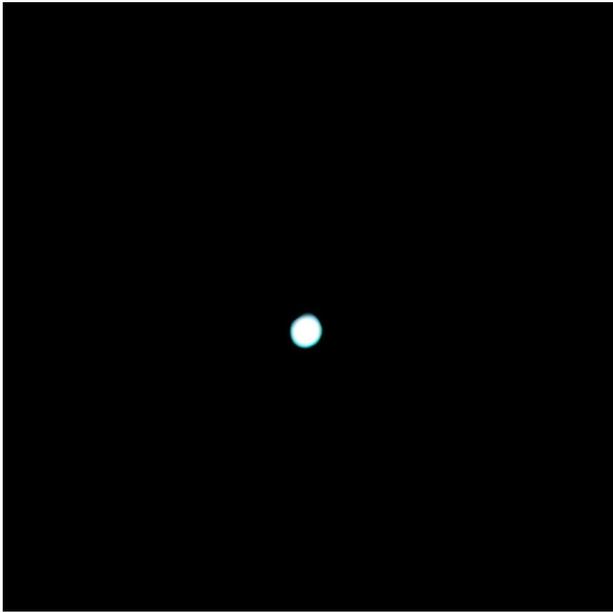


Riccardo Giacconi
Portfolio

Il corpo nero

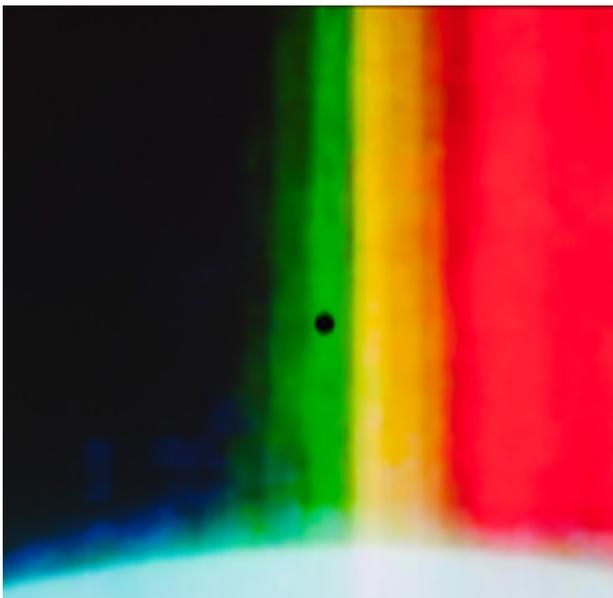
*installation with video projection and sound, 2015
in collaboration with Alessio Del Dotto and Carolina Valencia.*



In physics, a ‘black body’ is an idealized physical body that absorbs all incident electromagnetic radiation, regardless of frequency or angle of incidence.

Il corpo nero (‘The Black Body’) is a collaboration with physicist Alessio Del Dotto, composed as an installation with a silent video and a dark room with sound.

The video is projected on a wall, with a small hole in the centre. Behind the wall there is a room, where spectators can enter through an opening covered by a thick black curtain. Inside, the room is completely dark, except for a thin ray of light entering from the outside, from the small hole in the centre of the projection. In the dark room a sound is presented, composed by fragments from a conversation with Alessio Del Dotto, where the physicist tries to outline the concept of the black body by recounting anecdotes and ideas linked to it, such as the so-called ‘ultraviolet catastrophe’, the first moments of the universe, Borges’ *Aleph* and the different uses of the word “spectrum”.



An approximate depiction of a black body is a hole in the wall of a large cavity. Any light entering the hole is reflected indefinitely or absorbed inside and is unlikely to re-emerge, making the hole a nearly perfect absorber. The whole installation, separating audio and video and allowing the dark room to communicate with the outside only through a hole, is a reference to such depiction.

Controvena

performance, 2015.

Controvena is conceived as something between a mechanical séance and a performance for a machine. It concerns Guido Tallei, my great-grandfather. Guido Tallei was an engineer: he designed and patented dozens of machines, most of which have never been realized. These were mostly war machines (for example, a battle tank) and means of transport. Guido Tallei started working as an engineer in 1920 in Rome, just after having fought in the First World War. He therefore lived the rise to power of the fascist party. Although his professional life took place under the fascist regime, his diary shows that he was not an ideological supporter of it.

In 2001, while exploring Guido Tallei's folders of papers, projects and documents, the draft of a letter was found. It was something between an autobiography, a criticism and a call for help. After having deciphered it, it was realized that the likely recipient of the letter was Benito Mussolini. It is unknown if the letter, dated 1942 (in the middle of World War II), was sent or not.

Controvena is based on such letter, and takes the form of a radio play presented live, with only lights on stage.

The performance was created and premiered as part of the 2015 "Reims, Scènes d'Europe" festival at La Comedie de Reims, France, as part of a program produced by FRAC Champagne-Ardenne.



Il nonnulla

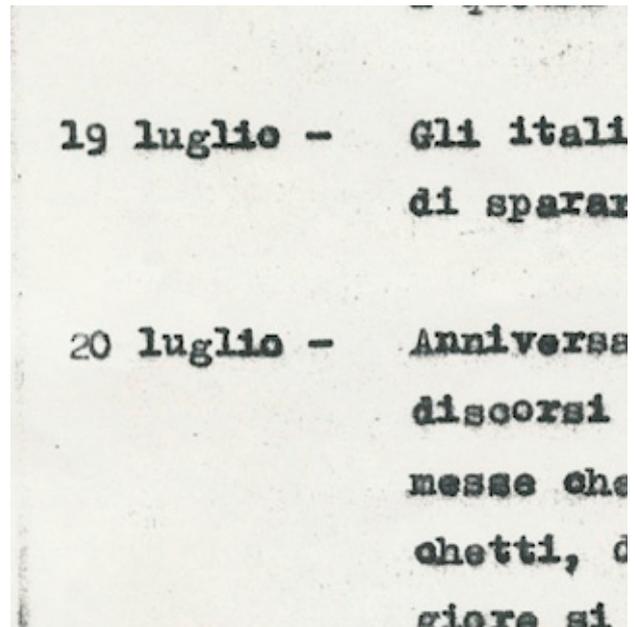
performance, 2014.

At the end of the First World War my great-grandfather, who was fighting on the Karst front (now at the border of southwestern Slovenia and northeastern Italy) found a manuscript in German in an enemy trench. After having it translated into Italian, he realized it was the war diary of a officer on duty in the Austrian army. The text bears witness to the progressive descent into madness of the officer, who was probably killed in battle on the Karst front. When my great-grandfather died, the original German manuscript had already been lost, along with the first page of the translation, typed in Italian.

Il nonnulla (“The Trifle”) is an attempt to produce a new translation of an original text that no longer exists. During the performance, a person produces a German translation of the Italian version of the manuscript, handwriting it on sheets of paper. A second person receives the sheets and re-translates them, aloud, into Italian.

The performance was first presented as part of “Skillbuilding”, 34° performing art festival “Drodesera” (Dro, Italy), where it was awarded the Live Works - Performance Act Award (Vol. 2).

Performers: Hannes Egger, Andrea Miserocchi.



Chi ha lottato con l'angelo resta fosforescente

video installation with sound, 18', 2013.

*"No path deceives,
no presage lies.
Who has struggled with the angel
remains phosphorescent."*

In 1990 poet Maria Luisa Spaziani (Turin, 1922 - Rome, 2014) published one of her more experimental works, the poem in heroic verse *Giovanna d'Arco* (Joan of Arc). One of the distinctive elements of the book is the invention of a language: Joan speaks with an angel, who addresses her in a non-existent language.

The angel who embodies such voice is, for Spaziani, poetry itself, that is, that force that constantly presses the boundaries of language and the speakable, deforming such boundaries, revealing glimmers of unexplored areas of pure voice.



La paradoja de Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen

research project, 2012-2014

"I was at a party in the garden of my house on the Andes. My friends were all around me, eating meat and playing cards sitting at wooden tables. The sun was shining high in the sky. Suddenly, everyone turned, pointing at me, and burst out laughing. I was standing before them, and could not understand what they were referring to. Then a blast of shame rose to my head when, looking at myself, I realized that I was on fire."



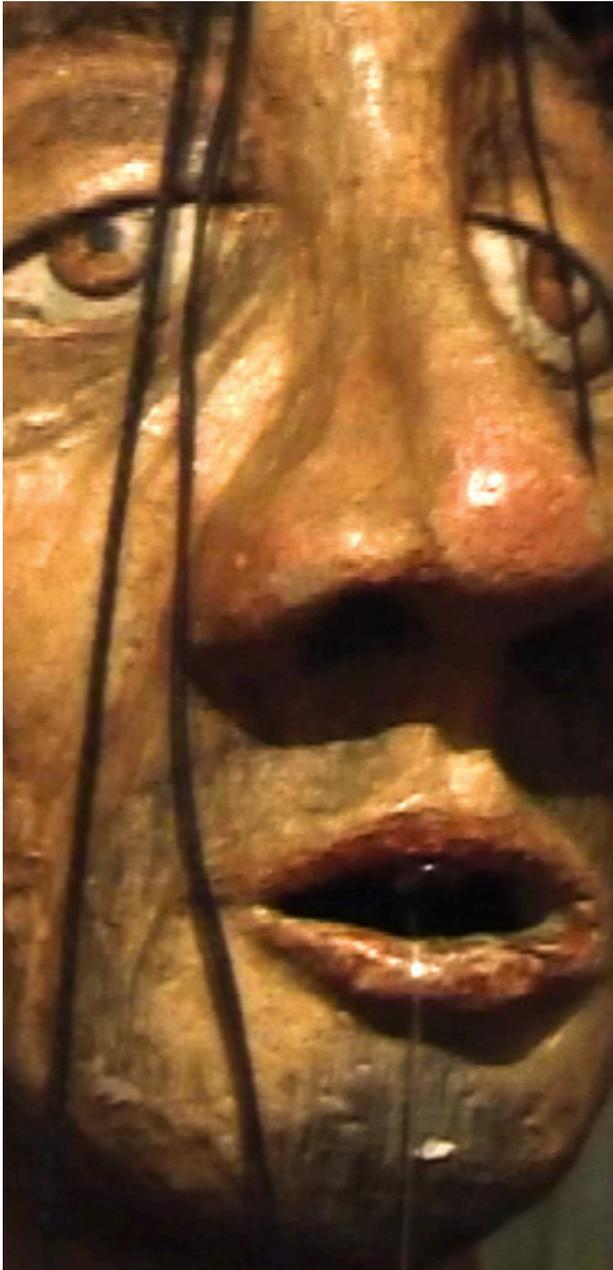
In quantum physics, if two particles interact in a certain way and then become separated, regardless how distant they are from each other they will share a state called 'quantum entanglement'. That is, they will keep sharing information despite their separation. This theory upset Einstein. In his theory of relativity, no transmission of information could occur faster than the speed of light, therefore he couldn't understand how the two particles could be simultaneously connected.

La paradoja de Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen is a research project on a series of interwoven narratives based in Cali, Colombia. It is composed by a film, a series of objects and documents related to the different story-lines and a video installation.

The film (*Entrelazado*) intertwines four interviews collected in Cali. A tailor, a puppeteer, a parapsychologist and a physicist narrate certain episodes supposedly occurred in the city: the disappearance of a cow; a form of possession caused by a puppet; a paradox in quantum mechanics; the fall of a bus into a river due to a lion on the road. A latent 'entanglement' between elements of the stories emerges, outlining possible examples of action at a distance.

Indagación sobre la forma de los milagros

*research project, 2012-2014
in collaboration with Fonoteca Nacional de Colombia.*



In 1972 the Teatro del Parque Nacional in Bogotá, Colombia, until then used for puppet shows for children, was occupied and turned into a communist/anarchist Commune. Many Colombian puppeteers took their first steps in that context, and within that political climate.

A first outcome of the research is a **radio-documentary** that, as a puppet show in the dark, presents the voices of the puppeteers recalling the 1972 Commune events. Furthermore, it focuses on a traditional puppet character, *el espiritado*, supposedly inspired by a real event: a man shot a policeman dead, and then always asserted not to remember having done it – thus becoming an icon for the anarchist movement.

Along the development of the vocal texture, latent connections between sleepwalking, anarchy, miracles and puppeteering, take shape.

A second outcome of the research is a **slideshow** in loop, focusing on the *espiritado* puppet character, on the controversial and untraceable story of its creation, as well as on the mysterious murderer that supposedly inspired it. The texts featuring in the slideshow are excerpts from interviews with puppeteers from Bogotá.

L'éternité par les astres

video, 12', 2011.

Two French partisans from the Second World War read excerpts from French political activist Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805–1881)'s astronomy book *L'éternité par les astres* (1872).

The video comprises recordings of the background sound emitted by the empty exhibition space of the Centre d'Histoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation ("Resistance and Deportation History Centre") in Lyon, which is housed in the very building previously used as the headquarters of the Gestapo.

The first screening of the video took place in September 2011 at the Centre d'Histoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation in Lyon, as part of the Résonance program during the Lyon Biennial 2011.

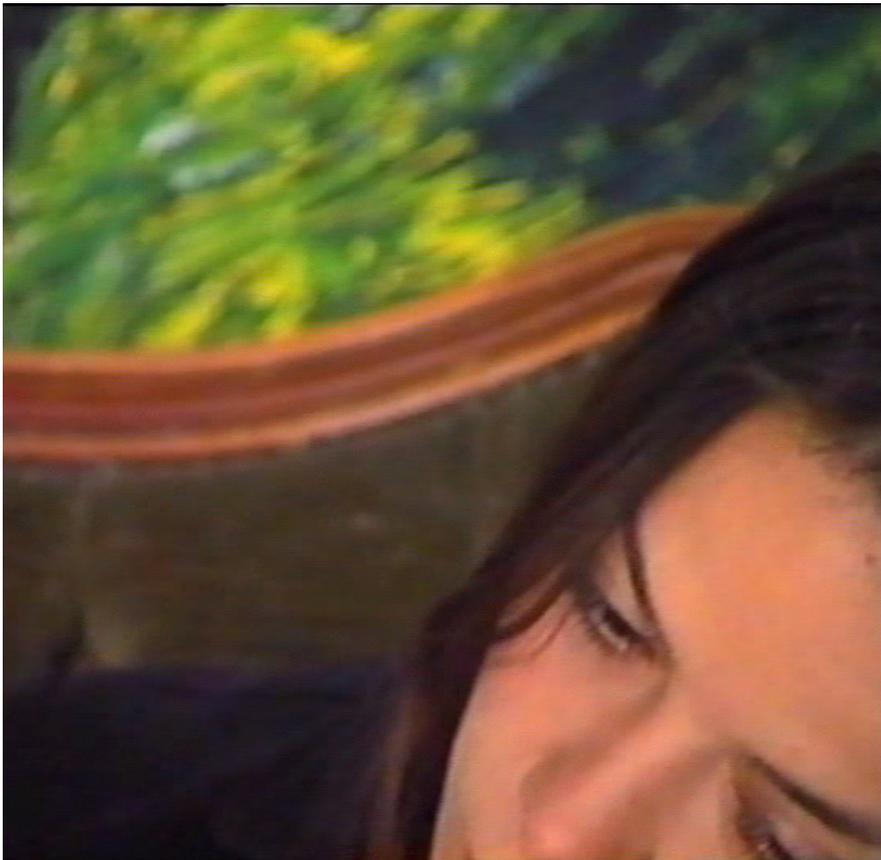


Portrait de Dominique Fidanza dans sa maison en Suisse

video, 14', 2011.

Dominique Fidanza, also known under the pseudonym Domy Fidanza, is a Belgian-Italian singer, born August 7, 1979 in Brussels. She won the Italian version of the TV talent-show Popstars and was therefore part of the pop girl group emerged from the show, Lollipop. Subsequently, in 2006 she was a finalist of the sixth season of the French TV show Star Academy, where she finished second.

Wikipedia.fr



Scherzo (Notre-Dame de Fourvière)

audio, 10', 2011.

13th century theologian Pierre de Poitiers invented a theory meant to ensure the validity, the effectuality of the sacramental liturgy without any reference to the agent. The problem was, if the priest who administrates the baptism is a murderer or an apostate, is the baptism valid? After an extensive discussion the church decided that, independently of the moral character of the priest, the baptism is in any case valid.

As a matter of fact the only case in which the baptism is not valid is if the priest is *joking*. That would be the only cause that can nullify a baptism, a sacrament.

In the church of Notre Dame de Fourvière in Lyon, I recorded a conversation I had with a priest in a confessional. Starting off with a series of fictional information I gave, the dialogue tackled Pierre de Poitiers' theory, questioning the joke as a human device that deactivates the dichotomy between truth and fiction. As in a joke, an uncomfortable laugh ends the conversation.



In Italian, the saying “scherzo da prete” (priest’s joke) indicates a nasty trick, a joke so bad that doesn’t seem to be a joke any longer. More than sound or conversation, the medium of this work appears to be the joke itself.

Il vendicatore

*puppet show in two acts, 70 mins, 2012
in collaboration with Andrea Morbio
puppet show performed by Giacomo Onofrio.*



Re-enactment of an ancient puppet show about Italian mass murderer Simone Pianetti, in the village where he executed his massacre, 98 years later.

On the single morning of 13 July 1914, Simone Pianetti (aged 56) used his rifle to shoot and kill seven people who ruined his life and his reputation in Camerata Cornello, a village in northern Italy. Among them were figures of power in the village, such as the town clerk, the parson and the doctor.

Soon after the massacre, Pianetti fled to the mountains. Due to the beginning of World War I, he was never arrested and his body was never found.

After nearly 100 years, in the area his figure is still controversial and for many his story embodies a positive example of revolt against authorities, while he personifies an anti-establishment political symbol, notably for anarchist circles in Italy and in the United States.

Shortly after the 1914 events, local puppeteers started to perform adaptations of Pianetti's story, which have been transmitted and performed until the 1990s.

Giacomo Onofrio embodies the third generation of a puppeteer family, from the North-West of Italy.

Il vendicatore ("the avenger") was written by his grandfather right after the news about Pianetti's massacre had been spread.

The puppet play hadn't been regularly performed since the 60s, since Onofrio doesn't perform puppet shows for adults anymore, due to the lack of an adult audience.

The puppet show Il vendicatore was performed by Giacomo Onofrio in the main square of Camerata Cornello in September 2012, ninety-eight years after Pianetti's massacre was carried out in the same location.



Monti e mari

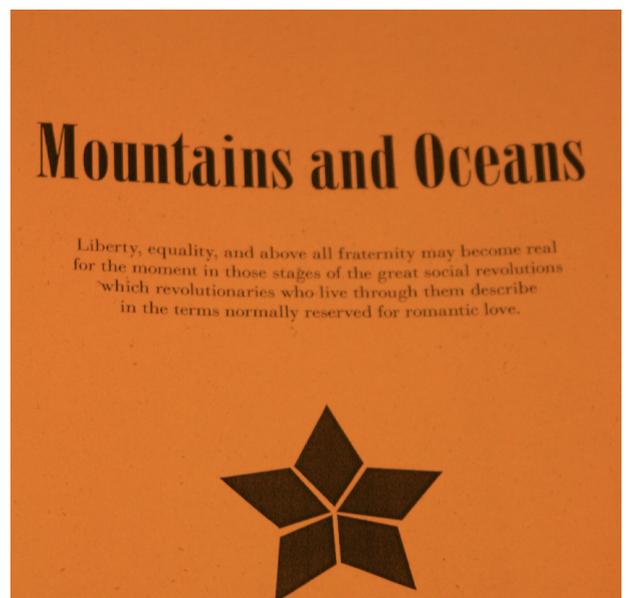
hardcover book, 18 pages, 30 x 42 cm, 2011
in collaboration with Andrea Morbio.

At the end of their performances, those wandering artists we call *cantastorie* (singer-songwriters from Northern Italy between 1850 and 1950) would sell printed flimsy flyers containing the lyrics of the song they had just performed. As well as words, there were often one or more illustrations which summed up the main theme of the song: they were either vignettes printed on the top of the flyer or single pictures placed to the side of the lyrics.

Together with anthropologist Andrea Morbio, I created a series of *fogli volanti* focusing on a single subject which was popular among singer-songwriters in the early 20th century, namely the story of Simone Pianetti, the avenger from Bergamo. In 1914, in a fit of lucid rage, Pianetti killed seven people whom he believed had unjustly treated him thus ruining his life. Soon after the massacre, he fled to the mountains. Due to the beginning of World War I, he was never arrested and his body was never found.

After examining two samples of flyers issued at that time and concerning this notorious affair, we created this new series which covers the documentary aspects only marginally, in the form of footnotes, captions, editor's additions and similar continuous variations on layout and genre. At the center of each flyer, there is a love song, *Monti e Mari* ("mountains and oceans"), which has no historical or philological connection to the Pianetti affair: it works as a fulcrum, as the overtly conventional core around which objects, quotations, and images are arranged. In a play of dissonant harmonies, a gory crime story is set in what might look like a love song.

The graphic design of the series is the result of a study of the fonts, illustrations and themes found in Italian printed materials dating from the first three decades of the 20th century. We took into consideration flyers as well as posters, book covers, and pamphlets.



Un ligero equipaje para tan largo viaje

performance, 2010
in collaboration with Andrea Morbio and Nerea Elizalde.

Un ligero equipaje para tan largo viaje featured in the one-day event *Desplazamientos Temporales* that took place 11 December 2010 at La Alhondiga, a public cultural center in Bilbao, Spain. A 12-year old girl, standing at the entrance of the space, shouted a looping series of sentences.

The performance aimed at functioning as a *non-recorded reportage*. The text was a montage (as it happens in video or sound reportages) composed of fragments of interviews with citizens of Camerata Cornello, in the northern Italian area of Bergamo. Such interviews were collected during a field research conducted in summer 2010 about the local episode of assassin Simone Pianetti (1858 - ?) and its relevance in present times. In the performed text, all details about names, dates and locations were omitted.

Simone Pianetti was an Italian mass murderer. On the single morning of 13 July 1914, Pianetti (aged 56) used his rifle to shoot and kill seven people who ruined his life and his reputation in the village of Camerata Cornello, northern Italy. Among them were figures of power in the village, such as the town clerk, the parson and the doctor. Soon after the massacre, Pianetti left the village and fled to the mountains. He was never arrested and his body was never found. After nearly 100 years, in the area his figure is still controversial and for many his story embodies a positive example of revolt against authorities, while he personifies an anti-establishment political symbol – notably for anarchist circles in Italy and in the United States.



L'altra faccia della spirale

video, 18'49", 2010.



Six Italian partisans from the Second World War read excerpts from Isaac Asimov's "Foundation Series", a trilogy of science fiction books.

Italian translations of Asimov's "Foundation Series" came out in 1963 and 1964. In the same years, Italian literature entered an important phase for the Resistance Novel, a genre whose narrative takes place in the partisan groups during Second World War's Italian Resistance. Notably, Italo Calvino defined Beppe Fenoglio's book *Una questione privata* as "the novel of Italian Resistance". *Una questione privata* came out in 1963, exactly the same year when Italian translations of Asimov's Foundation Series started to come out.



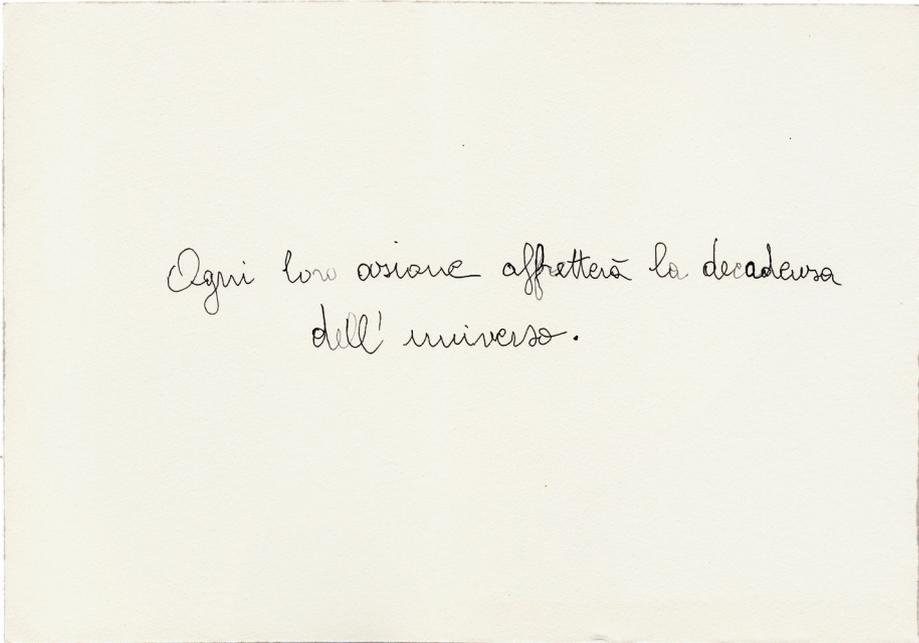
In each of the external locations portrayed in the film, an episode connected to central Italy's Resistance took place. The soundtrack of the film comprises extracts from 1966 film *Fantastic Voyage*, of which Isaac Asimov was subsequently asked to write a literary version.

L'altra faccia della spirale

4 plates (ink on paper), 24,5 x 34,5 cm each, 2010.

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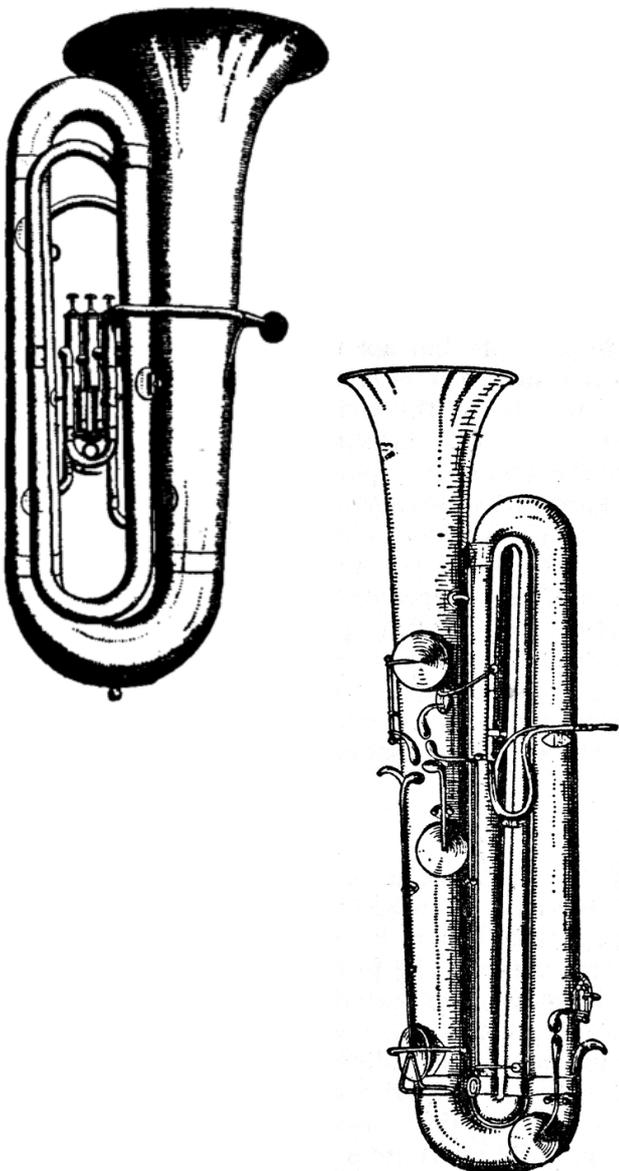
I asked four Italian partisans from the Second World War to choose a sentence each from Asimov's "Foundation Series", and to write them on a sheet of paper.



Ogni loro azione affatterà la decadenza
dell' universo.

In Thin Air (duo)

two-channel sound installation, 2010.



This installation comprises the most low-pitched sound emitted by the two most low-pitched wind instruments of the classical orchestra: the contrabassoon and the contrabass tuba. I asked two musicians to play the most low-pitched sound their instruments could emit, aiming at focusing on the limits of the orchestra, on the sounds closest to inaudibility.

Each sound source reproduces a low-pitched, dull and continuous sound, not immediately noticeable. These characteristics are similar to the ones of background noises produced in everyday life environments: fridges, heating and ventilation systems, motors.

The sound in *In thin air* presents a variable intensity: in a sinusoidal trend, it ranges from hardly perceivable (omitted by conscious perception because considered a background noise) to very loud (perceivable, readable).

This range (from maximum to minimum to maximum again) takes 12 minutes to be completed, and it repeats itself in loop. The perception of the space is completely different, depending on the point of the sound range when the viewer enters the space.

The work is both readable and non-readable, depending on the moment when it is experienced. It plays with the distinction between foreground and background: the piece configures itself as language, sign, message but also as 'white noise', ignorable and non-significant stimulus. The distinction is gradual: the work continuously covers the intensity range and oscillates between its two statuses: *figure* and *ground*.

Quello che non c'è

5 video pieces, 6'30", 2009.



Language prearranges strategies to refer to itself. It is capable of producing techniques in order to isolate the space of an enunciation, and to make a performance out of it – a performance that aims to reach a specific effect.

In *Quello che non c'è* (“What is not there”), five Italian jokes are deprived of their punch-lines. In telling jokes, the so-called ‘punch line’ is sort of a ‘flick of the tail’ of language, which flashes and illuminates the whole space of enunciation which comes before it.

By removing this ‘flick of the tail’, the primary aim of such enunciation is revoked. But the futility it acquires can open a space for sense, where the performative value of language becomes less easy to locate.

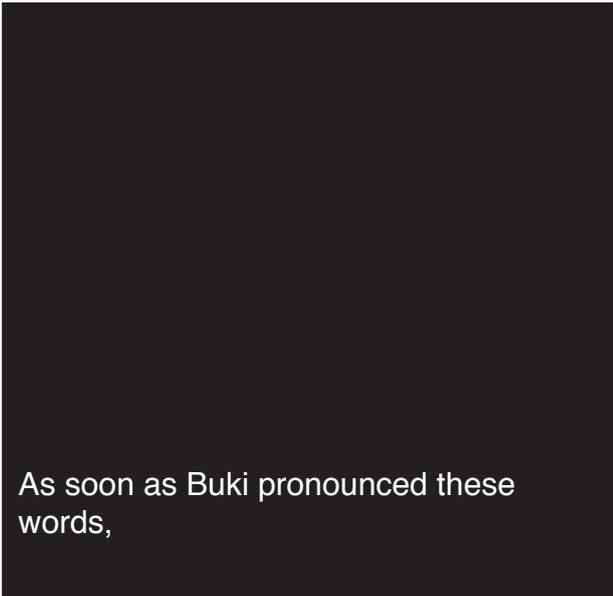
“The evidence: sense, games of sense, its abolition, its reappearance, are never anything other than *a matter of place*” (Roland Barthes).

The Talking Tree

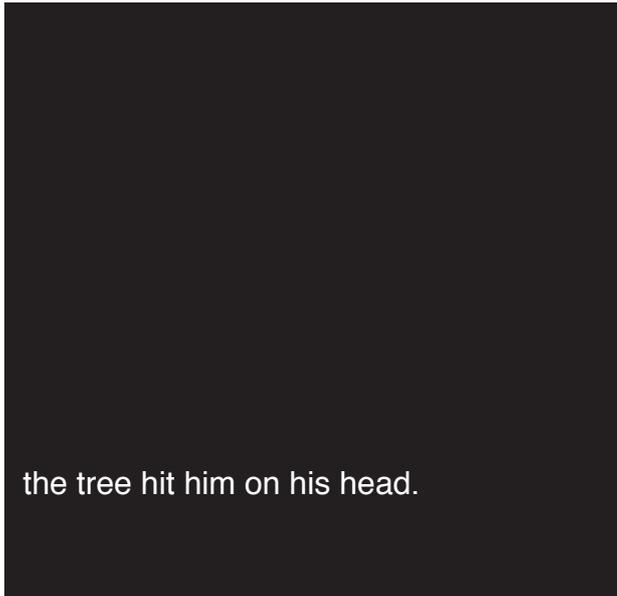
video, 3', 2009.

Abdullay Kadal Traore is a musician from Burkina Faso. He comes from a *griot* family (a *griot* is a repository of oral tradition from West Africa). Despite the fact that the official language of the country is French, in Burkina Faso there are around 66 spoken languages. The soundtrack of *The Talking Tree* is a recording of Abdullay speaking in Sambla, his mother tongue. He explains how, in his people's tradition, certain areas of language are only accessible during certain fixed social occasions, and how only a *griot* has the power to access such areas. But also for the *griots*, the power to tell certain stories or sing certain songs increases with the age. The stories told in such social events are strictly not translatable: only Sambla people can access them through their language.

In *The Talking Tree*, the screen is always black. Subtitles, although they seem to be a faithful translation to what Abdullay is saying, are not connected to his voice. Instead, they tell a traditional Sambla story for children. The story is about a talking tree, which kills everyone who pronounces certain forbidden words.



As soon as Buki pronounced these words,



the tree hit him on his head.

In Thin Air (church of Santa Caterina)

sound installation, 2009



“A now-famous anecdote tells of Cage visiting NASA’s soundproof room at Harvard University. Expecting absolute silence, he instead heard two sounds: one high and one low. The first, he was told, was his nervous system, the second his circulatory system. Even silence could not be silent.”

The organ of the small church of Santa Caterina, in Banna, was used as a machine instead of an instrument for sacred music. I blocked the lowest and the highest keys of the organ so that they would constantly produce a sound, being the organ electrically driven.

The result was a continuous background noise within the church, at first hardly assignable to the organ. The noise was composed by a low rumble and a high-pitched hiss, which were the two sound limits of the organ, the closest ones to human inaudibility.



La scena emisferica

video, 16', 2009
in collaboration with Daniele Zoico.



In 1992, athlete Frankie Fredericks became Namibia's first Olympic medalist when he finished second in both the 100m and 200m. For the 1996 Summer Olympics, Fredericks was among the title favourites for both the 100 m and 200 m. He reached both finals, and again finished second in both. In the 100m, he was beaten by Donovan Bailey, who set a new World Record, and in the 200m he was beaten by Michael Johnson, who also set a new World Record. At the time, Fredericks's second place run was the third fastest run in history, beaten only by Johnson.

Suffering from injuries, Fredericks had to withdraw from the 1999 and 2001 World Championships and the 2000 Summer Olympics. In the 200m final at the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, he finished 4th. He was 36. Although Fredericks is considered one of the top athletes of the end of the 20th century, he never managed to be Olympic champion.

La scena emisferica narrates the real story of Frankie Fredericks, interpolated with amateur images of a trip to Namibia made by an Italian tourist, establishing a balance between two unsatisfied endeavours.



They Gave Us the Land

video, 15', 2008.



They gave us the land takes place in Bristol, UK. The people featuring in the video are Spanish-speaking immigrants, living in Bristol only for a short period of time.

The text they read is a short story by Juan Rulfo, a Mexican writer. Originally written in Spanish, it is read by the Spanish-speaking immigrants in an English translation, without them hiding their accent.

The story, set in Mexico during the revolution, describes the journey a group of men take across an immense, barren plain. The plain has been given to them by the government but is wholly bereft of any quality that would make it good agricultural land.

The video features images shot in Bristol, as if trying to find a location in which to set a hypothetical visual transposition of the story.



My Grandmother Reads the Theses on the Concept of History by Walter Benjamin

video, 35', 2007.

*The true picture of the past flits by.
The past can be seized only as an
image which flashes up at the instant
when it can be recognized and is
never seen again.*

*For every image of the past that is
not recognized by the present as
one of its own concerns threatens to
disappear irretrievably.*

Walter Benjamin



My grandmother reads the 21 *Theses on the Concept of History*, a text in which Walter Benjamin discusses issues as the “moment of legibility”, the transmission of history, revolution and redemption.

My grandmother reads each thesis in a place that is (or has been) important for her life, or for her history.

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