DECAMERON

Emanuel Dimas de Melo Pimenta

dedicated to Giuseppe Morra
and Alberto del Genio

Il Vesuvio è un monte della Campania, non congiunto ad altro monte, abbondante in ogni parte di vigne e frutteti. Dal lato di Scirocco giace ai suoi piedi Pompei, e, quasi di Scirocco, Sarno, e, più lontana Benevento. Dal lato di Grecale giace Capua e da quello di Maestrale vi è Napoli dei Calcidensi, detta Partenope. Da mezzo questo, vicino la cima, usciva, con grandissima paura dei contadini, tanto fumo da ricoprire tutta la regione.

Giovanni Boccaccio

Decameron is a long musical concert and two films. But, in fact, it is much more than that.

As I have done for a long time, it is about a new concept that, in a certain sense, is based on Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* - often translated as "total work of art". The term was first used by the German philosopher Karl Friedrich Eusebius Trahndorff in 1827, was eventually developed by architect Gottfried Semper in 1834, and definitely adopted by Richard Wagner only in 1849.

That concept of "total work of art" is the essential foundation of Bayreuth.

The original idea, reinforced by Wagner, was that all artistic expressions had been linked in antiquity. Then, they worked simultaneously. Music, poetry, dance, theater - everything was connected in the universe of classical antiquity. But at a given moment, still in ancient Greece, during the so-called Greek Miracle, they were separated.

Wagner considered that such separation indicated a kind of civilizational degeneration.

In some way, the concept of the German movement known as *Gesamtkustwerk*, initiated by Trahndorff, developed by Semper and launched

by Wagner, anticipated and foreshadowed the changes that would happen with the electronic world about a hundred years later.

The departmentalization produced by literary culture would give rise to Niels Bohr's quantum universe - for which the old Aristotelian principle of the *excluded third* would no longer make absolute sense. That is, the principle of separation in departments would lead to systemic integration.

"With the Greeks the perfect work of art, the Drama, was the abstract and epitome of all that was expressible in the Grecian nature. It was the nation itself - in intimate connection with its own history - that stood mirrored in its artwork, that communed with itself and, within the span of a few hours, feasted its eyes with its own noblest essence. All division of this enjoyment, all scattering of the forces concentred on one point, all diversion of the elements into separate channels, have been hurtful to this unique and noble Artwork as to the like-formed State itself; and thus it could only mature, but never change its nature", said Wagner in his long essay *Die Kunst un die Revolution*.

Wagner sought a kind of new Italian Renaissance, something like the recovery and conservation of the past through the revival of the ancient Greek traditions. Another tiger's leap into the past, as an expression of the future with the essence of what he believed were the true and essential roots of the present.

Much has been done around the aspiration of a "total work of art" over the last century, although in most cases without acknowledging the deeply conservative character of Wagner's ideas about it.

The integration of different systems is typical in oral cultures, and what Wagner lamented was exactly his own cultural base: the literature, which replaced in ancient Greece an acoustic reality for the interior space of the literary universe - in terms of technology, of structure of thought.

Although Wagner may have represented, in his escape to the past in search of the future, an anticipation of about one hundred years to what would be the electronic reality, it is different of the acoustic one - even if they may share some similarities at a logical level.

If before the Greek Miracle the work was total, fusing dance, music, poetry and painting, electronic reality has set new parameters: to be and not to be of the quantum universe. In other words, it is no longer a "fusion", but to be and not to be - simultaneously.

After Wagner, of Bayreuth, and especially throughout the twentieth century, we have been witnessed a transformation of the "spectacle", where all the elements of its construction passed to be oriented to a *single* point, as advocated Wagner, to create a total work. Thus, lighting in cinema, the photography, editing, direction, clothing, scenarios, all serve to the text, the

script, or - in different words - to the author. The same started happening in the theater or whatever the "spectacle", including television and even, in some sense, the radio.

But it would be in the theater that the conceptual essence of which is the electronic world would emerge, with the genius Antonin Artaud. In his classic book *Le Théâtre et son Double*, published in 1938, Artaud would release not only the concept of *Virtual Reality* as well as the principle of independence of the arts, followed by John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Robert Rauschenberg, and myself among others.

The idea of independence of the arts would be fundamental for the definition of a new concept of total work of art, different from what was advocated by Wagner.

I have called this new concept - over many years - *virtual* - taking its Latin root *virtus*, that means potentiality.

However this new idea is bundled in the virtual universe, it certainly calls for a special name, which could be inspired by the concept of *autopoiesis*, coined by Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana.

The word *autopoiesis* was developed from the fusion of the Greek terms *auto*, meaning "self" and *poièsis*, which indicates the ideas of creation and of production. Literally, *autopoiesis* means self-creation. But the concept of Varela and Maturana implies much more.

It indicates the idea of *emergence*, of the permanent recreation of what exists through a network of independent elements, but whose independence can only happen with a continuous interdependence - such as the concept of a membrane.

Thus we have an *autopoietic* work of art.

That is, imagine a work of art that is total but that its parts are simultaneously independent, each part being an integral work. Not only, imagine a work of art, like a piece of music, an architectural design, or anything else. A work that can also be a treatise on philosophy, a photographic study, a scientific reflection, a movie or a book. And that these parts can be made by one person or by many. However, all parts taking a common idea, or a universe of ideas, as reference.

This is not about someone doing things in different specialties, like a kind of dilettantism. Neither ideas illustrating other ones, as it is so characteristic in interdisciplinarity.

Each field is complete and independent, but also - paradoxically and simultaneously - interdependent.

This concept reveals also a new idea of infinity.

Under the sign of the *virtual,* this new idea of infinity appears - no longer the unattainable distant, but what doesn't end in itself.

When we are networked, as when we use Internet, the exterior space is inside us. But it is different from the interiority produced by literature. Now, it is a paradoxical interiority, an interior paradoxically exterior and superficial.

In this new concept of autopoietic work of art, an architectural design can be both a musical work, a poem, a scientific work, a work of art criticism, a play in theater, a movie or a work of art.

Similarly, an art exhibition can be at the same time a place of study, a reflection, a work of analysis, history, music, installation and even, in itself, a work of art.

Different virtual dimensions reveal the many faces of each one of us, like an *ikebana* observer will continuously revealing the various possible combinations in the floral arrangement, which will always be rediscovered in a dynamic process without obligatory end or conclusion.

The sense of ubiquity emerges here keeping in mind the idea of place in the virtual world. In other words: no longer is about something or someone that is present in different places, in the strict physical sense, but a work that is present in several others, in time and space.

When Boccaccio wrote *Decameron*, in 1351, Europe already produced paper for over three hundred years, the production of books grew and less than a century later Gutenberg would emerge with his revolutionary press of metallic movable types.

Boccaccio shows, in the logical structure of his work, the world that lives the beginning of the literary revolution revealed by the Italian Renaissance - and that would change the world in the following centuries.

Thus the work of Boccaccio is made up of stories and inaugurates the so-called literary realism that finds in Giotto - died in 1337, only fourteen years before the appearance of *Decameron* - his pictorial expression par excellence.

Boccaccio was twenty-four years old and lived in Naples when Giotto died. He would return to Florence only in 1341, after being in Naples for sixteen years.

Naples was - as it has been over the centuries and as, in many ways, it still is in our days - one of the world centers of art and culture. It is a mysterious, enigmatic and paradoxical city, where - sometimes in unexpected ways - some of the most important artists, scientists and thinkers emerge.

Decameron is a collection of one hundred stories, told by ten personages - seven women and three men. It is the technology of history

what designs Boccaccio's work: the predicative chaining of information causally articulated, in a closed system where all elements are established on a common logical structure - like what happens with the technique of *flat perspective*.

When I started working on *Decameron*, I was especially attentive to the paradox of what we call *interior* and *exterior*, to the principle of the emergence, to the question of the membrane.

Giuseppe Morra had made some indications related to the work of John Cage, Marcel Duchamp and Allan Kaprow.

In 2004, Lucrezia De Domizio, Baroness Durini - a kind friend with whom I've made many works in diverse countries - introduced me Giuseppe Morra and Alberto del Genio. Since them, specially with Alberto del Genio, an important physician and art collector, I've developed several projects.

Surrealism was important for both Duchamp and Cage. It is not about an strictly pictorial surrealism, but yes about what turns magical what we call "reality".

To exist, any life necessarily implies a membrane.

There is no life without membrane. In the same way as there is no perception without difference. Only difference produces consciousness. But, like the membrane, this difference is paradoxical. Similarly, there is only identity in diversity.

A membrane - like that of a cell, for example - both isolates the interior of the exterior and unites them. If a cell, or a body, would have an absolutely closed membrane, simply it would be no life. To this condition of such simultaneous separation and integration between inside and outside, Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana called *autopoiesis*: each body continually recreating itself, simultaneously being a closed and an open system.

This paradoxical concept of interior and exterior was crucial in surrealism.

In 1934, during a conference entitled *Qu'est-ce Que le Surrealisme?*, in Brussels, André Breton said: "At the limits, for many years past - or more exactly, since the conclusion of what one may term the purely intuitive epoch of surrealism (1919-25) - at the limits, I say, we have attempted to present interior reality and exterior reality as two elements in process of unification, or finally becoming one. This final unification is the supreme aim of surrealism: interior reality and exterior reality being, in the present form of society, in contradiction (and in this contradiction we see the very cause of man's unhappiness, but also the source of his movement), we have assigned to ourselves the task of confronting these two realities with one another on

every possible occasion, of refusing to allow the preeminence of the one over the other, yet not of acting on the one and on the other both at once, for that would be to suppose that they are less apart from one another than they are (and I believe that those who pretend that they are acting on both simultaneously are either deceiving us or are a prey to a disquieting illusion); of acting on these two realities not both at once, then, but one after the other, in a systematic manner, allowing us to observe their reciprocal attraction and interpenetration and to give to this interplay of forces all the extension necessary for the trend of these two adjoining realities to become one and the same thing".

Four years later, Artaud wrote *Le Théâtre et son Double*.

Thus, I thought on the exterior and interior spaces of Casa Morra - Contemporary Art Archives, in Naples, Italy - while spaces that feed themselves, being independent.

The world described by Boccaccio is silently populated by the Black Death. Even without speaking on it, it is always present. It was a reality that lived the fear of extinction - not to say that this fear was born in the twentieth century. One never knew when the plague would devour all.

And it was, as if forming a new paradox, a world that started diving into what we would come to call the modern period.

Exactly seven hundred years ago it was the beginning the Great Famine; a few decades later movable types press would arise.

It was a world that lived at the same time, *eros* and *thanatos*!

The universe of the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first is also a time of metamorphosis. Boccaccio's epoch was the end of the Middle Ages. Today we live in the beginning of a new medieval period, in different colors.

We experienced the first bitter flavors of extinction of the modern period with the emergence of chemical weapons - with the gas bombs in the First World War. Later, we lived the horror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, followed almost immediately by the invasion of plastic, revealing an extinction of soft and colorful appearance.

But the beginning of the 21st century has its Great Plague in the tyranny of greed and the daily presence of the Sixth Extinction.

In such brutal, planetary scale, raised to the power of networks, sex lost the private dimension that had been designed by literary culture. Story passed, in large measure, to be told by audio-visual systems and the old moral, so present in Boccaccio's world, quickly volatilized.

Decameron at Casa Morra - Contemporary Art Archives happens simultaneously inside and outside the building, independent and interdependent, like the lives of a cell, like what we are.

The musical composition has two movements, which can be listened simultaneously or separately.

The first movement takes place outside the building, and is made of three sound elements.

The first two of these elements are the sounds of the human nervous system and of the digestive system. We have a big quantity of bacteria in our digestive system that is responsible for the production of the largest amount of our neurotransmitters. The third element are sounds of grasshoppers.

My book *The Grasshopper Man* shows how the genetic similarity we share with those insects have drawn much of our cultural journey over many thousands of years.

Here, there is a game between the interior world of our bodies and the exterior sounds of insects, between the production of neurotransmitters and our genetic link with grasshoppers.

They are three structural elements at the musical level.

The musical score is entirely made inside Virtual Reality, as I have made since the late 1970s.

The second movement of the musical concert *Decameron* happens inside the building.

Then, this interior movement is made with references, sometimes subliminal, to four Western composers: Richard Wagner (1813-1883), Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893), Edvard Grieg (1843-1907) and Gustav Mahler (1860-1911). Four composers born in different countries (Germany, Russia, Norway and Austria) and who lived in the same historical period, and that are especially representative of the Romantic movement of the nineteenth century.

If Boccaccio lived in an era of transformation, the Romantic period prepared all transformations of the twentieth century.

Isaiah Berlin said: "Romanticism embodied a new and restless spirit, seeking violently to burst through old and cramping forms, a nervous preoccupation with perpetually changing inner states of consciousness, a longing for the unbounded and the indefinable, for perpetual movement and change, an effort to return to the forgotten sources of life, a passionate effort at self-assertion both individual and collective, a search after means of

expressing an unappeasable yearning for unattainable goals".

But if the structure of this musical movement, inside the building, is built with harmonic and subliminal references to those four composers, it has another face: the sounds of grasshoppers performed by the audience!

Thus, available for free download on Internet, we have three sets of sounds of grasshoppers, three voices. Anyone can freely make any of these sounds on his or her personal cell phone and can, in this way, participate in the concert-installation.

The movement of people with sounds of grasshoppers is a counterpoint to the second movement of the musical composition, establishing once again a relation between interior and exterior, a new dimension of "membrane".

In this way, we have the musical concert *Decameron* in two large movements. In the first one, we have three voices. In the second movement, four voices. In both movements we have seven voices, as seven were the female characters of Boccaccio. The three voices present in cell phones - that can enter or leave the building - form the ten characters of Boccaccio.

The literary work tells one hundred stories, which are full of moments related to the sexual universe and to moral issues. In music, we have two movements, fifty minutes each, totaling one hundred minutes. But each movement has forty minutes of sound and ten minutes of silence - as a reference to John Cage.

In those ten minutes of silence, music is the environment, the musical discourse is the people.

While the music at the exterior of the building operates sounds of the twenty-first century, the music of the interior has strong references to the nineteenth century - with the intervention of cell phones, which are elements of the twenty-first century.

The same structural principle is applied to the movies.

One of the them is projected outside the building, and the other one inside of it. In fact, they are - like the musical composition - two movements of a same project.

What is inside or outside of us.

If the music outside is made with sound elements inside our body and the music performed inside the building is entirely elaborated with elements of *ready made* music, with compositions that bind us while culture, the movies work as a kind of mirror of such process, forming a kind of labyrinth of images.

Thus, the movie in the exterior is built with images of one hundred films, one hundred stories, whose main characters - those who tell us the stories - are seven women and three men, as determined by Boccaccio.

They are all characters who lived the same historical period, the twentieth century. The women are Anna Magnani (1908-1973), Audrey Hepburn (1929-1993), Grace Kelly (1929-1982), Ingrid Bergman (1915-1982), Katharine Hepburn (1907-2003), Marilyn Monroe (1926-1962) Marlene Dietrich (1901-1992) and Romy Schneider (1938-1982). The men are Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980), Fritz Lang (1890-1976) and Humphrey Bogart (1899-1957).

They are from seven countries - based on the nationality of each character, and having in mind Grace Kelly as Monegasque. Thus we have: Italy, England, United States,, Sweden, Monaco, Germany and Austria.

The hundred stories mark the cinema of the twentieth century, which had a remarkable role in shaping the collective imagination, similar to that exercised by the book at the time of Boccaccio. And, in the same way that happened with the book in the Renaissance, the cinema of the twentieth century anticipated the planetary metamorphosis of audiovisual networks of the twenty-first century.

But under these hundred stories we have the presence of the image of planet Earth in the twenty-first century. And with the image of Earth, also terrible amounts of grasshoppers.

Stories, the planet and the devourers insects: three key elements.

Ancient Greeks had three different concepts to the idea of time: *aion*, *kairos* and *chronos*.

Aion indicated the relation of quality, such as when we have a sensation of the present, or when - as the Brazilian poet Vinicius de Moraes said - something is "eternal while it lasts". In fact, Vinicius de Moares wrote about love: "Let it not be immortal, since it is flame. But let it be infinite while it lasts".

Kairos gives us the feeling of a historic, involving time - like when we refer to Ancient Rome, to Julius Caesar's time or to the Italian Renaissance - or if we look at Earth, from the outer space, and consider a moment, without specific duration.

Chronos, in its turn, coined our concept of chronology, which means "one thing after another".

The three classical ideas of time - *aion*, *kairos* and *chronos* - are a strong reference to the structure of the *Theory of Signs* of Charles Sanders Peirce.

Peirce, genius mathematician and American philosopher who lived between 1839 and 1914, created a method for understanding the formation of thought, to which he called *Semiotics* - that is totally different and far more comprehensive than Ferdinand de Saussure's *Semiology*.

In few words, for Peirce, a sign is made up of three basic logical categories, of different natures, occurring simultaneously - thus anticipating the logical structure revealed by the quantum universe of Max Planck and Niels Bohr.

To these three categories Peirce simply called *firstness*, *secondness* and *thirdness* - respectively, quality, index and symbol.

While *aion* is pure quality, *chronos* is of an indexical nature and *kairos* implies reason, inference.

The three logical categories of Peirce are always present in the sign, which means a logical approach that is strange to the Aristotelian principle of the *excluded middle*.

Like what happens to the music, the movies clearly operate these signical categories.

The hundred stories and planet Earth, movies and music, constantly involve us in the three times of Ancient Greece as well as clearly operate the three categories of Peirce.

The movie of the interior of the building is terribly puzzling. Inside, in our thoughts and in our bodies, the dramatic scenes of killings with drones, erotic images of the early twentieth century, swarms of grasshoppers devouring everything in their wake and, again, planet Earth.

Among the movie outside and that inside, the element of unity are the insects.

Both movies sum seven structural elements.

On the walls of the Casa Morra, two large drawings on paper are fixed. They are the virtual scores of the musical concert and movies.

The scores are entirely elaborated in three dimensions inside Virtual Reality. In the same way the old conventional musical written on pentagram established in the alphabetic writing its reference par excellence, impregnating the musical discourse with a strongly hierarchical logical structure, the creation of an environment with a totally different logical structure, where even fourth dimension - the time - can be operated, changes the logic basis of the musical discourse.

Then, an "aerial view" of the music score, fusing sound and visual, is

drawn on the two-dimensional surface of the paper. In fact, there are two large drawings, on which people are free to make their notes, thoughts, observations - because it is about a historic moment.

Each trace left on the large drawings implies not only the inclusion of a "personal history" as well as a kind of history of our historical moment, at the levels of the city, the country and the world.

On the drawings, made in black lines, I make interventions in three colors: red, gold and black - because they were the basic colors in prehistory, and now we are going to a post-history, produced by the vast amount of accumulated information worldwide.

With pencil - which is graphite, stone, temporal interconnector - I write with my writing - *calligraphy,* word that appears from the fusion of the ancient Indo-European particles **kal* and **gerbh* respectively indicating the ideas of *beauty* and *scratching.* I write two lines of text, determining three fields on the paper. The position of the rows of letters is determined by chance operations.

Each phrase is taken from one of seven books: Dante Alighieri, William Shakespeare, Jorge Luis Borges, Luis Vaz de Camões, Fernando Pessoa and Gustave Flaubert.

This operation on the drawings of virtual scores of my compositions has always been present in my work over many years.

Thus, music and movies are a process of dialogue. It is about a concert, an installation, movies, music.

But there are other components of *Decameron*.

The essential issue of Boccaccio is the story. Story as thought technology. Under the story we inevitably have a long-term memory accumulator.

Although the story is a technology of informational organization which is articulated in predicative and diachronic terms, it could never exist without some informational accumulator.

Over thousands of years we lived a metamorphosis, from the stone to the clay, from papyrus to parchment and to paper as informational accumulators.

The stone is the time interconnector par excellence, while paper is an excellent space interconnector. When the medium of informational storage was predominantly stone, spatial mobility was relatively small, and temporal projection was more intense.

The Sumerian tablets established an intermediate standard between

time and space. The emergence of papyrus - and more especially in association with phonetic alphabet - made possible the sense of spatial unity in large territorial areas. This was essential for the Roman Empire.

When Alexandria - then the largest papyrus supplier - disintegrates, we rapidly penetrated in the so-called medieval period.

Boccaccio's work implies, in addition to the simple reading, the literary dive - a technological novelty hitherto usually reserved for the monastic thinkers.

Such cognitive diving involves free time.

Through the techniques of permanent reproduction, phonetic alphabet and paper produce a temporal interconnection which until then was characteristic of stone, and also a strong spatial expansion. Because of this, the world became, for the first time, a global village with the Portuguese discoveries in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

But the emergence of electronic reality in the second half of the twentieth century designed the real-time: the no-time, the eternal present.

Aion surprises and eludes both *chronos* and *kairos*.

Decameron is, in its essence, reading, discovery and time.

In this way, as part of this complex universe around Boccaccio, I made a photo essay in the quarries of the Portuguese town of Borba, near the border with Spain.

Interestingly, the city of Borba has an old musical connection with Italy.

They are only ten photos, as there are ten the main characters of Boccaccio. But they are the fusion of one hundred images, many present with great subtlety, and the inclusion of references to the European erotic painting of the seventeenth century. But a long period of observation is required to find out these references.

Ten photos that require a long time of observation, like something like *yantras*, reflecting, in some sense, the temporal interconnector role exerted by stone.

This photo essay is also *Decameron*.

In addition to these elements, and this text, there is a long solo flute elaborated from statistical data took from the second movement - the one performed inside the building.

Thus, the electronic music is transformed into acoustic music; the virtual score made inside Virtual Reality becomes a conventional score; the

electronics is metamorphosed into organic, into breath.

Another face of Decameron is the poem. On September 21, 2016, I took the first pages of hundred newspapers in ten countries: Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Portugal, Spain, Germany, France, the United States, Switzerland and Italy. Sixty-seven of these newspapers are Italian. Again, a reference to the seven female characters and the three men in Boccaccio.

The sum of the numbers of the date of September 21, 2016 is 21.

2 + 1 + 9 + 2 + 0 + 1 + 6 = 21. 21 x 7 = 3.

Seven women and three men.

On each printed page of the newspapers I threw dices, which determined ten words.

Boccaccio's epoch anticipates in short time that of Brunelleschi. If Boccaccio is sixty-four years older than Brunelleschi, he is forty-seven years younger than Giotto.

So Boccaccio is at the center of flat perspective universe.

Thus, I imagined a virtual cube. Again using dices, I determined the position of the words on the paper and its depth - depending on the value determined by the dices - inside the cube. Depending on the position of the word inside the cube, the word is smaller or bigger.

After that, the printing shows words of different sizes spread out on two-dimensional surfaces.

They are one hundred newspapers, one hundred pages of the poem, one hundred stories in one thousand words, ten per page.

Unlike the structure established by Boccaccio, linear and strongly hypotactic, which represented a revolution of language in his time, now the words are distributed on a plane, like - in some sense - what had happened in cuneiform tablets and later in *carmina figurata*.

So, there are a concert in two large movements, two movies, two large graphic music scores, a photo essay, a long poem and a piece for solo flute - ten elements, ten stories, independent and interdependent.

All these elements are *Decameron* - all them are, simultaneously, a trip to what is under Boccaccio's dreams.

Emanuel Dimas de Melo Pimenta

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