opposites, the interpersonal exchange will lead to shared wealth. Democracy grows in relation to the degree of sharing between the parts. Sharing is, in the first place, interpersonal and then extends to the global level. Careful, though: if the mutual understanding is restricted to a small and exclusive circle the democratic phenomenon is subverted and diametrically opposite effects are produced.

The Game of Profit

Use of the Web is increasingly within the reach of all. And yet in today's virtual age the whole of human society can still be subject to rules of the game invented and put into effect by groups made up of very few people. The creativity of a handful of brains is sufficient to lay down the moves by which the entire human race plays. The system of thought that has underpinned all planning for the future up to now has been shaped by the idea that economic growth is the result of construction following destruction (peace and reconstruction after war). The game played by a few, still based today on this principle, can deliberately bring about terrible catastrophes in accordance with the equation: the greater the disaster the greater the profit. In this sense it is no longer a game founded on risky gambles, because money is made in any case, out of winning as well as losing. There is no longer any need to exploit a large part of humanity to the advantage of one part of it, as happened in the times of colonization, enslavement and lastly immigration. It is possible to act on entire populations directly *in situ*, managing them from a distance, making them prosper at will or paralyzing them not just through a lack of physical substance (economy), but through computer viruses or other forms of infection. The level of fraud, referred to above, has grown exponentially.

Regeneration

How can we develop a healthy conception of life on which to base *Democracy*, overcoming systems of power that lead to practices that are increasingly distant from the obvious need for a sustainable balance in global society?

If we look at reality from the viewpoint of international politics we realize that the word democracy is used as a synonym for the culture of consumption. The system of growth in consumption, which is based on the blackmail of poverty, is still applied as the economic model of democracy. Today many parts of the world are going through the same process of development as the countries of Europe and North America (which have on the other hand begun to experience a slump in growth) and are benefiting from their emergence from conditions of hardship, privation and suffering, as if after a long war. But these nations will soon reach the saturation point that follows rapid growth and the destructive consequences will be on a scale never seen before. Do we have to accept the prediction that catastrophe is endemically inevitable at the end of reconstruction?

Personally, I am one of those who are deeply committed to an attempt to move on to renewal while avoiding the abyss that yawns at the conclusion of this disproportionate growth of the artificial world. We are faced with a decisive question, one that has to be tackled in order to reconcile the artificial system of destruction-construction with the natural one of regeneration. The process of nature evidently turns on an alternation of life and death, but is based on a sustainable balancing of these two factors. We, on the other hand, live in situations of profit that lead to the destruction of resources and to disastrous departures from the natural dynamics of widely distributed regeneration. The forest, for example, always looks the same thanks to a continual process of internal replacement, a very different phenomenon from the deforestation brought about by human beings in their quest for profit.

Morality

The underlying problem is of a primarily moral character.

We are accustomed to regarding religion as the source, repository, temple and caretaker of morality.

Just as we are used to seeing spirituality as a monopoly of religion.

But can we consider the metaphysical potentiality of religious faiths sufficient to check abuse of power, degradation, iniquity and the atrocities inflicted by people on people? Can the recourse to divine admonition be enough to avoid the carnage, devastation and mass slaughter wrought by human beings?

In the modern era the reliance on transcendence as the arbiter of morality is proving increasingly ineffective, while an ever-increasing barbarism driven by pure cynicism is permeating, corroding and corrupting society all over the Earth. So it is essential to completely reassess the way in which morality is understood and practiced.

In the social sphere, this can be compared to the most advanced technological and scientific processes. Nanotechnology is growing increasingly important, as we explore the smallest dimensions of existence in order to understand the effect they have on the universe. Perhaps we need, therefore, to take an approach to morality based on forms of micro-research rather than sticking to the macroscopic one that has been applied up to now. It is necessary to set up debates and forums, networks for the reexamination and discussion of the subject of morality. To take codified forms of ethics and cut away at their structure in order to permit the introduction of new lifeblood, of ideas and procedures oriented toward interpersonal awareness and responsibility.

We need to embark on a major process of revision of systems of education, from the school and family level to the sociopolitical one, starting out precisely from those areas in which politico-religious conflict is fiercest.

Loving Differences

As part of the move toward the shaping of an omnitheistic and democratic morality, I created a work in 2000 entitled a *Multiconfessional and Secular Place of*

Meditation and Prayer.⁴ This takes the form of a temple that revives the concept of polytheism, bringing together Judaism, Catholicism, Islam, Buddhism and Atheism in a common space. A unifying element is situated at the center of the space: the *Cubic Meter of Infinity*, conceived by me in 1966.⁵ With this work art becomes a catalyst of all the meanings related to cultures of the present, both religious and not. The *Cubic Meter of Infinity* is a physical object that contains the verified phenomenon of the immeasurably infinite. A multiconfessional place exists in reality too and has been handed down to us by history. It is the city of Jerusalem, but it lacks a symbol proposed by art, like the *Cubic Meter of Infinity*, that might stimulate the attainment of a balance between its political and religious conflicts, which have ruinous consequences for the world as a whole.

The same intention as the *Multiconfessional and Secular Place of Meditation and Prayer*, but this time with a political aspect, lies behind *LOVE DIFFERENCE, Artistic Movement for an Inter-Mediterranean Policy*, launched at Cittadellarte in 2002. The path followed by Love Difference proceeds through artistic and cultural operations that unite the various traditions to the most advanced prospects of change. The project has been conceived as a preliminary step toward the establishment of a Mediterranean Cultural Parliament, that would create a vast cultural network and facilitate exchange between the region's different traditions, religions, education systems, idioms and tastes, with the aim of making possible the birth of a genuine Mediterranean democratic politics.

Laboratory of Democracy

We see that in the countries to the south of the Mediterranean, where elections have been held after the so-called Arab Awakening, the majority of the population has chosen to vote for parties of a religious denomination.

Just as in the Christian Democrat Italy of the postwar period, religion in these nations still constitutes an essential component of politics even where dictatorships have been overthrown.

Perhaps the democratic elections in the countries of the Maghreb, the fruit of revolutions organized on the internet, will lead to different solutions from those of the Khomeinist dictatorship which took the place of the shah's monarchy in Iran. Perhaps these elections signify a shift toward an effective democratization of some Mediterranean nations, but they also demonstrate how deep-rooted is the social and political power of the monotheistic religions. We have to place our hopes in the possibility that, after the popular uprisings, the Islamic parties will choose to veer toward that part of religious morality expressed in terms like dignity, equity, honesty, respect, moderation and solidarity. This is an important step toward broadening the field of understanding on democratic morality. But it is not enough. It is necessary to arrive at a true cultural, spiritual and political emancipation in

4 *Lieu de recueillement et de prière pluriconfessionnel*, realized in 2000 at the Paoli-Calmettes cancer hospital in Marseilles.

5 *Metrocubo d'infinito*, 1966, mirrors and rope, 120 x 120 x 120 cm. It is a parallelepiped composed of six mirrors facing inward. We see only the back of the mirrors that make up the cube, while on the inside the mirrors themselves are multiplied endlessly.

order for democracy to achieve its full potential. The Mediterranean countries are a genuine laboratory of democracy. But we must not forget that the Islamism of the territories of the Maghreb borders on Israeli Judaism, which represents a community with deep religious roots and powerful links with the Catholic and Protestant religions. We should remember, too, that the northern part of the Mediterranean is dominated by religions like Orthodox and Catholic Christianity. So the development and spread of a true and effective democracy is still dependent on the religious phenomenon and above all on how it acts, or is affected by the politics of a world continually lacerated by war. These intersecting conflicts between religion and politics fuel the most oppressive kind of conservatism and are exploited as part of the extremely risky games played by the powerful; games that are rooted in the form of abuse improperly referred to as liberalism. A genuine experiment in democracy, useful for the rest of the world, may emerge in these countries if those who have felt the responsibility to rebel are able to bring new methods of organization and education to fruition; methods capable of cultivating and operating alternative systems to the previous ones, which are trying to regain control.

Democratic Horizontality

In view of all this, it is clear that democracy cannot be achieved by following the principle of absolutism, and so the monotheism on which the absolute is based cannot be a reference for democracy.

It might seem that this phenomenon concerns only the great monotheistic religions, but in reality monotheism is also found in cultures characterized by other religious traditions. In these areas in fact the political leader becomes the god of the nation, a one and only deity like the pharaoh or the emperor. The other forms of divinity become a populist expression of this one god, useful for obtaining consensus and legitimizing absolutist power.

Monotheism established itself during the persecution of the Jews by the pharaohs.⁶ The Jewish people were in fact split into unorganized tribes under the central authority of a single ruler endowed with divine nature, like a pharaoh, and this constituted their main weakness. The decision to institute a supernatural sovereignty served to bind them together in their view of themselves as a people and in dealing with the most adverse conditions. Thus monotheism once again proposes the direct connection between political power and religious belief, raising the concept of absolute power to the level of the sublime. Following the direction indicated by the verticality of the absolute leads to the re-creation of dictatorships, incompatible with the evolution of democracy. Omnitheism is not based on specifically religious aims, but on necessities springing from the achievement of democracy, which depends on the growing consciousness and understanding of the individuals who make up society.

⁶A historic decision to impose a monotheistic faith was taken by the pharaoh Akhenaten in the 14th century BC, for which reason he has been called the Heretic. The attempt was not successful and was never made again in ancient Egypt.

As we move toward new practices of sociopolitical equilibrium it will be possible to replace the concept of power, i.e. –*cràtos*, with that of practice, i.e. –*praxis*, and speak of demopraxia.⁷ So the work that remains to be done is to develop these good practices. For instance, the symptoms are emerging of a real change with respect to a millenary practice that has assigned religious and political authority to the male gender. The idea of universal male and female suffrage began to surface with the Enlightenment, but was only put into practice in the last century and in some parts of the world. The representatives of the great religions are all of the male sex, while the female figure remains subordinate.

The Symbol of the Navel

The center of each person is the navel, the umbilicus, a natural symbol of life, formed with the cutting of the umbilical cord that connects every human being to the mother's womb. The instinct to preserve the children she brings into the world is part of woman's psycho-physical constitution. She has to be considered the protagonist and crux of humanity's prospects for survival on the planet. The central circle of the *Third Paradise* is the emblem of the procreative womb of a new humanity, which through democracy and omnitheism will be able to beneficially combine opposing terms like just and unjust, good and bad, war and peace, construction and destruction, dignity and degradation, hope and despair, emotion and reason... These polarities are characterized by a moral sense that implies a daily choice on everybody's part. Female and male together find in the symbol of the *Third Paradise* the sign of their union for a new society.

Cittadellarte

The Dalai Lama has explained to the world that an ethics has to be found that goes beyond religions. This is desirable since we have reached the point where a genuine anthropological mutation has become a necessity. The scientific and technological powers we have attained show how pressing is the need for a moral and social awareness commensurate with the means we are using. This transformation will be brought about by bringing conscience and consciousness together in a dynamic mechanism that produces responsibility as the third element. With this intention in mind I set up Cittadellarte in 1998, a laboratory made up of experts on and researchers into various sectors of the social fabric with the aim of *inspiring and producing a responsible change in society*. The name Cittadellarte incorporates two meanings: that of citadel, in other words an area in which art is protected and well defended, and that of city, which corresponds to the idea of an openness to the world and a complex interrelationship with it. Cittadellarte, in fact, pursues the objective of combining the aesthetic qualities of art with a substantial ethical commitment to produce a real transformation in every area of civil society. With this resolve Cittadellarte is helping to steer the profound and epoch-making

⁷Paolo Naldini, "L'Arte della Demopraxia," in *Arte al Centro di una Trasformazione sociale responsabile*. Biella: Edizioni Cittadellarte, October 2012.

changes underway in a responsible and beneficial direction, thereby extending the initial idea of *City* to that of *Civilization of Art*. We are entering a new phase of society, one of which we are all *co-authors*.

The Theorem of Trinamics

Trinamics is the dynamics of the number three. It is the combination of two units that gives rise to a third distinct and new unit. In Trinamics the three is always a birth, which occurs by fortuitous or deliberate combination of two subjects.⁸

Trinamics comes into effect in the process of conjunction, connection, combination, conjugation and interaction of two elements that are in themselves simple or complex, such as two cells or two people. This dynamics is found in chemistry and in physics, extends to the physiology of bodies and can even be applied to social life in its cultural, political, economic and religious aspects. The *sign-formula* of Trinamics is the emblem of the *Third Paradise*, which describes graphically the process in which two opposing circles generate a third circle between them. An example of Trinamics is provided by Omnitheism and Democracy, two different subjects that produce a new social system when joined.

Given the significance of the proposition, it is necessary to start from the origin.

I'm not in a position to tell whether duality arises from the division of zero, i.e. the nonexistent, or from the division of an existing unity. But I can divide the mirror that is both a nonexistent form, inasmuch as it is a neutral possibility of reflection, and a tangible physical material. In and of itself the mirror does not exist without something physical in front of it. However, this nonexistence is a "nothing" that contains "everything." The first polarity evident in the mirror is the simultaneous presence of nothing and everything.⁹ The image is the derivative, the third element, that unites both the physicality of the presence in front of the mirror and the intangibility that is in the mirror. At this point I work on the image which, in the *Quadro Specchiante (Mirror Painting)* - created in 1962, implies two new polarities contained in phenomena: the time and space of reality. In the *Mirror Painting* we find the relationship between two extremes: one is the static character of the fixed image, presenting a single instant of time, and the other is the variation caused by the continual succession of instants. The static figure is the product of a photograph stuck on the mirror, while the figures in movement are the ones reflected in the mirror itself. Thus the *Mirror Painting* is the place of connection of these polarities, immobility and movement, and so becomes the Trinamic phenomenon. The phenomenology of opposites combined in the picture embraces other polarities, such as depth and surface, singularity and multiplicity, absolute and relative, order and chaos... In short the very concept of positive and negative. They are harmoniously

⁸In Italian, the expression *per combinazione*, "by combination," also means by chance, reflecting the nature of chance as a combinatorial phenomenon.

⁹Starting from an analysis of the extreme temporal dimension, we can say that a journey in time taken to its maximum velocity results in the cancellation of time itself. By contrast, in the slowing down from the Temporal Nothing space is generated.

united in the *Mirror Painting*, which eliminates contrasts and reveals the unlimited space of coexistence. The *Mirror Painting* helps us to think and act consequently.

The Theorem of Trinamics describes an unlimited system that comprises the relationship between different elements and the continual production of third elements. It is the formula of creation. The sign of the Third *Paradise* captures emblematically the significance of the *Mirror Painting* and becomes a symbolical synthesis of the Theorem of Trinamics too.

The poles of comparison of the *Third Paradise* are the outer circles: i.e. nature and artifice. The central circle is the third element. It consists in the creative process that takes human society to a third stage.

As an artist it is not my intention to get involved in the scientific debate among physicists over the existence of a principle of determination of the universe. What I can note, however, is that in the practice of living we continually have to deal with the relationship between the indeterminate and the determinate. We ourselves are determinants in the period of our existence. People experience the indeterminateness of freedom and the determinateness of responsibility for their own actions, which affect society and shape it. The extreme freedom that art has attained comes to bear maximum responsibility. The whole of the artificial process has been conducted artfully and through *Trinamic combinations* civilizations have determined their living environment, their state. The attainment of a balance between freedom and responsibility generates, as a third element, a truly democratic society.

Power

Results derived from duality do not in themselves herald an ethical development in society. Let us look for example at the concept of power. To this end it will be useful to refer to a photographic work of mine from 1975, entitled *La conferenza (The Lecture)*.

A speaker stood in front of an audience made up of twenty people. A camera was given to each of them. The audience photographed the lecturer and at the same time the lecturer photographed the audience.

At the end we reproduced the image of the lecturer twenty times, while the whole audience was reproduced in a single image, the one taken by the lecturer. This is a photograph of power: the whole of the public is concentrated in the person of the speaker, while the person of the speaker is multiplied by the number of people that are in the audience. The lecturer can be someone who speaks to us in the name of god and then the audience is all the people kneeling in front of god.

The lecturer can be the dictator and the audience can be the people who listen to him. In this case it is clear how the relationship between the two elements, viewed from a political perspective, produces a condition of dominance and subjugation.

The democratic stance is very different, finding expression in the effort, made by every person, to understand and be understood by everyone else, as represented in another of my works in which everyone takes pictures of everyone else. This

generates a chain of mutual projections and comprehensions. Thus the Trinamics effect of the interpersonal relationship radiates out into society, producing a widespread and omnitheistic democracy.

Money

Money meets the requirements of the Theorem of Trynamics in so far as it is a third element created through mediation between the parts. It came into being with the function of facilitating exchange between human capacities and activities, in precise quantities and qualities.

The purpose of currency is to symbolize the values that are proper to things and people. Over time, however, it has lost its function of mediation, in proportion to an ever increasing emphasis on financial speculation. As a result value has been transferred from things to money, invalidating the very reason for which it was invented. Out of this comes the antagonism between money and what it represents.

Today we have to find a balance again in the relationship between work, production, trade and shared prosperity, giving money back its original function.

So it is necessary to re-create the conditions for an interpersonal relationship where money performs a social function of equitable mediation between values. On the basis of this reflection we can think of a future third element, one that regenerates and introduces innovations into the past. It is not things that are relative to the value of money. On the contrary, money should be relative to the value of things.

Doing Something for Nothing

To separate democracy from the destructive model of exponential consumption we need to turn back to the principle of sharing, applying it to the relations between people as well as to those between people and the environment. In doing so the concept of doing something for nothing will become part of the balance again. Nature regenerates itself without expecting anything in return, while human beings no longer seem able to renounce the search for profit. The relationship between human speculation and natural processes has to be brought back into proportion. Profit must take the phenomenon of extensive and balanced regeneration as its guide. All the costs incurred in restoring the balance in the relationship with the environment should, therefore, be allowed for and included in any project. In this way economic speculation is halted before arriving at an irreversible exploitation of the resources of the environment and is committed to keeping profit within the bounds of a natural equilibrium. Doing something for nothing becomes, therefore, an integral part of a continually regenerated economic exchange similar to the one that exists in nature.

Making a profit and doing something for free seem to be opposites, but they can be complementary. They have to find a balance. Profit cannot be regarded as the sole objective. Fulfillment in ordinary life is a value in itself, free of charge and the true

aim. People, their time and what they produce are the authentic values, which can be represented economically.

The balance between these two extremes, making a profit and doing something for nothing, should be sought, especially in this moment of transformation, through ethical goals to be attained; goals that cannot be achieved if the accumulation of money is the sole aim. Above and beyond philanthropic donations, everyone, from the richest to the poorest, has the space and time to do something for the responsible transformation of society without expecting anything in return. Democracy, in fact, is not the prerogative of a single class. All are called on to contribute politically. It is a question of shifting the desire for the personal accumulation of power and money toward a scheme of universal participation.

An example is the celebration of *Rebirth-Day*, a work of global reach, in which everyone participates with the means at their disposal, voluntarily contributing their own capacity for transformation.

Sharing

A human being needs another human being.

I am one or the other of a pair.

No one can accept being really alone, the search for the other is continual for all. God has been created as the other for everyone. If god is one person facing another, god is democracy.

If god is one person facing all, it is dictatorship.

Direct connection between individuals is essential. The exchange of love is important but not enough, an exchange of authority is needed. I have to be authoritative for you and you authoritative for me. Authoritative does not mean authoritarian. The democratic system is sustained by an authority that spreads and branches out among people, i.e. by the possibility and capacity that each of them has to vouch for the other. I vouch for you and you vouch for me. It is a matter of creating mutual trust. If believing means trusting, I have to be able to believe in you and you in me: this is the credo of art. If the two of us learn to trust one another we do not have to fear betrayal.

Mutual trust, obviously when justified by the facts, solves without any need for sanctions all the problems listed, in the form of commandments, on Moses's tables.

This sharing of trust and authority extends to the dimension of small, medium-sized and large communities and all the way up to society as a whole. Authority is what each of us seeks in the other. If we don't find it in those who are close to us then we look for it farther away. But distance, as was pointed out earlier, increases the risk of fraud. Democratic society is formed between people who are in close contact and exchange their complementary capacities. In this close exchange the process of Trinamics comes into play, producing a third element: that of participatory and collective politics. The Web increases the possibility of meeting at a distance while maintaining a relationship of proximity between people. In this sense participatory politics takes on planetary dimensions.

From Democracy to Demopraxia

In democracy organizing does not mean constructing the pyramid of your own power, but responding to the trust placed in you by creating more trust to give back to society. In 2011, a process of democratic practice was set in motion at the *Urban Art Biennale* held in the city of Bordeaux. Called *Evento*, I was responsible for its artistic direction. That occasion saw the opening of the *Construction Sites of Shared Knowledge*, organized by artists invited to devise and realize meeting places for the participation of bodies like neighborhood associations, schools and social and cultural centers.

The program of the *Construction Sites* was drawn up in such a way as to offer all the residents of the city a chance to find out whether they were capable of organizing joint activities. Proceeding along these lines democracy becomes *demopraxia*, a daily practice founded on a coming together of differences to give rise to shared third projects. Experiences like these are of value in so far as they lead to the development of new educational research laboratories and need to be promoted more widely.

Michelangelo Pistoletto, 2012

CITTADELLARTE EDIZIONI – BIELLA 2012