

VISUAL INQUIRY OF SYMBOLIC UNIVERSES

Thirty Years of Visual Anthropology in Sardinia in the Images of Dario Coletti

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Abstract

The article aims to retrace possible intersections between visual cultures and anthropology in the Mediterranean through empirical and critical research on the photographic practice of the Italian photographer Dario Coletti (Rome, 1959). In his massive body of work, Coletti established an archive of visual narrations of the living culture of the island's inhabitants, from the working conditions of the miners and of the communities of fishermen to the traditional local celebrations, such as the Carnivals and the Holy Weeks. In particular, the photographic series *Mana. Cronache dal carnevale barbaricino 1995-2015*, focusing on the depiction of the Carnival of Barbagia, is here analyzed for its outstanding role within the author's production. The appendix of the article includes the contributions of Antonio Cecere, Giulio Latini, and Paolo Quintili contextualizing Coletti's practice within the field of Mediterranean studies, as well as providing its possible intersection with anthropology, philosophy, and media studies.

Keywords: Dario Coletti, Carnival of Barbagia, anthropology, philosophy, media studies

For a photographer, collecting traces means isolating signs and finding a key that reveals their innermost meanings. When one takes on this role, one begins to move into a universe of archetypes, figures of synthesis that spring from unfathomable dimensions. The infinite Universe is contained in everyone's mind and is made up of the same matter of which we are all composed. One must become a Shaman, use his tools, roll dice made of animal bones and, through their combination, predict.¹

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1 “Per un fotografo raccogliere tracce consiste nell'isolare i segni e trovare una chiave di lettura che ne sveli i significati più reconditi. Quando si assume questo ruolo, ci si comincia a muovere in un universo di archetipi, figure di sintesi che scaturiscono da dimensioni insondabili. L'Universo infinito è contenuto nella mente di ognuno ed è formato dalla stessa materia di cui noi tutti siamo composti. Bisogna farsi Sciamano. Usare i suoi strumenti. Lanciare dadi di ossa di animali e attraverso la loro combinazione, prevedere”. Dario Coletti, *Il fotografo e lo scia-*

Several outcomes of the discipline of visual anthropology witness how approaches that foster a preeminent role of subjectivity within the scientific narration have become more and more encouraged through the years.² As an inner vision turns out to be increasingly more connected with an outer one, authors expressing themselves through writing, photography, or through the polymorphic codes of contemporary arts, seem to have overcome the rigid perspective of aseptic documentation, participating through a subjective contribution.³ But how do we correctly get to read and interpret such complex semiotics, where ethnographic outcomes and artistic exigencies are so strictly intertwined? Trying to untangle such complexities requires the commitment of new players, which have not normally been involved with the debate, as to accompany the ethnographic theory with critical reading of the uniqueness of the representational methods of the author. Here, a critical-curatorial approach seems to gradually find its space, as testified by an exponential process of hybridization between the artistic and ethnographic disciplines.⁴ In recent years, several examples substantiate the virtue of such a bond. Among the examples of the recent Italian curatorial landscape, it is indeed worth mentioning the 2017 Italian Pavillion at Venice Biennale, curated by Cecilia Alemani, which included works by Giorgio Andreotta

mano. Dialoghi da un metro all'infinito, (Rome: Postcard Edizioni, 2013), 49. All translations are by the author of this article.

- 2 References can be found in: John Collier, Bruno Pianta, *Apprendimento dell'antropologia Visiva*, (La Ricerca Folklorica, no. 2, 1980), 5-14; Paul Hockings, Keyan G. Tomaselli, Jay Ruby, David MacDougall, Drid Williams, Albert Pi-ette, Maureen T. Schwarz & Silvio Carta (2014) *Where Is the Theory in Visual Anthropology?*, *Visual Anthropology*, 27:5, 436-456; Shuchi Srivastava, *Visual anthropology: Changing roles in fieldwork*, *International Journal of Modern Anthropology / Vol. 2 No. 17* (2022).
- 3 Relevant case studies can be found in: Lydia Nakashima Degarrod, *Collaborative art and the emergence and development of ethnographic knowledge and empathy*, (*Critical Arts*, 2016): 30:3, 322-340; Jade Gibson, *Visual ethnographies of displacement and violence: land(escapes) in artists' works at Thupelo Artists' Workshop, Wellington, South Africa, 2012*, (*Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies*, 2013), 27:5, 531-552. Gibson (2013; 532) furthermore offers a broad bibliographic reconstruction of the main theoretical outcomes on the topic.
- 4 See: James Clifford, George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, (University of California Press, 2010, 2nd ed.); Arnd Schneider, Christopher Wright (ed.), *Between Art and Anthropology: Contemporary Ethnographic Practice*, (Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2010); Marcus Georges E., *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, (University of California Press, 1995); Rutten, Kris, van Dienderen, An, and Soetaert, Ronald, *Revisiting the ethnographic turn in contemporary art*, (*Critical Arts*, 2013), 27:5, 459-473.

Calò, Roberto Cuoghi and Adelita Husni-Bey and which was named after one of the main writings by Ernesto de Martino, *Il Mondo Magico*.⁵ Evoking de Martino's key writing, the exhibition aligns itself with an Italian anthropological – and visual-anthropological – tradition, proving how artistic practices can be informed by theoretical anthropological grounds. These are thus lenses to actualize often misinterpreted notions, such as the one about magic. With a closer look at the Italian scene, one can see how anthropological issues are confronted by artists using an ample range of media. However, it is possible to accentuate how photography,⁶ as well as video-making and writing, maintained their fundamental role through time. In this context, it seems urgent today to update the general knowledge of the Italian photographic scene through the analysis of the body of work of its relevant interpreters.

Giving up all claims on possible objectivity of the visual anthropological practice, the research of the Italian photographer Dario Coletti (b. Rome, 1959) has been evolving in the name of a deep sense of belonging and authorial responsibility regarding the territory he chose as the main field of his investigation: Sardinia. His first encounter with the island dates to 1993, on a reportage on the working conditions of the Sulcis-Iglesiente's miners at that time. During his first trip to the island, Coletti accidentally stopped in the small city of Ottana, in the heart of Sardinia, in the area known as Barbagia, one of the most important spots for the carnival tradition of the region. There, Dario Coletti attended the Barbagia's Carnival for the first time. That was a point of no return regarding his continuous pilgrimage to Sardinia.⁷

I believe that the understanding of happenings comes primarily through a casual revelation. A powerful force that has kept me on the Island these many years, an intuition, the fascination generated by a hidden treasure. An intimate, deep, and ancient relationship between objects and subjects, an erotic feeling that took shape in a Carnival thirty years ago. It was in that time and place that I began to stay.⁸

5 Cecilia Alemani (ed.), *Il Mondo Magico*, (Marsilio, 2017).

6 A useful reference here is: Sarah Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography*, (SAGE Publications, 2010, 2nd ed.).

7 It is important to preface that the photographer never actually moved to Sardinia but kept travelling back and forth from Rome to Sardinia throughout the years.

8 “Credo che la comprensione degli accadimenti avvenga soprattutto attraverso una rivelazione casuale. Una forza potente che mi ha trattenuto sull'Isola in questi anni, un'intuizione, il fascino generato da un tesoro nascosto. Un rapporto intimo, profondo e antico tra gli oggetti e i soggetti, un sentimento erotico che ha preso forma in un Carnevale di trenta anni fa. È in quel tempo e in quel luogo che ho

On the thirtieth anniversary of this event, Coletti's massive photographic body of work has become a unique example of aesthetic quality and commitment and a witness of the liveliest traditions of the Mediterranean area. These years of activity in the region appear now as a grand effort of documentation, aimed not only at telling stories to keep a vivid trace of remote traditions and intangible heritage but also to testify to a human condition that manifested itself in several ways, where the entity of the single being could access a sacred condition through a potential of community-building.⁹

The series *Mana. Cronache dal carnevale barbaricino*, selected for the main focus of this article, is composed of almost completely unpublished pictures that resurfaced from Coletti's archive, dating from 1995 to 2015, presenting itself as an extensive documentation of Barbagia's Carnival. Through the process of recovery of discarded images, the author places himself in a dialectic position with his oeuvre, re-combining images in which time appears out of joint, and where the chronological order is defeated in favor of an inner one. The series has been at the center of a collaboration between Dario Coletti and the collective Filosofia in Movimento, and in particular with Antonio Cecere, Giulio Latini, and Paolo Quintili, professors at the Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata. The narratives of these three scholars are in the appendix of this article, in order to provide a philosophical and anthropological framework, deepening the connections between the latter and the wider research path of Coletti. Before diving into an analysis of *Mana*, a premise on Coletti's work in Sardinia, as well as a contextualization of his work within the context of the Italian visual anthropology tradition, seem to be a must.

The Art of Dario Coletti

Dario Coletti's first assignment in Sardinia was linked to a research project on the working condition of the miners. Chronologically, this encounter coincides with the discovery of the Carnival, though we can notice how, in the first years of activity of the photographer, the Carnival has a secondary

cominciato a stare". Dario Coletti, *Mana. Cronache dal carnevale barbaricino 1995-2015*, unpublished (2021), 26.

9 This topic has been widely discussed in Antonio Cecere, *Gazing at the Mediterranean. Visual Anthropology and Photographic research in the Work of Dario Coletti*, appendix (2021). Cecere's contribution appears particularly relevant in contextualizing this process of community-building as a key pattern of a so-called Mediterranean feeling.

role to him, while the reportage on the miners has a primary relevance. The outcomes of this research are documented in two important publications of the '90s, *Terr'e Miniera* (1993)¹⁰ and *Gente di Miniera* (1999).¹¹ According to the photographic historian and researcher Manuela Fugenzi,¹² one could detect the main difference between these two publications through an analysis of their intents: whereas *Terr'e Miniera* was rather aimed at reporting the events of that time, in *Gente di Miniera* we can already see how the focus becomes rather “a dialogue on memory, on experience, the cultural heritage reflected on the faces and on the landscape, protagonists of his photographic portraits.”¹³

A crucial shift in Coletti's work can be found in the photographs gathered in the publication *Okeanos & Hades. Chronicles from Sardinia* (2011), where the juxtaposition of images of the miners and those of the fishermen of Sulcis-Iglesiente highlights an existential condition. In these images, the statuary bodies and figures stand like mythological apparitions, testifying to a condition of transcendence that pertains to individuals who extend their bodily finitude in a sense of deep belonging with the *other*, fostering ways of existing and operating in communities. Coletti explicits this feeling throughout the written descriptions of the volume:

Large machines are used in coal mines to excavate the face, cutting through the crumbly wall and transporting the material on giant belts. Even with such a meager description, it is not difficult to imagine what hazards those working underground are exposed to, and what feelings of solidarity and deep friendship can develop among miners during a work shift, in a contradictory atmosphere characterized as it is by places that are dusty and damp, hot and cold, silent and deafening.¹⁴

Such an existential condition is connected with the one experienced by the communities of fishermen, whose working practice takes the name of

10 Dario Coletti, *Terr'e miniera*, (Associazione minatori iglesienti, 1993).

11 Dario Coletti, *Gente di miniera*, (Nuoro: Poliedro, 1999).

12 Manuela Fugenzi, afterword of Dario Coletti, *Okeanos & Hades. Cronicles from Sardinia*, (Rome: Postcart, 2011).

13 Fugenzi (2011).

14 “Nelle miniere di carbone per scavare il fronte si utilizzano grandi macchinari che tagliano la parete friabile e trasportano il materiale su dei giganteschi nastri. Anche con tale scarna descrizione non è difficile immaginare a quali rischi è esposto chi lavora nel sottosuolo, e quali sentimenti di solidarietà e profonda amicizia possano instaurarsi tra i minatori durante un turno di lavoro, in un'atmosfera contraddittoria caratterizzata come è da luoghi polverosi e umidi, caldi e freddi, silenziosi e assordanti”. Dario Coletti, *Okeanos & Hades. Cronicles from Sardinia*, (Rome: Postcart, 2011).

mattanza – literally ‘slaughter’. Here, Coletti states: “*Mattanza* is a metaphor for coexistence, for modes of settlement, for living in a territory. It can be considered an economic activity for entrepreneurs, a seasonal commitment for crews, a blood feast, the waiting for the “village” to consume the fish caught in its waters.”¹⁵ Men’s and women’s bodies and souls, shaped by fatigue and risk, become the expression of a thousand-year-old knowledge which manifests itself as an apparition of the sacred. Their existences flow in a deep inextricable connection with nature, harmonically with its rhythms and threats. Such a profound respect and identification become the condition to access transcendence.

But the strongest suggestion remains the eleventh canto of the *Odyssey* [...] I realize only in retrospect that I experienced in the performance of my photographic work the same sequence as in this canto: the impediments of a fickle sea are the forces of Ocean, the slaughter equals sacrifice, the village’s waiting for the fruit of the catch is the feast of blood is the sharing of the meal of the sailors of the hero of Ithaca, Hades with its shadows and stories, and the descent into the mining underground, where men live suspended within a world apart.¹⁶

The significance of human relations become the cornerstone around which Coletti built a complex and rhizomatic representation where human beings manage to get closer to divinity thanks to their closeness to nature and to each other, as suggested by the very title of the book *Okeanos and Hades*. This precise concept echoes throughout the whole body of work of Coletti, from the documentary period to the recent experimentations with collage and digital manipulations,¹⁷ as well as in his insightful writings.¹⁸

15 Coletti (2011).

16 “Ma la suggestione più forte rimane l’undicesimo canto dell’Odissea [...] Mi rendo conto solo a posteriori di aver vissuto nello svolgimento del mio lavoro fotografico la stessa sequenza di questo canto: gli impedimenti di un mare bizzoso sono le forze di Oceano, la *mattanza* uguale sacrificio, l’attesa del frutto del pescato da parte del villaggio è la festa di sangue è la condivisione del pasto dei marinai dell’eroe di Itaca, l’Ade con le sue ombre e le sue storie e la discesa nel sottosuolo minerario, dove gli uomini vivono sospesi all’interno di un mondo a parte”. Ibid.

17 Among the manipulated-images-based works, where the role of the sacred keeps being crucial, it is worth pointing out *Prometeo. God inside me* (2016), accessible through the artists’ website: https://www.dariocoletti.com/prometeo_god_inside_me-g2363 (accessed April 15, 2023).

18 Coletti (2013). Structured as a diary which gathers writings from different journeys in a non-chronological order, this book remains one of the main sources to delve into the photographer’s practice.

As the anthropologist Francesco Faeta points out, the ability of the photographer to build connections between different elements allows him to create new narrations. His images manage to “relate things to each other, so as to penetrate into their deeper meaning, just scratching the surface.”¹⁹ Faeta’s text contextualizes Coletti’s practice within the wide context of the tradition of documentary photography in Sardinia. In his essay, he argues against the stereotyped representation of the island and of the Mediterranean in general.²⁰ In fact, Faeta interprets the common naive and idyllic vision of the Mediterranean as the result of the eradication of its violent and conflicted past, highlighting how such an inappropriate representation played an important role in the process of “mystification and visual alteration, exoticization and removal.”²¹ Placing Coletti in the tradition of Italian documentary photography, and in particular within the field of the visual narration of Sardinia, Faeta’s recognition refers back to a relevant precedent of the history of visual anthropology of the island: the Sardinian-born photographer Franco Pinna.²² This reference gives us the chance to deepen one of the main collaborative experiences of Italian ethnographic recent history, the one between Franco Pinna and Ernesto de Martino, which dates back to 1952 and was facilitated by the anthropologist Franco Cagnetta, a relevant figure in the field of anthropology.²³ Though far from being a harmonious relationship, the collaboration between the two brought an undeniable shift in both professional paths. The contamination of a scientific approach with a journalistic one²⁴ allowed for the birth of a unique and hybrid methodology, testified by the incredible array of images and texts that originated from their collaboration. They managed to report the actual conditions of existence of the rural societies of southern Italy in the second half of the 20th century, while the economic boom was increasingly shaping the features of the cities of the time.²⁵ Researcher and pho-

19 Francesco Faeta, *Narrare per immagini*, in *Ispantos*, Dario Coletti (Sassari: Soter Editrice, 2006), 103.

20 On this topic, also consult: Angela Bianca Saponari, *L’“iconizzazione” del Sud. Fotogiornalismo e cinema documentario*, (Cinergie – Il cinema e le altre arti, n.12, 2017).

21 Ibid.

22 A reference to the great visual ethnographic work led by Pinna in Sardinia can be found in: Giuseppe Pinna, *Franco Pinna, L’Isola del Rimorso. Fotografie in Sardegna 1953-1967*, (Nuoro: Imago Multimedia, 2004).

23 Marco Andreani, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, (Rome: Treccani, volume 83, 2015).

24 Ibid.

25 Among the main outcomes of the collaboration between de Martino and Pinna, see: Ernesto de Martino, *Sud e Magia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1959) and Ernesto de

tographer Giuliana Minghelli explains as follows Pinna's contribution to the expeditions to southern Italy in the research on the ritual of mourning:

Photography's input into de Martino's theorization is crucial. By isolating iconic gestural units, the camera reveals the structural organization of the lament according to a modular, repeatable sequence of gestures – the hands raised to the head; the loosening of the hair; the rhythmic motion of the body – a basic grammar of the technique of mourning handed down from time immemorial in the Mediterranean basin [...].²⁶

Such a relevant reciprocity is echoed undoubtedly in Pinna's reportages in Sardinia, where he started to work after the collaboration with de Martino,²⁷ and where he "reprised the mythical image of an archaic Sardinia fiercely anchored in its traditions, made up of ancient customs and rituals, shepherds and peasants, pristine landscapes, and remnants of millennia-old civilizations."²⁸

The persistence of these presences in Coletti's work allows us to retrace common and divergent paths, which are evident in the series *Mana* and which gathers 20 years of images of the Sardinian Carnival, with a specific focus on the territory of Barbagia. What one finds here is one of the most articulated and lively Carnival tradition in the Italian Mediterranean area, also documented in Pinna's Sardinian reportages.²⁹ Barbagia's carnival shares some common features with other similar traditions in the Mediterranean basin, marked by the presence of masquerade processions, as well as equestrian rides, both accompanied with music and dances.³⁰ A symbolic ritual that enacts processes of death and rebirth, marking passages from obscurity to a celestial ascension.³¹ A wonderful description of the main masks of the Barbagia's Carnival can be found in the pages written by anthropologist and writer Bachisio Bandinu:

Martino, *La terra del rimorso. Contributo a una storia religiosa del Sud* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1961).

26 Giuliana Minighelli, *Icons of remorse: Photography, anthropology and the era-
sure of history in 1950s Italy*, in *Modern Italy*, (London: Taylor & Francis, 2016).

27 Andreani (2015).

28 Ibid.

29 Pinna G, (2004).

30 Further references can be found in Sebastiano Mannia, *Masks and Carnivals in Contemporary Sardinia*, (VESTNIK ANTROPOLOGII, 4, 2020) 29-44. Additional references to the complex universe of Italian folkloristic traditions can be found in Annamaria Rivera, *Il mago, il santo, la morte, la festa: forme religiose nella cultura popolare* (Edizioni Dedalo, 1988).

31 Mannia (2020)

Coming from a prehistoric time the Mamuthones appear in the streets of the village of Mamoiada amidst enchantment and disturbance. Possessed by a spirit they speak the language of an incomprehensible dance; there is no speech, no song. There is no theater, no scene. The dance is an ethnological dream [...] A man has lost his identity and becomes a bovine animal. Celebration of an archaic agrarian rite or fear of metamorphosis into an animal? Possession of the bull god or anguish of disappearance? [...] There is no performance. The *mamutthone* is neither individual nor type. It is neither character nor actor. The ritual is the narration of an ancestral experience.³²

The Barbagia's Carnival seems to incorporate the co-existence and confusion of divine forces. This is highlighted in the description offered by Gianluigi Paffi, director of Museo delle Maschere Mediterranee, Mamoiada:

It is not known exactly when the pagan festival of midwinter fires began to be attended by men masquerading as animals; certainly, both celebrations were intrinsically linked to death and rebirth, so much so that originally men probably danced around the fire laden with bones rather than cowbells. Fire and death, a combination that in the spirituality of the Sardinians became a source of renewal through the liberating ritual of *su harrasegare*, the feast of the opposite, based on the reversal of the man/beast role, of souls turned into beasts. On the whole, particularly during the festival dedicated to Sant'Antoni 'e *su ohu*, a purifying rite is still staged today based on fire, on the cyclic harmony between life, death, and rebirth, evil and good, the world below and the world above, between the animal and human worlds, where the mask indicates the passage and metamorphosis from an ordinary, everyday state to a mythical one.³³

32 "Provenienti da un tempo preistorico i Mamuthones appaiono nelle strade del paese di Mamoiada tra incantesimo e turbamento. Posseduti da uno spirito parlano il linguaggio di una danza incomprensibile, non c'è parola, non c'è canto. [...] Un uomo ha perduto la sua identità e diventa animale bovino. Celebrazione di un arcaico rito agrario o paura della metamorfosi in animale? Possessione del dio Toro o angoscia di sparizione? [...] Non c'è rappresentazione. Il mamutthone non è individuo né tipo. Non è personaggio né attore. Il rito è narrazione di un'esperienza ancestrale." Bachisio Bandinu, *La maschera nella logica di un destino*, in *Ammentos. Feste popolari in Sardegna*, (Ex Mà, 1997).

33 "Non si sa esattamente quando la festa pagana dei fuochi di metà inverno cominciò a essere frequentata dagli uomini mascherati come animali; di certo, entrambe le celebrazioni erano intrinsecamente legate alla morte e alla rinascita, tanto che in origine gli uomini probabilmente danzavano intorno al fuoco carichi di ossa e non di campanacci. Fuoco e morte, un binomio che nella spiritualità dei sardi divenne fonte di rinnovamento attraverso il rito liberatorio *de su harrasegare*, la festa del contrario, basata sull'inversione del ruolo uomo/bestia, di anime trasformate in bestie. Nel complesso, in particolare durante la festa dedicata a Sant'Antoni 'e *su ohu*, ancora oggi si mette in scena un rito purificatorio basato sul fuoco, sull'armonia ciclica tra vita, morte e rinascita, il male e il bene, il mondo di sotto e il mondo

Contributions by Cecere, Latini and Quintili

In the appendix of the present article, Paolo Quintili repositions the role of this energy in Dario Coletti's work: "the nume-*mana*, or however else this anthropological concept is allowed to be named, is thus to be related to *force*, the chthonic force, the natural energy of the earthly being that, at the same time, transcends the actual experience of the world."³⁴ This seems undoubtedly the main trigger driving Coletti's hand and camera. Coletti's approach, in fact, does not allow for detachment but asks for a conscious presence and to become taken by the frenetic spirit that invades the crowd, almost reaching an ecstatic state.³⁵ This conception recalls Mikhail Bakhtin when affirms that "Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people."³⁶ While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. The procession of masquerades, as embodiments of ancestral forces, moves through the streets of Gavoi, Ottana, Lula, Mamoiada, and other remote centers of rural Sardinia. The photographer is *among* them and can see and testify to their appearance only by *being with* them. The very notion of Sacred, as highlighted on a number of occasions in the contextualization of Coletti's work, finds here its turning point, becoming a driving force that connects the experience of the photographer to the ones of participants in the sacred rite.

As intended by the photographer, the notion of the Sacred seems to resemble Umberto Galimberti's conception, with its original meaning of "separated,"³⁷ which at the same time, becomes the place for a possi-

di sopra, tra il mondo animale e quello umano, dove la maschera facciale indica il passaggio e la metamorfosi da uno stato quotidiano e ordinario a uno mitico". Gianluigi Paffi, *Mascherarsi è un destino*, unpublished (2021).

34 "Il nume-*mana*, o in quant'altre maniere si lascia dire questo concetto antropologico, è da rapportare dunque alla *forza*, la forza ctonia, l'energia naturale dell'essere terrestre che, al tempo stesso, trascende l'esperienza attuale del mondo." Paolo Quintili, *Philosophy of the symbolic bodies. A Contemporary Mana*, appendix (2021).

35 Coletti, 2013.

36 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Iswolsky H. (Indiana University Press, 1984). Further references to the confrontation between Bakhtin and Pierre Bourdieu's conception of the "carnavalesque" can be found in Michael Grenfell, *Bakhtin, Bourdieu and the aesthetics of the carnivalesque*, Axon: Creative Explorations, Capsule 2 (February 2018).

37 *Umberto Galimberti: sacro e ragione, da Edipo agli anni 2000*. Filmed November 18 at the Elfo Puccini Theatre, Milan, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3iUPY10PaA&ab_channel=FeltrinelliEditore

ble reunion of sacred and obscure forces that give birth to a process of transcendence. Redemption happens through a common participation in ritual practice. Such a process seems to be mirrored in the subjectiveness of perception:

I felt as if from being a rational man I had transformed in a moment into a worshipper of those intestine dark forces that the victory of a Manichean thinking had relegated to the realm of the evil, beyond the borders of humanity. In that image, I found that energy that throughout my life inspired moments of instinct, those related to carnal love, to furious rebellion over an imposed chain, over a suffered injustice. An image was educating me to love a part of man that is, in virtuous narratives, treated as an evil, destructive, negative entity. In my mind, I read: I am the dark, I am the bright, I am the contradiction, I am the man.³⁸

As detectable from the various subjects that animate Coletti's body of work, one can see how the reportage's intent of documenting an ancient tradition, rooted into the intangible heritage of the island, is only one of the many motivations of his work. The research of an ancient human attitude which, at the time of "superfetation of images with which our everyday life is burdened,"³⁹ allows him to reconnect to a sense of wonder that seems to be elicited by the experience of the natural phenomena as well as by the innate sense of solidarity among humans.

One can see that the repetition of the pilgrimage and of the photographic act for thirty years becomes itself part of the construction of a radical connection with the sacred. The calling of Sardinia acts as a driving force moves and displaces the photographer, as if he were connected to the cyclic nature of the Carnival itself. It is interesting to backtrack such a speculation in the text written by researcher Pier Gavino Sedda:

'Su carrasecare boled'attu!,' Carnival must be done!, we often say in Gavoi. It is not easy to find a precise meaning or meanings of this "act", this trag-

38 "Mi sentivo come se da uomo razionale mi fossi trasformato in un attimo in un adoratore di quelle forze intestine, oscure che la vittoria di un pensiero manicheo aveva relegato nell'ambito del maligno oltre i confini dell'umanità. In quella immagine trovavo quell'energia che durante la mia vita ha ispirato i momenti d'istinto, quelli legati all'amore carnale, alla ribellione furiosa per una catena imposta, per un torto subito. Un'immagine mi stava educando ad amare una parte dell'uomo che viene, nei racconti virtuosi, trattata alla stregua di un'entità maligna, distruttrice, negativa. Nella mia mente ho letto: io sono l'oscuro, io sono il luminoso, io sono la contraddizione, io sono l'uomo". Gaia Bobò, *Dario Coletti, vent'anni di fotografia tra l'altro e l'invisibile*, in *exibart*, March 24, (2021).

39 Quintili (2021).

edy. Carnival as repetition, imitation of acts, of gestures, of a passion; but in truth it is the story of a continuous change. [...] Dario Coletti also seems to find himself, participating in this dream, immersing himself in these atmospheres. His merit is to create images that seem as evocative as the sound of drums; images that tell us about an experience, a feeling, a unique instant, a passion where communication is important. A kind of “photographic idealism,” which, however, starts from a good knowledge of Gavoi and its carnival, a work with an image that is almost mystical in nature, but at the same time thoughtful and seems deeply religious.⁴⁰

Such “religiousness” and “mystical” quality of the images come from a conception of photography as expression of spirituality, that is expressed from an obsessive presence, a real devotion that needs to be continuously reiterated. Such a necessity is also reflected in specific compositional and technical choices, analyzed by Giulio Latini:

A writing of light, that of Coletti’s individuating chamber, capable of spelling out real anthropological-visual captures precisely by virtue of a deep relational internality to the religious dramaturgy that unravels along the segments of space crossed and reflected. An internality with an exquisitely pathetic testimonial coloring since Coletti’s gaze, in Ricoeur’s words, “has seen, heard, felt [...] in short, it has been “impressed”, struck, shocked, wounded, in any case, reached and touched by the fact. What his saying conveys is something of that being-impressed by (Ricoeur, 2004).⁴¹

Giulio Latini posits on the overall structure of the images, where “exact compositional weighing, etched in a black and white of powerful contrasts, extended up to the maximum range possibilities, in a rarefied expressive quadrant, of suspended fluctuation that plays productively with “blurring”

40 “Su carrasacare boled’attu!” Il carnevale va fatto!, diciamo spesso a Gavoi. Non è facile trovare un significato o i significati precisi di questo “atto”, di questa tragedia. Carnevale come ripetizione, imitazione di atti, di gesti, di una passione; ma in realtà è la storia di un continuo cambiamento [...] Anche Dario Coletti sembra ritrovarsi, partecipando a questo sogno, immergendosi in queste atmosfere. Il suo merito è quello di creare immagini che sembrano evocative così come il suono dei tamburi; immagini che ci dicono di un’esperienza, di un sentimento, di un istante unico, di una passione dove è importante il comunicare. Una sorta di “idealismo fotografico”, che però parte dalla buona conoscenza di Gavoi e del suo carnevale, un lavoro con l’immagine quasi di tipo mistico, ma allo stesso tempo meditato e che sembra profondamente religioso.” Pier Gavino Sedda, *Liberannosdomine!*, unpublished (2022).

41 Giulio Latini, *Shadows of the Sacred. Around the Photographic Figuration of Dario Coletti*, appendix, (2021).

and with an undulating spacing of focus of the physiognomies and postures of the subjects.”⁴² Such postures, or rather such presences, become the very center of the construction of the images. The depicted bodies are, at the same time, documents, and icons. Coletti reports their presences maintaining a mysterious aura around their stories, inviting us to go beyond the specificity of what we see.

It is, in conclusion, a profound commitment to human dignity that seems to trigger the sense of sacred that pervades Coletti’s work. It is a practice made of pauses, gaps, departures, returns, and explorations, as well as from the actual community that the photographer managed to build throughout the years around his practice. Photography is intended here as a means of relationship-building, a practice of care that opposes its slow natural rhythms to the frenetic ones of our days. As a result of such a sedimentation, the extensive photographic work by Dario Coletti, mostly still unpublished, seems today particularly relevant to be re-positioned and re-considered.

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42 “Una scrittura di luce, quella della camera individuante di Coletti, capace di sillabare vere e proprie captazioni antropologico-visive proprio in virtù di una profonda internità relazionale alla drammaturgia religiosa che si dipana lungo i segmenti di spazio attraversati e riflessi. Un’internità dalla coloritura testimoniale squisitamente patica poiché lo sguardo di Coletti, per dirla con le parole di Ricoeur: “ha visto, sentito, provato [...] insomma è stato “impressionato”, colpito, scioccato, ferito, in ogni caso raggiunto e toccato dal fatto. Ciò che il suo dire trasmette è qualcosa di quell’essere-impressionato da”. Ibid.

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