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PHOTOVOICES

Sociological Visions





The
diagonales

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What the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: The Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially.

(Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida, 1980)

He went back to his solitary wanderings. Believing any set of four walls to be a tomb or a trap, he preferred to float over the most barren of open spaces.

(Bruce Chatwin, The Viceroy of Oiudah, 1980)

With a slightly visual touch (by way of Introduction)

by Cleto Corposanto



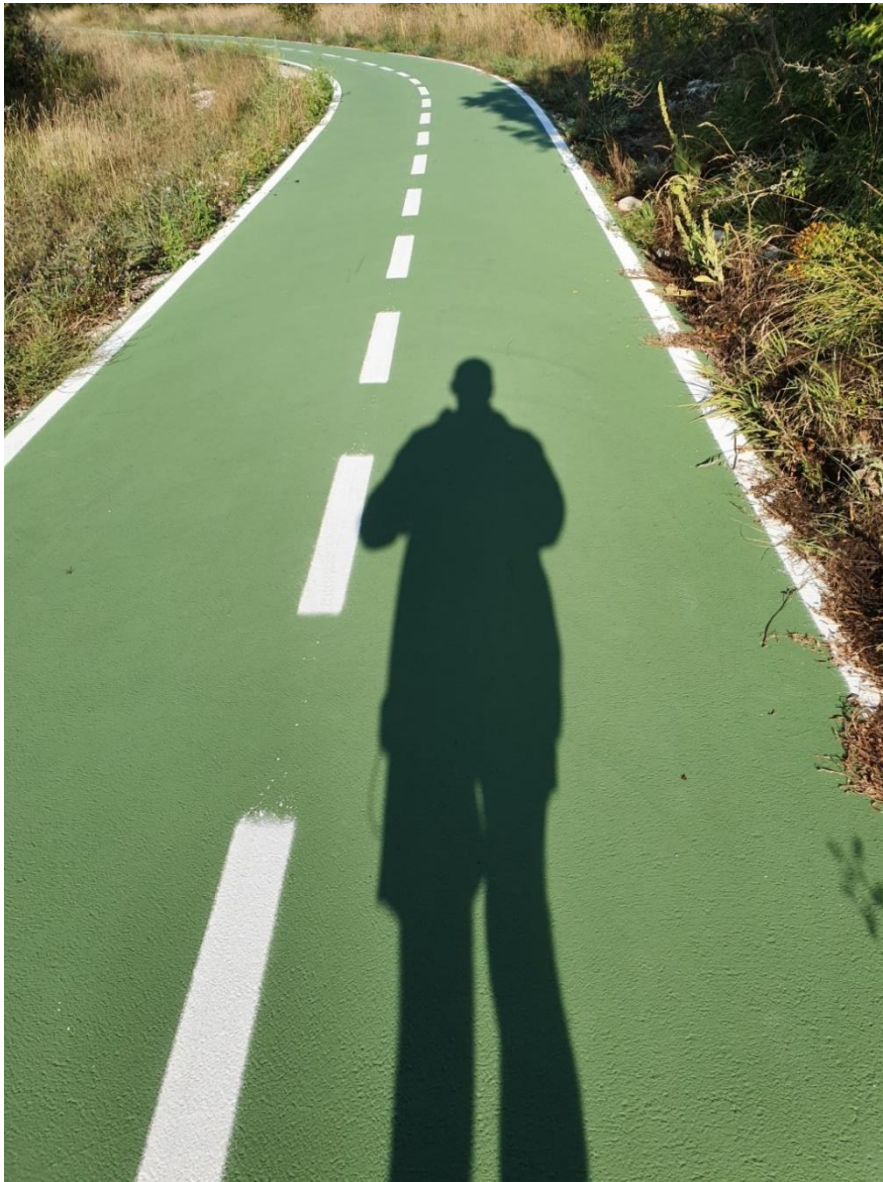
I consider myself lucky. I have always had the good fortune to be able to travel, from an early age, on vacation with my parents before; then thanks to my work, which has taken me to every corner of the earth for research activities, conventions and academic conferences. In short, traveling is in my normal nature of things. I have often travelled alone, and other times I have done it with others, depending on the situations and motivations. From my travels, beyond the official reasons, I have always tried to bring home feelings about different cultures, habits and people I had the pleasure of meeting. Recently, I had toyed with the idea of translating some sociologically determined reflections gained while traveling using a tool that is closely related to travel: photos. Thus was born some time ago the idea of producing a series of “talking photos”: of course, it is often thought that the photos should speak for themselves, they do not need comment. But here we are also talking about a use of the photo as a sociologically determined image; therefore, not the perfect shot of the click professional but an image that, in some way, interacts with the continuous growth process that characterizes our life as researchers. From an idea of this type, a column on *the Diagonales* online platform is born, called *Photovoices*, and precisely returns this possibility of a photo with a long caption, as I like to think of this type of writing.

That first experience had the great merit of bringing to light a very great potential in this type of particular visual-sociological research. I therefore discovered that some of the important concepts of our discipline could be interpreted by an image taken perhaps also with other purposes, as if some things emerged in some way from simple daily gestures taken with the camera – often the mobile phone – or from harmless urban landscapes. The initial project started with Umberto Pagano, friend and colleague, who is also an enthusiastic traveller and a curious observer of the reality that surrounds us: with him, among other things, I have made some trips in recent years which you will find traces in the following pages. Continuing that experience was therefore quite natural. To the point of creating these pages which, I hope, can awaken interest in knowledge and culture in you too, ultimately the ultimate goals of our work.

PS: Many of the things written in this book were born on that very useful sea view terrace during the lockdown period. It deserved a photo, for sure.

Picture # 0 (...where you usually expect Introduction)

by Umberto Pagano



I am lucky to do a job which legitimizes me to curiosity, to doubt, to ask myself the reason for things, to be wary of ready-made and convenient answers, not to look for those with a capital “A” but to work, more than anything else, to look for those minimal, temporary, “small but good” (to paraphrase Raymond Carver). Being a sociologist means above all trying to understand how societies work and how they change over time. An essential part of our work has to be done “in the field”. It is an advantage, from my point of view. Because any occasion can (and should) become a reason for observation, reflection, questioning. It is true that this also involves the other side of the coin, the one for which our work, actually, never really ends, being fatally intertwined with the rest of our life, in a more intimate and profound way than many others works.

The journey, regardless of its concrete purposes, has always been for me a moment a combination of urge and enchantment, disenchantment and discovery. This is why this book is the result of an intertwining of travel experiences and sociological observation, through images that are somehow emblematic, evocative, “demonstrative” of a phenomenon, of a culture, of a time ...

This is not a collection of “beautiful” photos according to the prevailing aesthetic canons (some of them may be but this is incidental). You may also find some of them technically unsuccessful: blurry, skewed, grainy, underexposed... It doesn’t matter, that’s not the point. There are images that “speak” on their own, which need no caption, no comment, no explanation. What you will find are not even photos of this type ... otherwise the book would have had no texts! Instead, these are scenes that ignited in me, the moment they were experienced and fixed in a shot, a spark, a light on a shred of “sociological discourse”. Sometimes, however, the meaning and the discourse emerged in retrospect, finding and looking at these photos even many years later. I have experienced that, sometimes, even photos, like good wine, need to be decanted to “mean”.

It may seem strange then, but this is properly a Sociology text. You won’t find “*Grand Theories*” (Do they exist anymore? Do they still have legitimacy in this world?) but a small, passionate collection of visual sociology notes. Or at least, I hope so.

P.S. The one in the picture is my shadow.

So many dreams...

by Cleto Corposanto



How many dreams, how much desire to grow ... At the turn of the 70s and 80s, Italian Sociology had elected the University of Colchester as the site to train its young scholars. It was worth remembering that it was in full reinforcement of a quantitative approach to social facts which, since then, would have made fortunes (and misfortunes) in the discipline. But in short, you had to go to Essex. I went there too, of course; in Trento I already had a research grant but Essex's appeal was formidable. In the meantime, it must be said that a Milan-London event was my baptism of air in 1978. There was a scheduled flight from *Milan Linate* to *London Gatwick*, but there were other possibilities.

Traveling by plane was still considered a luxury for the few. Fortunately, there were low cost prices even then: to save money, you went from Trento to Milan by train, then by bus from the central station to *Porta Garibaldi* because the bus that then connected Milan to *Malpensa* departed from there. Then the flight, with *Monarch Airlines*, to *Luton*, train from *Luton* to *Victoria Station*, subway to *Liverpool Street Station*, train to Colchester and finally a bus to the campus. A long journey, in short. It took the same time as it takes to go to Bangkok today, practically ...

And then you were finally there, in the temple. Immersed in a campus that who came from universities deeply rooted in the urban fabric of our cities, had never seen. It was there that we all returned students (even if the "lucky ones" were already doing exercises and exams in their Faculties in Italy, and some were even already in charge), full-time students with a whole day full of courses and seminars and a few hours free.

We probably took this photo on a weekend, when classes were suspended; we spent afternoons on the grass discussing about Sociology and the future, when we didn't feel nostalgic for the sea and then we would go to Clacton on the sea ...

And in the evening, it was a cooking festival: in the towers where there were the apartments for us students, there was a flourishing of dinners between different groups, in that university spirit that anyone who has been an off-site knows well. Sometimes it was decided to go out to dinner in the city. Colchester was not far from campus, and since the lira/pound exchange rate was not very favourable to us, we often ended up eating at the cheap Chinese restaurant, where it was still better to announce our arrival with a phone call.

At the time of the call, Giovanni always came forward and volunteered. He called the Chinese restaurant and announced the arrival of a number of people ... and when the time came to communicate the name he started with his very fast spelling: *Ei-en-ei-en-ai-ei*. Unforgettable. Giovanni Anania is in the centre of the photo, with a serious look and head resting on his fist.

A doc from Catanzaro who had elected Cosenza as his home of studies. And at *Unical* he then made his entire academic career as a full professor of Agricultural Economics with vast international relations. We resented the phone a couple of times, especially when I in turn chose Calabria to teach. Then, five years ago, Giovanni left. Suddenly. The memory of an exquisite, cultured and highly educated person remains alive in me.

Wabi-sabi

by Umberto Pagano



I don't like being photographed. Perhaps, for some arcane reason, I inherited the belief that was of various cultures – and in some of them, surprisingly, still exists – that photography is a sort of spell, of magic, through which the soul of the one who's portrayed in the picture gets stolen. Or, more trivially and likely, I just don't like my image and I have never been able to accept it completely. But this is a very little interesting speech.

I never knew the person portrayed in the photo, I never talked to him, I don't know who he is. Yet, in some ways, for thirteen years I have felt him *close*.

I "stole" this photo (and I swear I also felt guilty about it, I ... who don't want to be pictured). I took it in a modest inn near the Tokyo fish market. It was 7.30 in the morning of a sultry September in 2007. I went out at dawn to browse the huge and fascinating *Tsukiji*, the fish market (at the time the largest in the world) where 65,000 people worked and where the picturesque tuna auctions were held. Around 7.00 am, most of the negotiations were already over and the market workers poured out, tired and hungry, in the dozens of small restaurants inside and outside *Tsukiji*. And so did I.

Lost in my steaming *misoshiro*, I had placed my *Nikon* on the table. At a certain moment, I noticed him, he was on my right, motionless, with his gaze fixed, flooded by the morning light. His gaze expressed something deep and powerful. Cautiously I turned on the *Nikon*, without moving it of an inch, and snapped.

Since then this image has accompanied me. Sometimes I don't watch it for many months but I think about it often. I don't know if and how much soul there is inside this picture. But for me it represents the soul of Japan, of *my* Japan, of course.

In Japanese culture the concept of *wabi-sabi* assumes a great importance. Like all words meaning deeply connoting and specific aspects of a culture, it is practically untranslatable. *Wabi* refers to the idea of rustic simplicity but also of sobriety, discretion, silence.

Sabi is the beauty or serenity that accompanies advancing age, when time, with its inexorable "patina", marks the appearance of things.

And both terms contain a nuance of desolation, of solitude and melancholy but at the same time of sad and imperfect beauty, of poignant and introverted tenderness.

Here I'm... pathetically trying to express in words what every Japanese "knows" and cannot express in words.

This photo, for me, is *wabi-sabi*. That's it!

Those clouds over Hong Kong

by Cleto Corposanto



Hong Kong is one of the watersheds in the world. It is one of those places that evoke crucial junctions in human history. Or that evoke images of tangent worlds, like the *Cape of Good Hope*, part of many stories about the great voyages on the sea. Initially referred to a small inlet on the island, the name Hong Kong represents – like most names of Chinese origin – an approximate phonetic representation of “香港”, *Hakka*, which means *Perfumed Port*. It is possible that the name derives from the incense factories in the area. Over time, starting in 1842, the name Hong Kong first became that of the entire island; and then slowly – in a time span from 1860 to 1898 – incorporating first the Kowloon peninsula and then that of the territories facing the mainland.

Hong Kong became a British colony immediately after the so-called *First Opium War* (1839-1842); a period of long independence from China ended in July 1997, when after 156 years of British colonialism, Hong Kong's sovereignty was transferred from the United Kingdom to the People's Republic of China, effectively becoming China's first special administrative region.

Since then, Hong Kong has had to deal with many problems: immediately after moving to China, it first suffered the serious crisis of the Asian financial markets and then the very serious H5N1 bird flu epidemic. A few years later, in 2003, it was the infamous SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) that hit the population of Hong Kong.

I took this photo from the top of the *Peak*, one of the most beautiful observation points in Hong Kong, towards the end of 2018. The city appears in all its extraordinary beauty, suggesting the world record of the presence of skyscrapers, which are beyond 1300. The particular orography and lack of space made Hong Kong the most vertical city in the world. I was not very lucky: that day, as you can see, the sky was overcast but not to the point of depriving me of one of the most beautiful views in the world. Here, these dark clouds over Hong Kong for me today symbolically represent the difficult and unclear situation that the former British colony is experiencing. A new round of protests began last year to “keep their distance” from a country that is becoming increasingly present in the delicate balances of Hong Kong. A series of very vehement protests, which saw an impressive number of people take to the streets.

It is worth mentioning that 95% of Hong Kong's population is of Chinese origin. And yet, those over 150 years of European culture have perhaps definitely marked their sense of belonging.

The colour of the cities

by Umberto Pagano



Cities are full-colour or black and white. It is a condition that has little to do with real colours of things but rather with their “soul”.

By my nature and aesthetic orientation, with some exceptions, I am more attracted to black and white cities. And not surprisingly, the clearest pictures in my mind are black and white.

Bangkok is a colour city. San Francisco, Rangoon, Mexico City are colour. Instead, Berlin, Paris, Prague (at least the one before the devastating *disneyfication*, begun back in the Nineties) are certainly black and white. Others are chromatically more indecipherable, I cannot classify them clearly. Some of ‘em form a separate category: those that change colour according to seasons and moments; among these I put, for example, New York and Naples (my city). In some ways, these are the most interesting, because their black and white moments are sort of “coloured”: they have a particular and specific intensity. But here we go into a field that is difficult to walk with words ... There are also colourless, neutral cities, greyish inside. But let’s forget about those!

London is undoubtedly a black and white city.

I took this photo recently, from behind the window of the Tate Modern cafeteria on the top floor.

London is a city where it is easy to feel comfortable. Because diversity is the rule: it is total, profound, widespread and, because of this, irrelevant. People manage cultural diversity with great naturalness, as a completely normal element, on which there is no need to linger. One thing I envy of London is that in almost all museums, admission is completely free (and we are talking about “temples of culture”, such as *The National Gallery*, *British Museum* or *Natural History Museum* ...). I find it a sign of civilization and foresight in the policies, from which our country is very, terribly, far away.

And then you can enter the stunning *Tate Modern* without paying a penny, wandering around the huge rooms and then maybe you go up and sit behind the large window of the cafeteria to rest for a while, watching the Thames flow grey and indolent, and perhaps you take a picture... In black and white, of course.

You are now entering Zambia

by Cleto Corposanto



Border posts have always fascinated me, places where contamination is more marked, diversity coexist in a balance that is not always easy, things are always a little fuzzy. I was born in Puglia, and I still remember today how I looked for signs of a sort of natural contamination the first times that, as a child, I saw the meeting between the *Adriatic Sea* and the *Ionian Sea* in Santa Maria di Leuca; as if it were possible to observe the dividing line between the two seas that met themselves right there in front of me.

Today I also consider the large airports where I often find myself as border posts; in spite of what Marc Augé says and writes about “non-places”, I consider airports a great space for experimenting with cultural contaminations. Especially when you make long stops there and you have a tendency to familiarize yourself with other travellers ...

In short, crossing a border – even symbolically – is very often immersing oneself in another culture, in a place that statically awaits us, with its own prerogatives, and asks us to “acclimate”, to adapt to the new situation.

I have passed many borders in my long life as a traveller. First of all, because I have travelled to about sixty different countries around the world – and in some cases I have returned and returned several times – and also because border situations in general, even scientifically, have always fascinated me. When I was a kid, during my first long European journeys with my parents, I was very curious about customs passages; you got there by car, you went through the formalities, and you were on the other side, in a rite, in fact, of passage. The border post was a milestone reached, kilometre after kilometre, in a series of approach stages that could sometimes last days. Things have obviously changed since I’ve been traveling by plane. In a few hours you fly to the other side of the world and you are catapulted elsewhere.

I took this photo on the long bridge over the Zambezi, in the *Victoria Falls* area. The bridge has on one side the customs of Zambia and on the other that of Zimbabwe, and symbolically is itself divided in half between the two African nations, once (colonial) Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia. I wanted to walk through it, passing then the border while walking (“*You are now entering Zambia*”), in a rite of passage between two wonderful nations of Southern Africa.

11 days

by Umberto Pagano



There is no doubt that the relationship that the Neapolitans have with their patron saint, San Gennaro, is characterized by magical elements and by a prevalence of a profane dimension over the sacred one. But to witness an almost complete profanization of the cult of the saint, you need to move about 7,000 km East, curiously at the same latitude, in New York, Manhattan, *Little Italy*, every year around September 19th, the day on which the Catholic Church celebrates, in fact, San Gennaro.

But in *Little Italy* they are not satisfied with a daily feast, since 1926 they grant themselves 11 days of celebration, before, during and after the topical date of September 19th.

Little Italy is no longer like decades ago and the Italian “community” is now deeply integrated into New Yorker life and society. The original *Little Italy* was gradually eroded and incorporated by the neighbouring *China Town*. Today, if you really want to find a high density of Italian-Americans, you have to go on *Arthur Avenue*, in the Bronx, or in the suburb of *Bensonhurst* in Brooklyn, or to Staten Island.

But *Mulberry Street*, in Lower Manhattan, the first large Neapolitan settlement in New York, remains a symbol, as is the feast of San Gennaro. Eleven days of “ostensions” of busts of the saint and offerings of dollars, blessing of the stalls, inevitable evenings dedicated to Enrico Caruso, old Neapolitan songs, processions, exorbitant quantities of meatballs and fried zeppole and competitions of cannoli eaters (cannoli, actually, have nothing to do with Naples... but cultures are known to hybridize continuously, and *Elizabeth Street*, the first settlement of the Sicilians, is too close not to incorporate the cannoli into the symbolic apparatus of the celebrations ... with all due respect to *babà* eaters ☺) .

Obviously, what is staged has little to do with the contemporary Neapolitan reality – and perhaps with the Neapolitan reality *tout court* – but this is exactly what makes the feast particularly interesting. What is represented here is a sort of simulacrum, a copy of a non-existent original. A fictional narrative functional to expectations, to the image of a fantastically “authentic” Naples. But recognition mechanisms often have little to do with historical “reality” or “truth”. How much, today, the feast of San Gennaro is “identitary” and how much it is a business machine, a “product” to sell to New Yorkers and tourists, after all, is irrelevant.

The light of Sydney

by Cleto Corposanto



Sydney is one of the most cosmopolitan cities I have seen. Like London and New York – curiously, they are also English-speaking – the de facto capital of Australia, which with its over 5 million inhabitants is the largest city in Oceania, gives back the idea of a megalopolis where languages, cultures and different ethnicities have found an interesting balance. You live well in this land so geographically distant from Italy, which in the past has also attracted many of our compatriots, who emigrated to the brand new world in search of work and with the aim of making a life elsewhere. I obviously visited it as a tourist, and some images of this beautiful city nestled in a bay that makes it enchanting remained. If I close my eyes, I see the marvellous architecture of the *Opera House*, the splendid theatre by architects Jørn Utzon and Peter Brian Hall inaugurated in 1973 which overlooks the bay and is now Sydney's favourite skyline.

This one that I propose today is another photo of the Australian city; it is one of the photos I like the most among the many I have taken around the world in all these years. I still remember how it was yesterday the excitement of this show from the hotel window, in an unspecified hour of the afternoon, which suddenly coloured the landscape in front of my eyes with gold. A photo that materialized almost suddenly, in a golden light that lasted just the time of bliss and that I have never seen again anywhere else in the world with that intensity in an urban context. Thanks, Sydney.

The market of good luck

by Umberto Pagano



Bangkok is a truly unique place, starting with the name. Many (even those who have been there) do not know that Bangkok is the name by which it is internationally known, but it is not the one used in Thailand. The Thai name is *Krung Thep* (กรุงเทพฯ), the City of Angels. But it is an abbreviation, the full official name is: กรุงเทพมหานคร อมรรัตนโกสินทร์ มหินทรายุธยามหาดิลกภพ นพรัตนราชธานี บุรีรมย์อุดมราชนิเวศน์มหาสถาน อมรพิมานอวตารสถิต สักกะทัตติยะวิษณุกรรมประสิทธิ์ (transliterated into: *Krung Thep Mahanakhon Amon Rattanakosin Mahinthara Yuthaya Mahadilok Phop Noppharat Ratchathani Burirom Udomratchaniwet Mahastan Amon Phiman Awatan Sathit Sakkathattiya Witsanukam Prasit*)¹. This is a certified record: the longest name for a place in the whole world.

I am sure that Bangkok has another record, the number and the size of markets. There are of all kinds stable, temporary, covered, uncovered, night, floating, specialized in one commodity... The city literally overflows with every possible (and unlikely and impossible) merchandise.

But there is a very special and particularly important market for Thai people: the amulets market. Dozens of small shops plus dozens of stalls where you can find, without hyperbole, millions of amulets and talismans of various types and materials (mainly plaster, terracotta, wood, various metals), of all shapes, sizes and prices.

For the Thais it is a serious matter, not simply labelable as superstition or confinable to certain sections of the population. It is a pervasive phenomenon, deeply rooted in the country's religious culture, Buddhist but crossed by strong Hindu influences and animist reverberations. Everybody uses amulets and takes their effectiveness for granted and irrefutable. There are generic amulets or highly specific ones, to achieve a certain result or to protect against a particular pitfall. And each professional category has amulets functionally suitable for its type of business and risk.

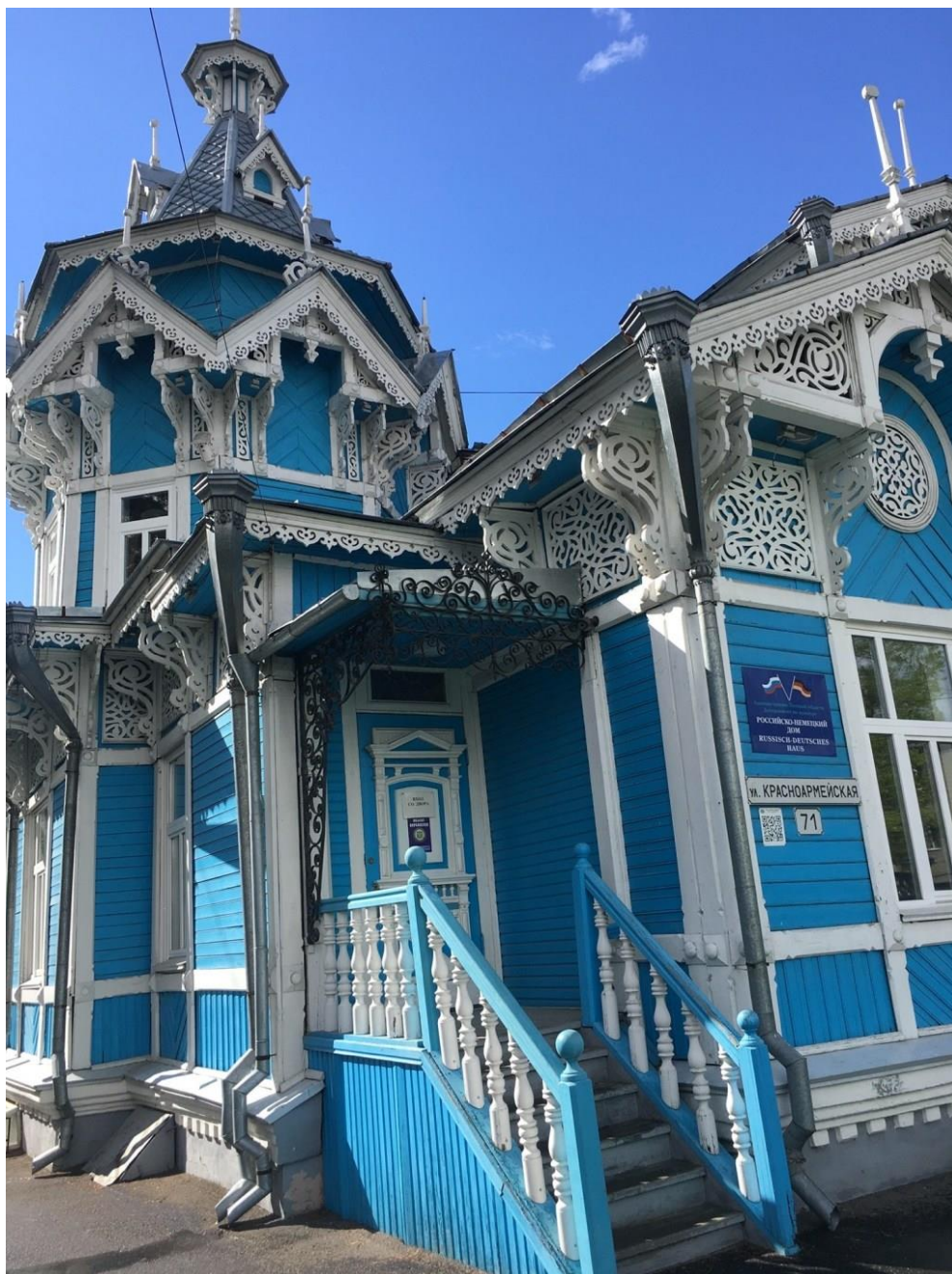
Generally handmade by monks (but there seems to be a thriving market for fakes), their cost depends on the time of construction (some are very ancient), on the spiritual stature and prestige of the person who made it, on the workmanship, and on power, of course. There are thousands of experts able to recognize, catalogue and estimate them, also because we are talking about such an enormous number of pieces that each one hyper-specializes in the knowledge of a genre, or even of a single type.

Each market stall displays tens of thousands of pieces, mostly small terracotta or plaster plates, meticulously sorted by colour and size. And everyone, sellers and buyers, speak with a significantly lower volume than normal. There is only a constant, faint, background whisper. Definitely a weird situation in the madly crowded city of angels.

¹ Translatable with: The city of angels, the great city, the eternal jewel city, the impregnable city of God Indra, the grand capital of the world endowed with nine precious gems, the happy city, abounding in an enormous Royal Palace that resembles the heavenly abode where reigns the reincarnated god, a city given by Indra and built by Vishnukarma.

The houses of Tomsk

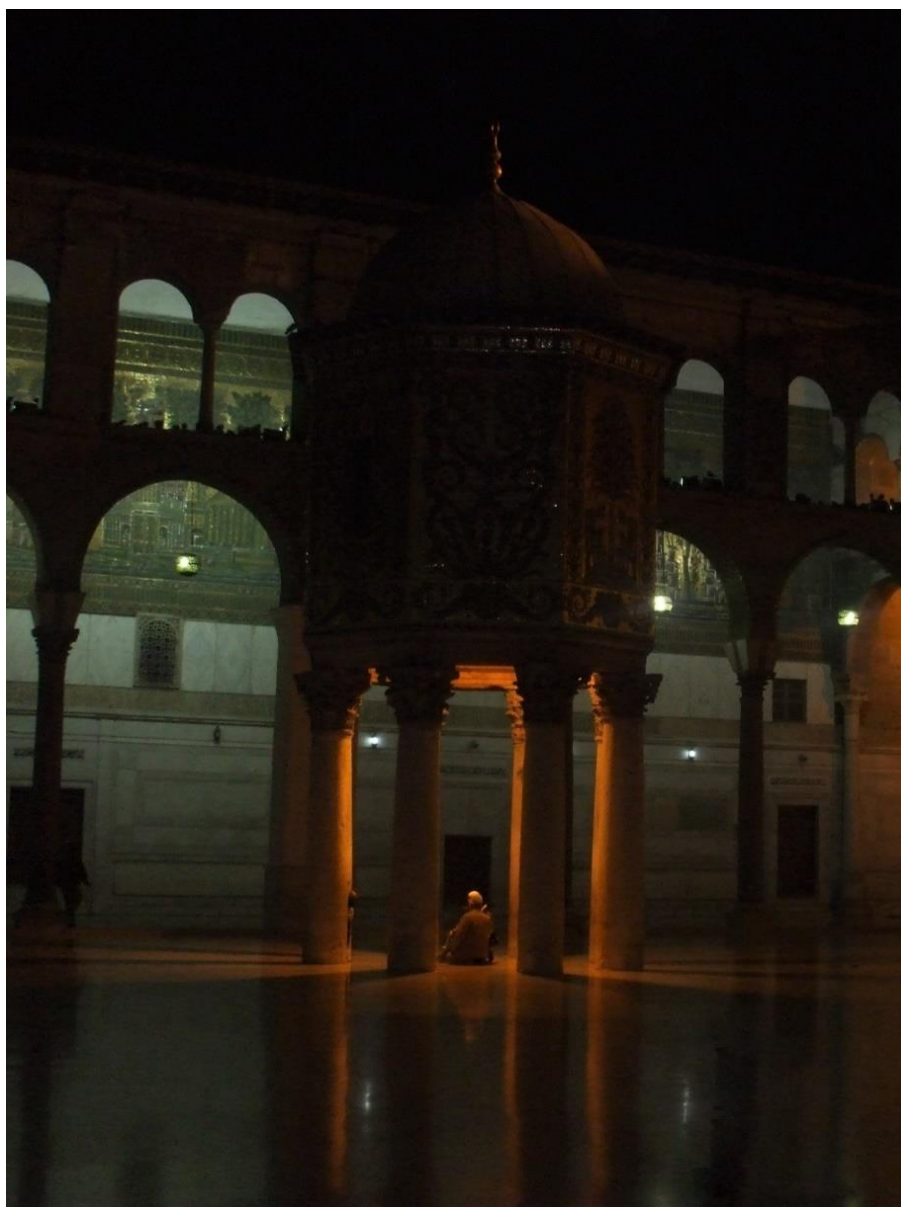
by Cleto Corposanto



I took this photo in May 2019 in Tomsk, when I received an invitation to participate to the international *Social Sciences & Health* Innovations conference, organized by the local State University in collaboration with a couple of other European universities, which gave me the possibility for the first time to visit Russia, and in particular Siberia. Imagined from our latitudes, the huge region at the centre of the immense Russian expanse could remind us of boundless expanses and frozen lands: in reality I found a beautiful city of about half a million inhabitants (of which almost a hundred thousand are students), alive, which in a warm May offered itself perhaps at its best to the many visitors who came. Tomsk is a very important cultural centre, with many universities that make the city swarm with young students eager to store the heat before the harsh Siberian winter. The city has always had a vocation for inclusion and confrontation, even from a religious point of view. In addition to the orthodox rite, in fact, Tomsk already in 1910 had a Catholic church, two mosques, a Lutheran church, an Old Believer orthodox church and one of the most beautiful synagogues in Russia. In 1911, the Neo-Byzantine Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul was built in the Northern part of the city, which remained open during most of the Soviet era. But the most characteristic part of the city's architectural heritage is certainly found in the characteristic neighbourhoods of meticulously decorated wooden houses; the "laces" of the wooden architectural decorations of Tomsk, especially the edges of the windows, called *nalichniki*, are wonderful architectural examples for the details and for the state of conservation. Many of these houses were built for merchants who lived in the Tatar quarter, the same quarter that now houses the restored White Mosque. Wandering around the streets of Tomsk and admiring these houses is one of the most beautiful experiences I had on my first trip to Siberia. In this city which, although not on the most fascinating railway line in the world, the *Trans-Siberian*, has managed with a mix of cultures and an extraordinary openness to science and change, to become an absolutely sought-after and interesting place.

Back to Damascus

by Umberto Pagano



I have been in Damascus just a few months before the war began. This picture was taken in the *sahn* (inner courtyard) of the great mosque. It was one of those rare evenings when you feel, without managing to argue rationally, that the balance between the weather and environmental variables somehow almost touches perfection. I arrived in the city at dusk, after endless and exhausting bureaucratic troubles on the Jordan border and several hours of travel in a grey, barren and stony desert.

The temperature was of a total mildness, dim lights were already on but the last sunrays still lapped fruit trees, palms and olive trees, and gilded the surface of the *Barada*, that the Greeks called, not by chance, *Chrysorrhoas* (the golden stream). By the time I entered the grand mosque, darkness had already come. In the immense *sahn*, I could perceive an almost tactile, balsamic, sensation of serenity and peace. What a mocking paradox! In the very next months, following the chronicles of the conflict from Italy, I felt an unsettling inconsistency between that sensation and the tragedy that was taking place. An unfinished tragedy that has so far generated half a million deaths and 6 million refugees, a quarter of the population.

The war is not yet over but the reconstruction, albeit in leopard spot, is progressing.

The old centre of Damascus, unlike the disaster happened in Aleppo, has been spared, while some peripheral neighbourhoods have been destroyed. In recent months, the chronicles that I read tell of a desire to live that has returned: people crowd the coffees, smoke the hookah, women look at things in shop windows under the large iron arches of the *souq*, the boys get in line to buy traditional ice cream.

Damascus is not a city like any other. Together with Jericho it is the oldest inhabited city in the world: eleven thousand years of history! E l e v e n t h o u s a n d. *The Garden of the world* it was called.

Finally, the time is coming to return to Damascus.

What game do we play?

by Cleto Corposanto



One of the things that will perhaps remain in our mind after the *Covid-19* pandemic will be a new balance with time. We have re-discovered (someone has perhaps just discovered) that there is not only a mood to live this life of ours; in short, it is not mandatory to live with the paradigm of speed.

The forced lockdown put us in front of a renewed daily life made of slower, more relaxed gestures and gave us back an amount of time that we thought we didn't have (and that before was in part destined to travel and ended up burnt in the endless queues in the car or in any other means of transport).

We had – and frankly I hope everyone understands it as a strong message – a need that seemed imperative: run, run, run, do things, chasing a goal that seemed to move proportionally to our need to chase it. Chasing a dragonfly on the lawn. Leisure, play too, required continuous pursuits, updates and improvements of the latest generation, with a burning time as if there was no tomorrow. As soon as it is released, something already seems obsolete.

It is curious that in these days when is being celebrated the 40th anniversary of *Pac-Man*, the cult video game born in Japan from a fantastic idea of Toru Iwatani and which conjugated ghosts and a hypothetical pizza that ran not to be bitten, I stopped to relate this photo that I took only less than a year ago in Myanmar, the former Burma.

Last December, in a village not far from the capital Yangon, I immortalized this game room (for us) of the past, a *P-2 game station* (with the addition of *Phone*, *Mp-3* and *Mp-4* on the cartel) . A canopy, a few plastic chairs, open air and the desire to tinker typical of the very young.

The irrefutable proof that playing is a form of the mind, that the desire to socialize and have fun transcends the possession of the latest generation of smartphones or video games, and overcomes the barriers of the exaltation of technologies. We are getting used to playing using our imagination and not just the latest, innovative opportunities that technology makes available to us. Perhaps, but I'm not sure, the generalized slowdown that the pandemic has triggered can be a useful brake. To start again with less anxiety and enjoying more of our time available. And to return to play less globalized (in ways, desires and times).

Simulations

by Umberto Pagano



For Jean Baudrillard, contemporary society is characterized by an enormous increase of simulations. Fakes dominate the world more and more and their pervasiveness undermines the distinction between true and false, real and imaginary. The copies increase hypertrophically until they devour the real. There are copies, more or less faithful, of “original” objects, places (or even behaviours) but there are also copies of non-existent originals: *simulacra*. Representations that are proposed as copies of an original, but “in reality” this original does not exist or, at least, does not exist as represented in the copy (as happens with the photoshopped image of a model's body). In short, the false copy of a nonexistent original. These are the most dangerous fakes, because they go straight leg on the ontological status of the “real”. And in this type of copies there are often, concentrated and compressed, traits and connotations which perfectly correspond to social expectations about a specific place, object, behaviour... This makes them a representation unrealistic but “perfect”, corresponding to what one expects or would like things to be. In short, better than the real, more than the real. It's the *hyperreality*.

When speaking of such things, what is often taken out as an example of apotheosis of simulation is Las Vegas, with its, mega casino-hotels that reproduce glimpses of the most disparate places and eras. Yet I believe Vegas simulations are less dangerous and aberrant than many others. And they make me sick much less than the *diseneyfication* of *Times Square* or of Prague's old town.

The fakes of Las Vegas denounce themselves, totally represent themselves for what they are, they do not pretend or mystify to deceive subtly, on the contrary they proudly claim their falsehood. There is such a visual overload, such a density of simulation, such an inconclusive excess of styles, symbols, suggestions, referrals, quotes... that the overall result is a phantasmagorical and kitsch apotheosis of capitalism, which unexpectedly reaches a paradoxical “authenticity”.

What is authentic and what is false? A reproduction of *Piazza San Marco* is clearly a fake, but concentrating in a few square miles a majestic patchwork of fakes (glimpses of Venice, Paris, Bellagio, Luxor, New York, ancient Rome ...) and making it pompously an object of business, has got its own bizarre authenticity.

Basically, Vegas must be seen and told for what it is: a huge game, a bombastic and hyperbolic carousel. And do you know what? Getting on it for a couple of days is pretty funny!

Hotel Corposanto

by Cleto Corposanto



It is not for everyone. Not even with a more frequent surname. Let alone for someone like me, who is called *Corposanto*. Having a hotel with one's surname in a square which itself has the same name is certainly unusual. In reality, on closer inspection, there is a small difference: that small space that separates *Corpo* from *Santo* – more visible on the plaque in the square, in truth – is a clear indicator that we refer to something else, but in short I must say that the glance, the first time, can be deceiving. This photo was taken randomly, in the streets of central Lisbon, the beautiful capital of Portugal. Certainly a very religious country, that of the Lusitanians – so much so that a “largo” and the hotel are dedicated to the Holy Body – as well as linked to a religious tradition are the origins of my surname, which is very little widespread in Italy. We come from Puglia, I from Bari where I was born and lived my first 18 years; going backwards, my father Riccardo was born in Barletta, the eldest son of Vito who was born in Barletta in 1897. Vito's father, who was called ... Riccardo, was originally from Andria, one of the two municipalities together with Lucera, in Foggia, in which our surname is more present. In short, Andria and Lucera; we know that in the first there are traces of Corposanto since the end of 1500, with a girl born in 1606 (and her father was evidently a Corposanto in turn). You cannot go further back because the registers went up in smoke due to a serious fire in the local Cathedral. I know less about Lucera. And I've always wondered about the origin of this singular surname. My brother Vito, eldest son, has the name of my grandfather and is the author of the research on the surname, abandoned the first hypothesis that he was chosen for some foundling – a bit like Esposito in Naples, but in Andria the equivalent is Proietti – leans instead for a toponym of Spanish origin. Who knows. Maybe he's right.

An unconventional cosmetic

by Umberto Pagano



Only a few decades ago Japanese girls dressed in a completely different way from their Italian peers, McDonald's fast food restaurants were not yet present in 120 countries and to eat a kebab you had to get to Istanbul at least. Today cultural globalization is rampant and everything merges into a vortex of homologation with ambivalent and complex consequences, not necessarily, or not only, negative or aberrant. But the contamination between cultures is not something new, actually it has always happened, always. What is new is its whirlwind pace: it is the rapidity of the process, exasperated by contemporary technologies, that causes the greatest imbalances. In this chaotic world standardization from which almost nothing escapes, the *thanaka* can only intrigue and make sympathy, almost tenderness.

It is the Burmese cosmetic par excellence, in a double sense. First, in Burma (to which the military junta has imposed the name of Myanmar since 1989) the use is widespread. Second, it is used basically only in Burma (except for some limited trespassing into neighbouring territories, such as in some parts of Thailand).

It is a whitish/yellowish mush obtained by rubbing the bark of the logs of the homonymous tree, very common in those places, on a small stone slab (*kyauk*). The logs are sold everywhere and are in every home and every hut in the country. And the *thanaka* stands out on the faces of women of all ages and children (but often also of men). It is not absorbed, but remains on the skin for many hours to perform its action moisturizing, refreshing, purifying, perfuming... and above all of sun protection. And since it remains so long upon the face, Burmese women often apply it, creating suggestive drawings.

While I was writing these lines I had an atrocious doubt ... I immediately went to check ... Relief: on *Amazon.it* (on October the 11th 2020) there is no *thanaka* to buy. Yay!!! Unfortunately, you can't even find cans of amazing tamarind juice. I used to drink several a day in Rangoon, paying them 200 *kyat* each (the equivalent of about ten cents of euro). Now I'd be willing to pay one of those like a good beer but not even Mr. Amazon can bring one to me ☹. Pros and cons of resistance to globalization.

The land, first of all

by Cleto Corposanto



Two children, brother and sister, sitting on the ground and intent on playing – as is normally done at their age – with the little they have available. They are two Mapuche, two young people belonging to the “people of the earth” (this is the etymology) that I met in Araucania, Chile. The bond that exists between this people (who fought fiercely against the Spanish invasion and colonization) and the land is very strong and full of everyday meanings. A visceral relationship that is also the basis of their entire agricultural economy. A Mapuche is not a Mapuche if he does not have a house on his own land, where he can also live with pets, cultivate and raise his family.

I took this photo in the tenth region, Los Rios, in Panguipulli, Valdivia province: I was a guest of this family for a few hours as part of the construction of the tables to rethink social policies built from below. An extremely important morning to understand how in the Mapuche culture the land comes first in the system of values and therefore any policy action you wish to undertake must be centered on that.

I was struck by the two children of this family, who in the photo it is clear that they have found a way to play, to be children in any case, in a situation of economic conditions of subsistence but in a group of great dignity, which makes cultural cornerstones handed down their own reason for living for generations. I particularly like this photo for another reason: Panguipulli is a town of about 40,000 inhabitants at 39° 38' 40" of latitude. In my wanderings around the planet, that remains for me today the southernmost point of the globe.

The death of the will

by Umberto Pagano



Milan, a shop window on *via Montenapoleone*, 2017.

The images “speak”, some whisper, others scream, others suggest. This photo is talkative. It tells a lot. It reminds us how fundamental the “representations” of a culture are. The ways in which values, beliefs, concepts find their expressive symbolization, and feed a circle of feedbacks in which representations reinforce concepts that reinforce representation schemes that reinforce concepts... and so on, in a self-referential spiral. The dummies of a well-known boutique can be seen among the reflections of the glass. Forms so unrealistically / hyperrealistically filiform to give rise to suspicion of a provocative and (self) ironic (tragic) *divertissement*. Hyperbole or non-hyperbole... truth is that never like in the digital age representations of the body, continuous, implicit, explicit, fractal... catalyse the internalization of the dominant physical model as a pathological solution to the problem of identity. The obese body is socially perceived – more or less consciously – as a result of lack of control, the thin one as the result of the ability to control itself, to manage itself, to represent itself, to communicate itself. And the mechanism is not new at all: just think of the medieval “anorexic saints”, for whom the deprivation of food was an evidence of control, through faith, over senses and passions. The triumph of the will. Or the triumph of faith over reason? It is actually the death of the will, in the extremism of “*solo Dios basta*”. Likewise, in anorexia the triumph of the will becomes its opposite, the annihilation of the will. Through the will of total control, the loss of all control occurs. But isn’t anorexia itself, after all, a metaphor for this world of ours? The only “will” that truly triumphs is that of Performance, which devours us and inexorably reduces us to quantity, measure, number, result, product, weight, shop window dummies.

Profession: cook

by Cleto Corposanto



Traveling, especially when you are alone, gives you back absolutely wonderful time management. You can walk or stop when and as long as you want. You can choose to engage in seeing things or talking to people, or doing both. What remains a profound truth for me is that the places, even the most beautiful - and I have seen so many - remain inside you for a long time, they are pleasant in the memories, and the photos often make up for a memory that gradually it fades with time. In Iceland, for example, the spectacle of the geysers seen up close is truly unique and unrepeatable, and deserves many photos. Some people you met, however, did not. They stay inside you for some reason, even futile, for a speech, for the time they have dedicated to you, for the proximity of some ideas. Or simply for their charisma, for the strength that distinguishes the things they do and say. I took this photo in Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland, a few years ago. One evening, walking in the port area among a thousand possible places to dine, I was attracted by the sign of a restaurant. It didn't have a lot of tables, and I liked the climate as a whole. I am generally lucky in these kinds of choices. When ordering, a big man with a red face, a black bowler hat and a white beard, showed up from the kitchen; he sat down at my wooden table and listed to me with great enthusiasm all that I could eat. I don't know how many different types of fish, many of which I didn't even know. He grasped my difficulty and stopped to explain fish after fish, dish after dish, everything I could have tasted. It was a very satisfying dinner, which ended with a long chat with my cook friend, who praised the cuisine of this extreme Northern European island. To my surprise, the next evening, in my hotel room, I saw him again as a judge of the local *Masterchef* program. Incredible. He had exactly the same black bowler hat on his head. And the same smile. I smiled too at this incredible coincidence.

The emerging face

by Umberto Pagano



The double, the mirror image of man, concentrates his craziest need: immortality, the perpetuation of a trace of life, of a presence, through mimesis. In dreams and hallucinations, in masks, in water or mirrors, sculpted or painted... the double is a metahistorical cultural universal of humanity, one of the few great universal myths crossing over time and cultures. In fact, the belief in some “essence” which survives over the caducity of biological life is a constant element of every magical-religious system.

The doubling has crept into images and forms since the origins of graphic representations, starting with Prehistoric cave paintings, but even the simple reflected image has the “magical” qualities of the double; just think of superstitions concerning the mirror (broken mirror = omen of death, veiled mirrors = impediment to the soul to leave the deceased body, etc.).

For thousands of years, one of the main functions of the plastic and figurative arts has been to fulfil the function of fighting mortality, to keep alive the spirit of the individual beyond death, at least in the memory of the living. Not surprisingly, it is with the advent of photography and then of cinema, with the “technical reproduction” and the incomparable fidelity to the actual referent they can guarantee, that the “traditional” arts begun to free themselves from their “necro-antagonist” commitment, from their anthropocentric utilitarianism.

I love this photo. I took it by chance while walking through the streets of Paris about fifteen years ago, with my reflex in which I had loaded the legendary black-and-white *Kodak 400 Tmax* film. Perhaps thanks to the print with a slight “sepia toning”, it appears as a timeless photo; and basically there is no element in it that can be connected to contemporaneity (other than some of the clothes worn, perhaps). I always admire with amazement, with enchantment, the work of the portraitists (I, who am totally unable to draw), the endless “magic” of an emerging face upon the void of a blank canvas.

Its Majesty, the Durian

by Cleto Corposanto



Anyone who has been lucky enough to travel to Asia certainly knows that one of the great characteristics of most Asian countries is that of the huge street food offer. There is no street, corner, square where it is not possible to buy food from a stall, from a vehicle, from someone who offers a range of things on the street, from meat to fish, from noodles to soups, from fruit to rice. Street food is a particularly developed *modus vivendi* in Asia, even at extremely low costs.

This is a photo I took in Thailand, in a large supermarket in the capital, Bangkok. Fruit from SouthEast Asia is a delight for the palate and eyes. Thais are rightfully very proud of the fruit they produce and consume in large quantities. There are many varieties that are practically unknown in Europe, some excellent and very tasty, others a little less ...

It passes in rapid succession from a very colorful and very strange Rambutan with Mangosteen, very similar in taste to Lychee, from Jackfruit to wonderful small bananas to eat even roasted, from the incredible Dragon fruit to Sapodilla, reminiscent of a type of medlar. And again the Custard apple, which despite its name has the shape of a pine cone and the flavor of a ripe sweet pear or the Plum Mango, with a taste reminiscent of that of a plum.

But the king of fruits is unquestionably Durian, the favorite of Thais, one of the most expensive, it must be said. What can be observed in the photo. They eat it by buying it, already cleaned and cut into pieces, served in trays during walks in the city. Large in size (it can weigh up to 3 kilos) and equipped with large thorns, the fruit has a sticky edible pulp inside. To clarify flavors and smells, it must be said that it is forbidden to transport it on public transport or consume it indoors. This is due to the smell, which recalls a mixture of aged cheese, sour fruit and ... dirty feet. The taste? I only tasted a Durian-flavored candy. Kept in the mouth for a few seconds. Inedible.

Ghost money

by Umberto Pagano



Money is not a thing, it is a function. And it generates a huge multiplicity of symbolic meanings, different in different cultures and subcultures but also within the same culture in different situations.

In Western culture, very often, money often takes on a negative connotation, because it expresses an exact measure of value that doesn't match well with affective and interpersonal relationships, it objectifies them. That's why we employ a series of strategies to "filter", to neutralize, the aspects too explicitly quantitative linked to it and not contaminate "immaterial" dimensions such as respect, prestige, affection ... So, the doctor will not directly take the money for his consultation but will delegate his secretary, and from a gift we have the care to remove the price (rude allusion to material value). In short, we tend to keep the dimension of rational computation of value separate from "incommensurable" affective values. But this does not always happen and sometimes money as an object regains a different symbolic value of "object" to be donated. In some cultures this use is frequent (for example, the Japanese one), in certain subcultures it assumes curious forms (there is a memorable scene in *"Donnie Brasco"* in which two low-ranking *mafiosi*, give each other banknotes of equivalent amount for Christmas present).

In some Asian cultures there are symbolic uses of money that may appear bizarre to Westerners.

I took this photo in Vietnam, where the ancient practice of burning banknotes as a form of "help" to dearly departed is widespread (the same custom is common in several other far Eastern cultures, starting with the Chinese one). They call it "spirit money"¹. Actually, these are imitations of banknotes, both current and ancient, and of various currencies (dollars are very popular), generally on very shoddy paper. So, on one hand it is a copy on real money, but on the other "votive money" has a cost, an equivalent in real money. It is sold at temples – in this way it feeds a mechanism of offers – but also in flea markets, in various types of shops, even in some supermarkets. It is even easily found on Amazon². The basic idea is that burning money gives relief to the souls of the dead, to help them repay the "debts" they accumulated in life with wrong behaviour. Not everyone who burns money for their dead actually believes in this form of efficacy. Often it is a practice that has an identity function, of belonging, of tradition continuation. Or more simply a way to give a thought to dead loved ones. Some burn joss money for their parents on the anniversary of their disappearance. It is a ritual way, like so many other equivalents, to remember them. They don't necessarily believe they are paying off their "debts" in that way. Just as you don't necessarily have to believe in the afterlife to go to the cemetery and leave a flower on the grave of a person you loved, respected, admired. To us Westerners it may seem strange but in the end we too convert money into wax candles that become flame, smoke, light... exactly like sham dollars burning in a small Vietnamese temple.

¹ There are various equivalent expressions, such as "Joss paper", "Heaven money", "Hell money".

² On Amazon, it I found a bundle of 80 of \$1,000 votive bills for €12.00: a good deal!

Cultures and borders

by Cleto Corposanto



There are many borderlands on Earth. Places that act as a watershed between populations, cultures, religions and even very different languages.

I took this photo in one of the most significant border posts. We are in the Sinai peninsula, of a vague triangular shape, approximately 380 km long from North to South and a little more than 200, with a coastal development of about 600. The Sinai, squeezed between the Gulf of Suez and that of Aqaba, it is largely desert territory, except for some seaside resorts including Nuweiba, Dahab and the more famous Sharm el-Sheikh.

The Gulf of Suez acts as a geographical border between Africa and Asia, and this is why the Sinai Peninsula is geographically the first Asian outpost. But administratively it is part of Egypt, representing the last edge of it to the East. In short, it's a piece of Africa in Asia. We are talking about a territory that has always been at the center of attention, given that it has long been a contest, for example in the so-called six-day war between Israel and Egypt, in fact. Conquered by the government of Jerusalem in 1967, it was returned to Egypt thanks to the Camp David agreements, 11 years later.

In short, a real border post.

A place where, thanks also to an important tourist development for many years, exogenous and endogenous cultures and customs are intertwined, where apparently irreconcilable lifestyles coexist. I took this photo in Sharm el-Sheikh, along a road that leads to the sea from one of the many tourist villages frequented by tourists who love the climate and the richness of the fauna of the marine waters. Those villages where, almost thanks to a tacit agreement, during the day the pools are reserved for foreign tourists – and the Russians, as well as the Italians, abound there – while at night the Arab women make use of them, dressed in their *jilbabs*.

A photo that exactly testifies to the proximity of the many cultures that, in Sinai, coexist with mutual respect: four women, each with different clothing, are going to the beach. Let's imagine that everyone is at ease in their culture, respecting some principles, in the choice of clothing. Such a large assortment is rare at the same time. It only happens in border posts, where everything mixes.

But how does Jordan do it?

by Umberto Pagano



Jordan is a strange country. If you think about it, you end up being surprised that it still exists. In some ways it is almost a geopolitical paradox that the small Ashemite kingdom manages not only to survive but also to maintain a troubled balance and a certain stability, uncomfortably embedded as it is between Israel, the West Bank, Syria, Iraq and the Saudi Arabia.

It is a land that drips history from each and every stone. Here, on the Eastern bank of the Jordan, many biblicists locate the Garden of Eden, and the events of Abraham, Job, Moses. Here, in Bethany, John the baptizer bathed the head of his disciples and of a certain Jesus Christ.

Anyone in Europe who complains about the excessive flow of migrants should take a look at Jordan's numbers. About 10 million people live here, of whom 3 million are refugees: many Palestinians but also Iraqis and, in recent years, obviously, a huge amount of Syrians, piled up in dusty and desperate camps. It is the country in the world with the highest percentage of refugees over population. And again, you wonder how Jordan keeps going.

Here life, for many, is really hard.

Around here, in many areas, an entire age of life, adolescence, is skipped. Boys seem not to exist: you are child or you are adult. And you often become adult tremendously early.

In Jordan child labour is widespread. It is difficult to have certain numbers. The most accredited estimates report of about 70,000 children exploited in 2016 (they were around 44,000 in 2010, when I visited the country). Jordan formally adheres to international conventions and the law punishes the exploitation of minors with severe penalties. But in reality, the few inspectors often close one eye and the other in front of irregularities. "What a barbarity!", therefore thinks the wise Western man, "What an absurdity!". What the Western wise man does not imagine is that inspectors tolerate violations because not doing so would not mean protecting children, but condemning them to hunger and often to death. They have to work to survive.

I took this photo ten years ago, in March 2010, in Jaresh, a place so full of Roman ruins, about an hour from Amman, on the road to Damascus. I only stayed a few minutes with this shepherd boy and his goats, but I often think of him. Now, ten years after that, he should have just come of age to work. And I think to myself ... but how does Jordan do it?

Come and have a tea with us

by Cleto Corposanto



In our Mediterranean culture – and even more so in the South – a coffee is much more than just a drink. Just to name one, the phrase of Luciano De Crescenzo: “*Have you ever wondered what coffee is? Coffee is an excuse. An excuse to tell a friend you love him*” quite clearly expresses the rich range of meanings that can be attributed to the simple act of drinking a coffee.

In any case, nothing to do with what is happening on the other side of the world. In the East, the content in the cup changes, but rituals and meanings linked to the consumption of tea are also accentuated, which in that part of the world is certainly the queen drink.

I took this photo a few years ago in Yokohama, an important port centre South of the capital Tokyo, in Kanagawa prefecture. A large city of just under 3 million inhabitants – the largest in Japan if we exclude, of course, the capital city to which it is connected by fast subway – also famous for hosting the largest Japanese Chinatown and a Museum dedicated to Ramen, the dish of the typical Sino-Japanese noodle.

In the photo, a woman in traditional costume is engaged in the tea ceremony, an operation that transcends the simple preparation of the drink. Everything has a why, a way and a time in the ancient art of the ceremony, starting with the room that must have particular characteristics and which is called *cha shi tsu*.

Murata Jukō, a Buddhist monk (1423-1502), is considered the true founder of the Japanese tea ceremony. He was responsible for the initiation of the *wabi-cha* style, which sanctioned the autonomy of the Japanese ceremony from that of the Chinese rite. Later Sen No Rikyū (1522-1591), reformed the *wabi-cha* style by codifying the tea ceremony as we know it today, the famous *cha no yu* (“hot water for tea”). The tea used is usually *matcha*, with its characteristic jade green color, prepared not by infusion but by suspension. The entire ceremony, usually reserved for special events, is divided into three moments: *kaiseki* (a light meal), *koicha* (thick tea), *usucha* (light tea). The central phase is very long; sometimes the ceremony is then shortened by skipping the thick tea.

Participants are kneeling on the tatami mat and the tea master offers them the same cup, rotating it three times in the palm of the hand so that the inside decoration of the cup is facing, while the one being served must see the main decoration outside the cup and in turn he must rotate it so as not to drink from the side of the decoration. The rite is so codified that even the discussion topics that accompany the entire ceremony – and even the terms – are part of it. A very strong bond that binds this people to their traditions.

Duplications, intersections

by Umberto Pagano



A photo of a photo exhibited in the palace of the popes in Avignon. The picture photographed shows the poster of a *Pietà* representing a “double” Pasolini, who personifies both the dead Christ and the one who holds it in his arms. French street-artist Ernest Pignon Ernest made this poster and went around pasting it in many places of many Italian cities, places for themselves, for one reason or another, densely symbolic, taking a photo of each poster glued and of scenario around it, and eventually exhibited those photos around the world.

In Pier Paolo Pasolini’s work, an intimate, close, recursive comparison with the figure of Christ is evident. His *“Il Vangelo secondo Matteo”* (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*) represents the attempt of an atheist who is confronting with the mystery aspects of existence but also with the more human and anarchist sides of the social “construction” of Christ, in which the “true” story matters very little and the theological-dogmatic apparatus matters nothing. Instead, all is about the specularity between the experience of Pasolini and the one of Christ in bringing a “revolutionary” word to the derelicts and outcasts. Pasolini himself in a famous interview with the *“Nouvel Observateur”*, in March 1965, said: *“Some laymen told me that my Christ is Stalinist. In fact, I was thinking of Lenin! The fact is that they do not take into account that Christ proposes himself as the son of God, and the cult of personality is a bit like this: to deify a man”*.

There is a measure of magnetic and magmatic power in this unsettling tragic hyperrealism of a secular Piety in which PPP carries his own corpse in his arms, in a deafening doubling of pain. And the poster, a technical reproduction, duplicates, triples, multiplies and spreads in a thousand places. And photography, double par excellence, which immortalise (takes away from mortality, from the fleeting moment) the death of the Christ-Pasolini and his dead body carried by his own double.

And a Neapolitan who, in his turn, in Avignon, photographs, doubles, the photo that portrays the poster of Piety of Pasolini affixed on a wall of a devastated and devastatingly poetic *Scampia* (Naples).

And how can we forget that PPP himself had duplicated, replicated, for lighting and image composition, the Mantegna’s dead Christ, in the penultimate, astonishing sequence of his *Mamma Roma*?

So many duplications. And intersections.

A dazzling beauty

by Cleto Corposanto



If I had to express Myanmar with one word, I would say dazzling. In this way this country of Southeast Asia appeared to me, the same one I learned about school books as Burma, with the capital of Rangoon. Since 2010, on the other hand, it is called Myanmar – to be exact, the full name is ပြည်ထောင်စု သမ္မတ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတော်, *Pyidaunzu Thanmăda Myăma Nainngandaw* – and the capital has become Naypyidaw, a city of just over a million inhabitants North of Yangon (the “old” Rangoon), which still remains the most densely populated and most fascinating urban agglomeration in the whole country. For some time, referring to this nation with the name Burma (which recalls the past from a former British colony, albeit not part of the Commonwealth, until the proclamation of independence in 1948) or with that of Myanmar meant to marry, in some way, a precise political ideology; this even if Burma or Myanmar may appear very different as names if we use our Latin characters, while they have the same root – and also a similar sound – if you use the Abugida writing system, which is precisely the one in use in the country.

The history of this wonderful country is, as often happens, full of problems and even violent political battles to make one's opinion prevail. There are numerous episodes concerning Myanmar from this point of view, most of which are related to Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1991, after the military junta, the year before, had canceled the elections who had seen her triumph with her “National League for Democracy” list. Aung San Suu Kyi used the prize money to establish a health and education system for the Burmese people. Forced for many years to house arrest, it has become a symbol of the fight against oppression, which over the years has also developed through the so-called “saffron revolution” (from the colour of the robes of the Buddhist monks who numerous took part in the non-violent protests attributable to the galaxy of “colour revolutions” that characterized many post-communist regimes).

One of the most majestic and mystical places of Burma / Myanmar at the same time is located in Yangon / Rangoon. I'm talking about the *Shwedagon Pagoda* (ရွှေတိဂုံစေတီတော် in Burmese) a complex that characterizes the city skyline, visible even at long distance. It is a golden stupa almost 100 meters high and represents the main Buddhist temple for Burmese, as there are the relics of 4 Buddhas of the past, including Gautama, the historical Buddha.

The stupa is plated with over twenty thousand solid gold plates and the tip is encrusted with jewels: 5,448 diamonds, plus 2,317 rubies, sapphires and other precious stones and 1,065 gold bells. At the top there is a 76 carat diamond. The pagoda is surrounded by 64 “small” pagodas and 4 other pagodas that indicate the cardinal points.

Inside there is a huge statue of Buddha, made in 1999 with 324 kg of massive jade from the Kachin, an area located in Northern Myanmar. This immense Buddha is inlaid with 91 rubies, 9 diamonds and 2.5 kg of gold.

Clear now why the term I associate with Burma is dazzling?

I took this photo in one of the thousand places inside the *Shwedagon Pagoda*. I really liked the light that emanated and the color – gold – everywhere, even in the clothes of this young Burmese woman. It is a photo of the end of 2019, when the climate – non-meteorological – in the country was good and favoured the influx of people from all over the world. A beautiful place. Of a dazzling beauty.

A nice skyscraper

by Umberto Pagano



The charm of the pyramidal shape goes through the millennia unscathed. It may be due to the brave and reassuring solidity of the base or to the tip reaching out towards the infinity of the sky, but anyhow it has always exerted an indisputable magnetism on sublunar minds.

The *Transamerica Pyramid* in San Francisco is a high-symbolic pyramidal skyscraper. For starters, it has a history of troubled acceptance in its social context. As happened with the *Eiffel Tower* (which is similar: TP looks like an *Eiffel Tower* of concrete and glass), its shapes were too daring and innovative to please everyone, not to arouse adverse reactions or even indignation, in such city so proud of its traditional Victorian wooden houses. But exactly as the *Eiffel Tower* is for Paris, the Transamerica is now an essential and unmistakable emblem of the city skyline.

Designed in the 1960s and finished in 1972, everyone liked it in 1989, when its 260 meters swayed supple and careless of the violence of a tremendous earthquake (San Francisco bay is one of the most seismic areas on the planet), without reporting any kind of damage.

William Pereira, its designer, stated: “The pyramid is the ideal configuration for a high-rise building in a densely populated urban area: it has the practical advantage of leaving more light and air to the surrounding streets and it forms a unique elegant silhouette against the sky”.

But his foresight went much further. Following a challenging renovation – but undeniably thanks to the principles underlying its design and construction – since 2009 the *Transamerica* has been one of the most eco-sustainable buildings in the world and, in terms of energy and water efficiency, polluting emissions and high-quality interior habitat, outclasses much newer and more celebrated skyscrapers. And the company that manages it is still committed to continuous improvement of environmental standards and the containment of the ecological footprint.

The *Transamerica* has also played a symbolic role in my personal life-story.

San Francisco is the first city I visited outside of Italy. In 1991, I had just turned 18 and had never taken a plane. I got there, travelling alone, with a direct, never-ending flight Rome-Los Angeles of 17 and a half hours, to which was added a short internal flight. The *Transamerica* was the first real skyscraper I saw and photographed in my life. I returned to San Francisco several times later but, inevitably, I fondly remember this first shot at the *Pyramid*, in a black and white which enhances the linearity of its forms, made with my beautiful Canon film reflex, that 2 years later was stolen from me, paradoxically, in one of the most peaceful and harmless cities on the planet: Copenhagen. But that’s all a different story...

Doctor Livingstone, I presume

by Cleto Corposanto





Doctor Livingston, I presume” is a phrase that has somehow remained in history. Lovers of great travel and travelers know it very well, but it has become part of the lexicon of many others, even those who consider travel from home

to sea as the maximum possible travel. The sentence was pronounced on November 10, 1871, by the well-known journalist and explorer Henry Morton Stanley – Welshman by birth and American by adoption – in Ujiji, an ancient city in Tanzania located on the shores of *Lake Tanganyika*. In front of him was David Livingstone, physician, missionary and explorer of Scottish origins. Two intricate stories, one in front of the other.

Henry Morton Stanley was born as John Rowlands, in Denbigh in Northeastern Wales, in 1841. An illegitimate son, he never knew from his mother – who entrusted him to an orphanage – who his father was. When he was 17 years old, he embarked for New Orleans to begin his second life as an American citizen, at first becoming an archivist and freelance journalist later.

It was only in 1869 that it was decided to send someone in search of him, and the choice fell precisely on Henry Morton Stanley, who in turn faced the journey in the black continent on the trail of Livingstone, managing to track him down after two years. It was, precisely, November 10, 1871; and as if they were two friends they did not see each other, they greeted each other as if they had met by chance at a dinner. In fact, they were probably the only two non-African men within hundreds of kilometres. Livingston died two years later, in 1873, from malaria.

This photo was taken in Livingstone, a city that took its name from the great European explorer, in present-day Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia). The city, just beyond the border with Zimbabwe, is about ten kilometres from *Victoria Falls* and between 1911 and 1935 it was also the capital of the then English colony, before the headquarters were moved to Lusaka. In Livingstone, today, it is possible to visit a small museum linked to the adventurous life of this great traveller, who in Africa chose to live and die. An interesting place for a great traveller, an obligatory stop after admiring, entranced, the splendour of nature represented by the *Victoria Falls*.

Imprinting

by Umberto Pagano



My first, deep, contact with Berlin happened long before I physically went there, through the images of a movie which, for various reasons, ended up marking an era and a generation in particular, mine.

*The sky above Berlin*¹ was released in 1987, two years before that '89 that shocked the world when that historical-concrete absurdity, which was called at the time of its building (1961) – with a lexical solution worthy of the best examples of Orwellian *Newspeak* – “*Anti-faschistischer Schutzwall*” (Anti-Fascist Protection Rampart) finally fell. And by chance it becomes, in addition to the profound reflection on human nature it represents, also a vigorous visual document of “pre-fall” Berlin, one of the last, certainly the most aesthetically fascinating one.

In 1987 I was fourteen and Wenders’ black and white images of Berlin represented a sort of imprinting for me. From then on, Berlin has always remained a black and white city in my mind. As soon as I was eighteen, Berlin was the first European capital I visited. I found myself skirting the long stretches of wall still standing and picturing one by one the old cult murals on the West side and the very recent ones on the East side.

Imprinting. I can’t stay in Berlin without seeing it through the eyes of Wenders’ angels, in black and white indeed, without photographing its clouds, without thinking to myself of Handke’s magnetic words from the beginning of the movie. Perhaps only today, with a retrospective look, I do realize that, after all, the questions contained in those words have been “*die Grundlage*” (the foundation) of my personal and professional experience:

(...)

When the child was a child,
It was the time for these questions:
Why am I me, and why not you?
Why am I here, and why not there?
When did time begin, and where does space end?
Is life under the sun not just a dream?
Is what I see and hear and smell
not just an illusion of a world before the world?
Given the facts of evil and people.
does evil really exist?
How can it be that I, who I am,
didn’t exist before I came to be,
and that, someday, I, who I am,
will no longer be who I am?

¹ The horrible English title is “*Wings of Desire*”.

Vespa and five-inch heels

by Cleto Corposanto



Anyone who has visited any Asian capital will bring with them the memory, among others, of the incredible traffic; in some cases incessant, even until late at night. And if you choose Hanoi, you cannot fail to be impressed by the traffic, of course, but in particular by the very high number of mopeds that pass through the streets of the Vietnamese capital. It is an incessant, thunderous sea of vehicles, which moves like a magma that descends from the mouth of the volcano in any direction you can imagine, following the most bizarre and unpredictable paths, with maneuvers at the limit between acrobatics and pure madness. , with a level of compliance with traffic rules close to zero. Crossing the street remains one of the hardest things to do in Hanoi. And one of the most dangerous. The very high number of mopeds has its own *raison d'être*: the vehicles are not used to zigzag between cars, reducing the time needed to travel. No. They constitute the very large percentage of vehicles circulating on the roads. The reason is obvious. Until 2017, the country did not produce cars. None. And the prices of imported ones were skyrocketing. *Vinfast* began precisely in that year, producing the *Fadil*, a subcompact practically identical to *Opel Rocks* or *Chevrolet Spark*. The price? 500 million Vietnamese *dong*, which, however little the currency may be worth, is equal to about 19 thousand euros; therefore in any case much more than they cost in Europe. But the real problem is that in Vietnam the average salary is about 6.5 million *dong*, or about 240 Euros per month. Here. Do the math and find out why buying a car in Vietnam is a complex operation for the vast majority of the population.

I took this photo right in Hanoi, sitting on a mini stool at a mini table (who knows why the proportions are those of children, practically) outside a beautiful bar that served excellent coffee, next to my hotel. This young Vietnamese mother is about to leave with her son (both with masks, and *Covid* wasn't there yet ... or maybe yes, we are at the end of November 2019, but that's another story); helmet, trendy watch, camel-colored overcoat and black velvet heel shoe. And away, aboard a Vespa, the pride of Italian industrial production.

The way of the sword

by Umberto Pagano



I took this photo in *dōjō*¹ in Kyoto, intended for the practice of *Kendō*.

The «*Kendō*» is «*the way of the sword*», the ancient Japanese autochthonous martial art (the only one together with *Sumo*) derived from the evolution of the techniques of use of *katana*, the *Samurai* sword. But for long time now the *katana* has been replaced by the *shinai*, a sort of bamboo sword.

Thinking of *Kendō* in Western terms, as a combat practice, would mean being very far from the real meaning it has in Japanese life, in which it represents one of the greatest expressions of *Zen*.

It is inspired by principles of loyalty, discipline, overcoming fear, enduring suffering, modesty. But above all *Kendō* tends to “emptiness”, that is, it aspires to create the mental void (*mushin*), which is the presupposition of *enlightenment* (*Satori*).

Western thought tends to be dualistic, proceeds in pairs of opposites, while for *Zen* understanding is non-absolute, non-conceptual, inexpressible through words, and arises in the void, above being and non-being, in a higher dimension of “no-mind”.

To totally master the sword, the technique is not enough at all, you have to get to its *spirit*, and this is possible only by reaching the no-mind, the (in)consciousness beyond good and evil, true and false, in short, beyond of the trap of opposites. It is a condition unachievable and incomprehensible through rational logic. In fact, *Zen* is not taught, it is lived; it is not theory, it is only – and totally – a practice.

From outside of the Japanese culture, the “*way of the sword*” may seem absurd, paradoxical: the practitioner aspires to reach a state of mental detachment but at the same time a dynamic and harmonious tension of every muscle in the body, as long as all its movements will no longer be governed by logical-rational thinking.

No matter how hard he tries, a westerner will never really understand *Kendō*. But it is impossible not to be fascinated and overwhelmed by the rituality with which it is deeply imbued.

Just think of the system of “degrees” that express the level of skill reached by the practitioner². There are seven initial degrees (*Kyū*) and eight higher degrees (*Dan*). To reach the 8th *dan* it is necessary to be at least 46 years old and have 31 years and 3 months of practice of the discipline, as well as having achieved the 7th *dan* for at least 10 years. The exam to reach the last *dan* is considered one of the hardest tests in the world, with a passing rate of around 0.5%. About 1,500 practitioners try it every year, but only 6 or 7 succeed. Every *dan* has its name. The eighth and final *dan* is called «*Hachi*». A rather indicative term: it means «*God of Kendō*».

¹ In Japanese language «*dōjō*» indicates the «*place where the Way is taught*», that is, the way to get to the open-minded condition to which *Zen* tends. Both rooms dedicated to meditation and those in which martial arts are practiced take this name.

² Contrary to other martial arts, the “degree” is not expressed through the “color” of a belt, nor through any other sign. It has no external manifestation at all.

Grand Bazaars close

by Cleto Corposanto



I have some memories, in my youth in Puglia, of shops where it was possible to buy very different things; and years later, I saw that even in Trentino, especially in small towns, it was not uncommon to come across these slightly souk shops, where it was possible to buy everything, from toothpaste to newspapers, from cigarettes to school aprons. One thing to drive industry studies crazy. I suddenly went back in time recently, when I found this shop in a town in the province of Catanzaro unfortunately closed for hours. I would have liked to come in and have a look, perhaps with the excuse of buying a newspaper or a deodorant. Small village shops that resist the imposing and massive advance of shopping centres, which slowly contributed to the cessation of many of these activities, also thanks to the emptying of small towns, especially in the mountains.

Shops, on the other hand, are very useful for communities, places where you can also find important landmarks. And activities that, in moments of great fear due to virus infection, certainly represented a lifeline for many people, where they were still present and had not been completely wiped out by globalization and large distribution. Who knows that the turnaround that now seems to favour an outflow from large urban centres to the suburbs and smaller centres may not represent, in the future, a rebirth of these small “*Grand Bazaars*”. And together with them also communities of proximity that, in the big cities, have broken up a bit.

Living in a tube

by Umberto Pagano



The organization of urban and domestic spaces is the result of a phenomenon of complex historical interaction between physical environment and socio-cultural variables. Thus it happens that housing models that may appear bizarre, or even illogical, meaningless, to a Western gaze actually have their precise motivations in the underlying social organization models. Often the root causes can be found far back in time but it is equally frequent that certain habits and practices of use of space, once generated, trigger self-referential consolidation mechanisms, which involve their stabilization for even significantly long times.

When wandering around a Vietnamese city, one cannot fail to be intrigued by the conformation of many residential buildings, the so-called *nhà ống* (literally “tube houses”). Why they are so called is understandable at first glance. These are houses whose facades measure between 3 and 4 meters (but there are more extreme cases of less than 3 meters wide), more than 30 meters long (but often over 50), for a height generally not less than 10 meters (but on average between 15 and 20 meters, that is 6/7 floors), in which the openings (windows and doors) are only on the facades. Basically real “pipes”. These photos were taken in Hanoi, but the situation is similar in many other urban centres of the country, starting with Saigon (or Ho-Chi-Minh City, if you like). From the 15th century on, the urban development model of Vietnamese cities was strongly influenced by the aspiration of all merchants to look out with their shops on the main streets. To satisfy as many people as possible, given the demographic pressure, the shops had to be very very narrow. The traders lived in the back room (even today if you enter a Vietnamese shop it is not uncommon to glimpse a living space behind, often a kitchen or a living-room) but when the economic conditions allowed it or when the family grew, they gradually built upper floors: a double bedroom (on the first floor), then the children’s rooms on the upper floors, up to a small prayer space and a small terrace on the top floor. This type of spatial organization solution for urban housing was encouraged by the taxation system. Taking as a reference the great value attributed to the street view, the taxation was in fact based solely on the parameter of the width of the street front, while the length of the building was totally irrelevant. That’s why today, wandering around the Vietnamese cities, you can sneak into hallways that are authentic claustrophobic guts.

The pink tree

by Cleto Corposanto

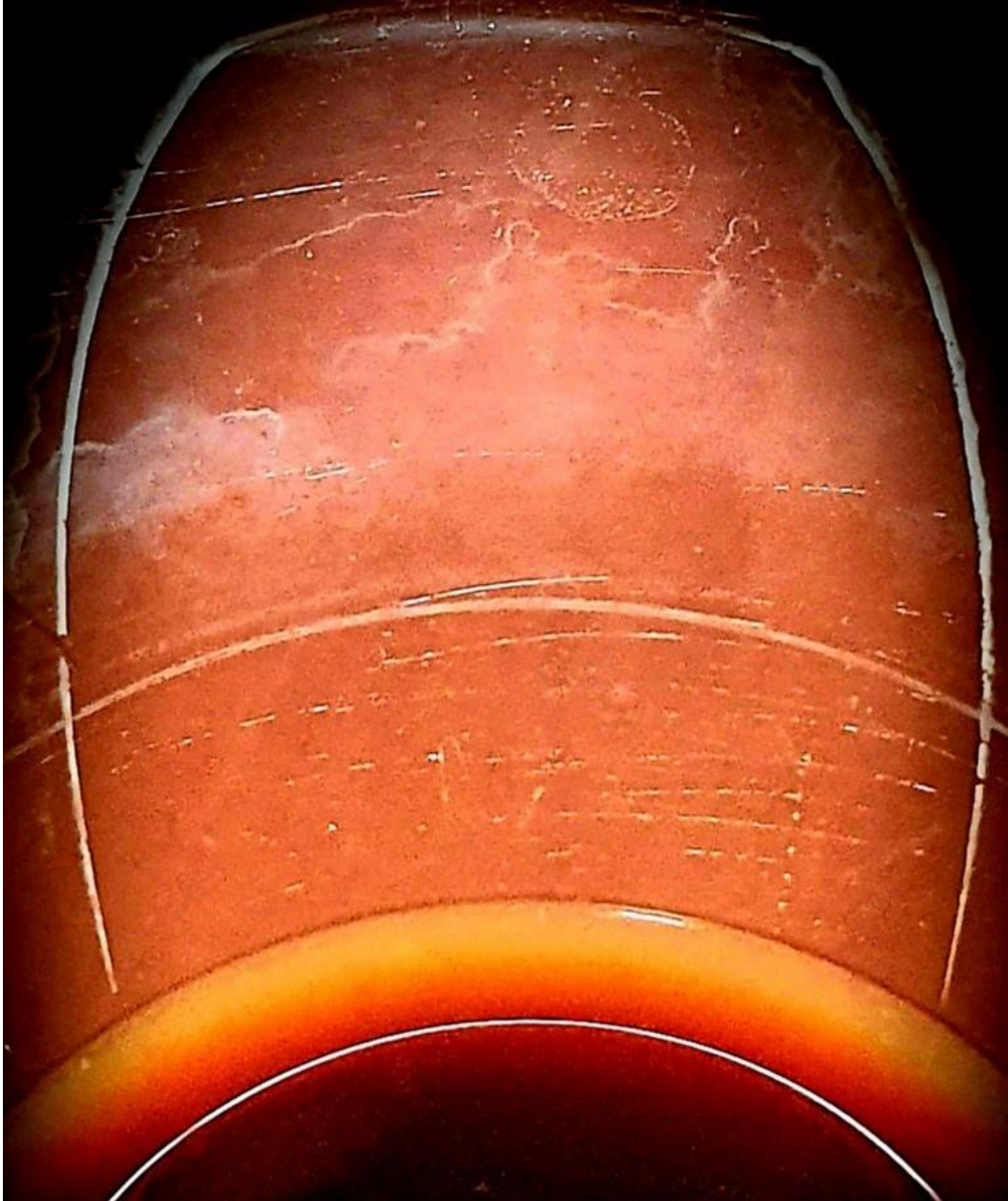


I've always loved this photo. It is from 2006. Year after year, every time I happen to look at it, it gives me a feeling of great serenity. I remember exactly the moment – and the place, of course – in which I made it, at the end of my stay at a resort near *Victoria Falls*, in Zimbabwe. Leaving this really beautiful place, I saw this huge colourful tree for the umpteenth time, the first thing I noticed when I arrived a few days earlier. It was natural to photograph it, majestic, colorful, a sort of sentinel towards a path that leads you to one of the most exciting natural spectacles in the world. Take a few steps out of the gate, in fact, heading towards the waterfall area, the dull sound of the water begins to make its way down with great energy from the jump of over 100 meters. A noise gradually more and more thunderous, until you see the falls, hear them, live them.

Zimbabwe is an enchanting place, a border place where the two main groups, *Shona* and *Ndebele*, both of Bantu ethnicity, finally coexist with great serenity. And this heavenly corner that hosts the falls is in turn in a border area that sees four different countries cross: in addition to Zimbabwe, in fact, also Zambia – which in turn holds a part of the *Victoria Falls*, and then Botswana to the South and a very narrow strip of land in Namibia, to the West. A crossroads of great suggestion.

Riddles

by Umberto Pagano



Martin Heidegger wrote: “In *Angst* one has «*uncanny*» feeling. Here the peculiar indefiniteness of that which Da-sein finds itself involved in with *Angst* initially finds expression: the nothing and no-where. But uncanniness means in the same time not-being-at-home (...). Everyday familiarity collapses. Da-sein is isolated, but as being-in-the world. Being-in enters the existential «mode» of not-being-at-home. Now, however, what falling prey, as flight, is fleeing from becomes phenomenally visible. It is not a flight *from* innerworldly beings, but precisely toward them as the beings among which taking care of things. Lost in the they, can linger in tranquillized familiarity. Entangled flight into the being-at-home, that is, from the uncanniness which lies in Da-sein as thrown, as being-in-the-world entrusted to itself in its being. *Not-being-at-home (Ex-propriation) must be conceived existentially and ontologically as the more primordial phenomenon* (SuZ, §40).

“Riddles: they either delight or torment. Their delight lies in solutions. Answer provide bright moments of comprehension perfectly suited for children who still inhabit a world where solutions are readily available. Implicit in the riddle’s form is a promise that the rest of the world resolves just as easily. And so riddles comfort the child’s mind which spins wildly before the onslaught of so much information and so many subsequent questions. The adult world, however, produces riddles of a different variety. They do not have answers and are often called enigmas or paradoxes. Still the old hint of the riddle’s form corrupts these questions by re-echoing the most fundamental lesson: there must be an answer. From there comes torment” (Mark Z.Danielewski).

But, in the specific case, a table, the heat, a cup of coffee, what once was just a phone... may be enough.

And that’s it.

Stories of Maori

by Cleto Corposanto



We got to know them mainly thanks to the performances that precede the matches of the players of one of the strongest national rugby teams in the world, that of New Zealand. That typical dance with leg movements and curious facial expressions punctuated by the imperious sound of a voice command is the *Haka*, typical of the *Maori* people, wrongly considered exclusively a war dance. Depending on the interpretations, the *Haka* is also a manifestation of joy or pain, a way of free expression on the part of the New Zealand natives. The origin of this ethnic group is still doubtful today: the legends of the oral tradition speak of a land of origin called *Hawaiki* (and identified with French Polynesia) from which the first would have moved to the current New Zealand, before divide into two groups – *Moriori* and *Maori* – which later would fight bitterly with the *Moriori* who practically died out thanks to the collaboration of the *Maori* with the British imperialists, who armed them for this purpose. In fact, even if the Polynesian origin is accepted, recent linguistic studies and analyzes carried out on mitochondrial DNA suggest a Taiwanese origin for the *Maori*, with a settlement dating back to about 5200 years ago. Today the *Maori* represent about 15% of the “kiwi” population (this is how the inhabitants of New Zealand define themselves from the name of a characteristic bird of the country), while the great majority – over 70% – of the inhabitants have European origins, mainly English and Scots. The relationship between the two prevailing ethnic groups is different from that which characterizes the neighboring Australian cousins: in the large oceanic island, in fact, the local aborigines – the most accredited studies speak of their presence in Australia already 50 thousand years ago from the area of Indochina – for a long time they were subdued and driven back to some areas reserved for them in the desert center of the island. A bit of what happened with the Native Americans confined to the Indian reservations. In New Zealand, on the other hand, relations have always been less conflicting, and the *Maori* language is studied in all primary schools. I took this photo in Auckland, the largest city in New Zealand, in the harbor area. I was struck by the way he looked at the sea. Soon after, I invited this New Zealander to my table, and we chatted and had a coffee together.

Little monks

by Umberto Pagano



In Myanmar (the present official name of the country better known as Burma) there are over half a million monks and about 75,000 nuns out of a population of 51 million inhabitants, 90% of whom practice Theravada Buddhism. You see them almost everywhere, starting from early in the morning when, in queues, they wander around on the streets for the ritual of daily begging which allows them to raise the necessary for sustenance (usually rice or other food), that later will be shared and consumed with the confreres. It is an important ritual in Burmese society, through which the recipient can live and the giver acquires *kutho*, merit, to improve their karma. The refusal by a monk to accept someone's alms is a tough act, meaning unworthiness of that person. This is exactly what Buddhist monks began to do in 1990, when in protest against the military junta that ruled the country oppressively, they stopped accepting offers from soldiers. Up to being the protagonists of the so-called "*saffron revolution*" of 2007, the anti-government movement of non-violent resistance that was brutally repressed by the regime.

Monasteries play a key role also in the field of education. About 1,200 monastic schools welcome tens of thousands of orphaned children and young people from families who are unable to provide for them.

In any case, every male child after the age of seven must spend a novitiate period which lasts from a few weeks to 2 or 3 months (girls can also access it optionally). And this experience is then repeated around the age of 20.

The novitiate begins with a rite of passage, called *Shinbyu*. The children are dressed in sumptuous clothes and taken to the monastery, where they get their head shaved and wear the saffron-coloured tunic (pink for girls), to symbolically retrace the abandonment of riches by Prince Siddhārtha (the historical Buddha). Their tasks are relatively simple: they have to observe only 10 fundamental precepts instead of the 227 that rule the life of true monks. It is a very hard life, but it allows to have a roof and a chance to study (also mathematics, physics, English, in addition to sacred texts). For many young people, entering permanently a monastery often represents the only possibility of a future, in one of the poorest countries in the world.

Don't step my shadow

by Cleto Corposanto



After all, there are two pressing recommendations related to this phase 2 of the *Covid19* pandemic, the one that allows us to leave the houses in which we have been holed up for a couple of months: use of the mask (especially when indoors) and distance. It is not difficult, although many show signs of impatience to follow the rules, but this is another matter. We fly over the mask, which has already become a fashion object as was easily foreseeable. And we stay on the distance, because it is full of interesting implications.

I remember that when I was seven / eight years old, in Bari, South Italy, the city where I was born and lived up to the eighteenth year of age, a game that was played on the street especially in the summer was in vogue among my friends afternoons were long and sunny. Fortunately, they had not yet invented the *Playstation* and therefore all our activities were on the road. So the game, very simple, was to walk behind people who were walking being very careful not to step on their ... shadow. Because this involved a pledge to be paid to the group.

This childhood memory came back to me when I visited Japan. A place very far from Italy and not only geographically but above all culturally. In reality, Japan is far from any other culture: the Japanese (who, remember, are islanders, and this takes on importance) are very attached to their traditions, of course, as we all are, but they are a little more. They defend their specificity and typicality while keeping alive a series of traditions and lifestyles that cover many aspects of everyday life, including clothing.

I took this photo in Osaka in 2018. I was very intrigued by these two young Japanese girls who were discussing who knows what: they were dressed in traditional clothes (a fairly widespread choice even among the younger generations) and above all they respected one of the cornerstones of culture Japanese, expressible with the term/concept of *Hedataru*.

Hedataru means to separate, and indicates a situation in which distance is an indicator of demand for one's own living space, it is the space that surrounds each person, like a sort of "bubble", described by anthropologist Edward T. Hall in 1963 to indicate the study of proximity relationships in non-verbal communication called proxemics, a term he coined himself. In short, Japanese culture recognizes the physical distance – albeit minimal – of a somewhat salvific meaning, exactly like what we all need today, citizens of the globalized world, to defend ourselves from the danger of infection.

And it struck me, studying the meaning of the value of distance (physical but also social, in its sociological meaning) to discover that Japanese children also play *kage fumes* ("trampling on each other's shadow"), which symbolically represents the violation of personal space. In short, the opposite of the game we played in Bari between the 1950s and 1960s.

When it is no longer the time of *Hedataru*, and therefore when things change and there is no longer any need for separation, we go towards *Najimu*, a term that expresses entering into confidence (and intimacy) with someone. Then the distances are reset, but safe in a relationship deemed non-dangerous and at zero risk.

Here, *Covid19* has suddenly extended the concept of *Hedataru* to the entire world population, imposing on us that distance that does not make us step on the shadow of others. And it can save our lives, as we slowly seek a return to *Najimu* which from now on will perhaps no longer be possible as we intended it before. And this too will be a small legacy that will leave us this pandemic time.

At dusk over the stone bridge

by Umberto Pagano



Photo of a blurry photo, found in the bottom of an old box. But I clearly remember the where, the when, and I relive the sensations. Once the photos were also used for this, no longer now, consumed (literally) in a fleeting, instantaneous way on social media. Once they were used to remember, to say “this is how it was”, “this is how I was”; nowadays, mainly they serve to say “that's what I'm doing, now”. I took this picture in Prague, in 1991, from the Charles Bridge, at dusk. I was lucky enough – I was young – to see Prague shortly after the “*sametová revoluce*” (the velvet revolution), which quickly led to the dissolution of the Czechoslovak communist state. Now almost everything has changed. It was a Prague that one could not but love, unconditionally. I remember the little shops of *Staré Město* (the old town) at night, whose door was kept closed, in many cases, with an iron wire or a curved spoon. And the spotless snow among the broken and overlapping tombstones of the old Jewish cemetery. Of that Prague, Angelo Maria Ripellino had written: «*The antiquarian coquetry, with which it is now pretending to be only still life, a taciturn sequel of past splendours, a dull landscape in a globe of glass, only increases its spell. It sneaks slyly into the soul with bewitchments and enigmas, of which only it has got the key. Prague does not let go any of those it has captured*»¹.

And then I saw the Prague of the 2000s, with its perfect, clean, overexposed and disneyfied beauty, in which even the tiny house where Franz Kafka wrote many of his stories has been transformed into a cute and vulgar souvenir shop, a stop as another for crowds of tourists in procession. McDonaldization has perpetrated here a systematic and inexorable emptying of the soul, in which even the Nazis and Communists had not succeeded.

«*Oh*» the mouse said, «*the world's shrinking day by day. Once it was so wide that it scared me, I ran and I was happy to finally see walls to the right and left in the distance, but these long walls are coming closer one another so fast that I am already in the last room and there in the corner is the trap into which I shall fall*».

«*You just have to run in another direction*» said the cat, and ate it»².

¹ Ripellino A.M., *Praga Magica*, Torino, Einaudi, 1973 (3a ed. 2002), p. 11 (translation from Italian is mine)

² Kafka F., *Kleine Fabel* (1920). The text shown corresponds to the entire story, it is not an excerpt. Translation is mine from German is mine).

Silvana Mansio

by Cleto Corposanto



I didn't take this photo. I'm the one with the straw hat playing table football. The girl in the foreground is my sister Anna and the younger boy of the two opponents is my brother Vito. The photo was taken by my father. We are in 1964, I have just turned 10; the photo is somewhat historical because it testifies to my first time in Calabria. We are in Silvana Mansio, in Sila, 1400 meters above sea level, approximately halfway between Camigliatello and Lorica. I don't know why my father chose such a little-known place – at the time – to spend a week of holidays, our first after the purchase of his first car, a white Volkswagen Beetle. He had probably received some suggestions as part of his role as a member of the provincial tourism body of Bari, the city where we lived. Silvana Mansio, born as a tourist village in the 1930s at the behest of a Lombard entrepreneur who coordinated the work of some trunks of the Calabrian-Lucan railway, owes its name to the role of rest station of the Romans (precisely *Mansio*, in Latin) in the woods of the Sila (which was originally called Silva, forest). A magical place. For us who came from the Bari Levantine, maritime, the city of the Teatro Margherita built with a daring view of the sea, an absolutely fascinating place. We slept in one of the rooms in the buildings to the right of the hotel, and I remember that in addition to the table games, one of the most frequent things I did were long walks. I often accompanied another guest of the hotel, a young Genoese whose name and surname I still remember perfectly after having maintained a correspondence for some time, in his rounds in search of mushrooms. I still remember the faces of my parents when, from one of those laps, we came back with shirts full of yellow chanterelles. We had found so many...

I returned to Silvana Mansio on a Sunday a couple of years ago. More than fifty years later. And a slight shiver ran down my spine.

Chi tene 'o mare...

by Umberto Pagano



*Chi tene 'o mare
S'accorge 'e tutto chello che succede
po' sta luntano
e te fa' senti
comme coce
chi tene 'o mare 'o ssaje
porta 'na croce.
Chi tene 'o mare
cammina ca vocca salata
chi tene 'o mare
'o sape ca è fesso e cuntento
chi tene 'o mare 'o ssaje
nun tene niente...*

(Pino Daniele, 1979)

Who's got the sea
understands whatever it happens,
it can stay away
and makes you feel
how it burns,
who's got the sea, you know,
carries a cross.
Who's got the sea
walks with his mouth salty,
who's got the sea
knows he is foolish and happy,
who has the sea, you know,
has nothing ...¹

¹ Translation is mine.

Sommario

Le parti in nero sono di Cleto Corposanto, quelle in blu di Umberto Pagano

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The
diagonales

