Representing the Past.
Social Anthropology and History of Art in a Holy Drama in Northern Italy

Foreword

In this seminar, I would like to briefly illustrate, also using some images, the study I am working on in Cerveno, a small valley town in the Italian Alps. This involves, as is customary in

cultural and social anthropology, a phase of fieldwork, which began with my first visits in March 2011 and is still in progress. This will culminate in the observation of a religious representation, which I will discuss later, on May 20 2012. My fieldwork also involved an exploration of the local civil and religious archives, which was obviously crucial in understanding the phenomenon being studied, as well as raising a whole range of as yet unanswered questions for the ethnographer. There is also a phase of study linked to a precise theoretical and methodological problem, taking place in New York with the precious contribution of the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies at Columbia University which, in the persons of its Director, David Freedberg, I would like to thank. I am grateful for the generosity and warmth of his hospitality, and for the precious information I am acquiring in my stay here. Obviously today I will be giving you merely, in a somewhat provisional form, my first impressions of a research project that promises to be extremely long and difficult. I would thus like to ask you to be so kind as to forgive the somewhat sketchy nature of my considerations.

But allow me to introduce my work, starting with the village on which it focuses.

The village

Cerveno, as I mentioned, situated in the Val Camonica, in the Italian province of Brescia, 75 km away, is a village of 659 inhabitants (2010 figures), lying at 500 metres above sea level. The town layout is still austere and medieval, albeit with new houses and facilities, and is hemmed in by high mountains. Through the village runs a steep, noisy, fast-flowing brook. In even quite a recent past this was above all a rural farming community, but today only marginal, subsistence farming remains, along with a small number of innovative companies, some in the field of agriculture, trying to make a mark in the medium-sized local market. The extraction and initial processing of iron from deposits found in the surrounding area, which had given the town some limited wealth up until the 18th century, has long been abandoned, and its importance as a point on the road that still leads towards the Alpine passes and Austria, has also diminished. Many local inhabitants work in the service industry. Overall, the village suffers from the problems of all towns situated in areas of late development, in both the North and South of Italy, with marked difficulties for the young. Youth unemployment is in fact high, and many young people have moved away, or are considering doing so, especially towards Milan or towns abroad. These difficulties, moreover shared by the other generational groups, have not however, fortunately, corresponded with the adoption of reactionary, extremist political positions, based on marked xenophobia and a chauvinistic sense of identity, as often happens in the Alpine valleys, where the Northern League (Lega Nord) party has given a distorted solution to the empty streets, and to the lack of prospects and social cohesion found in the outlying villages and unpopulated valleys. The well-run village appears clean, sleepy and closed within itself. The local needs for identity seem to be channelled into the relatively contained promotion of the nearby rock drawings of Val Camonica, the object of extensive study by scholars and a great tourist attraction; a jealously-guarded museum of popular traditions, opened in 2005 as a result of the commitment of a small group of elderly farmers and craftsmen, which attracts limited numbers of visitors, mainly from the surrounding area and its schools; and above all, the sanctuary of the *Via Crucis* and its related popular event, which I have already mentioned, locally known as *Santa Crus de Shervè*.

What is this cultural and social event that takes us to Cerveno, and what is its relevance from the point of view of the theoretical approach I intend to pursue? In order to understand this, we need to take a step back and reconstruct, albeit sketchily, the complex circumstances that lead to the contemporary events, more strictly relevant to anthropological study.

Something about the past

Leonardo from Porto Maurizio (1676-1751), a tireless preacher in the odour of sanctity who had chosen the Franciscan austerity of the so-called *Riformella*, a branch of reformed Friars Minor, founded in 1662 by Bonaventura from Barcellona, travelled far and wide, during the first half of the 18th century (as is documented by a large number of historiographical sources), in northern Italy, particularly along the Alps. He thus contributed to laying the foundations, within the local communities where he performed his catechesis, for the construction of no fewer than 572 *Viae Crucis*, *Viae Dolorosae* or *Sacri Monti*, as part of acts of penitence already begun throughout the Italian peninsula in the early 17th century, also in function of the Counter-Reformation. Leonardo's oratory followed the example of Paolo Segneri, the famous inventor of the missions of evangelization, particularly in southern Italy, who was responsible for reintroducing popular and popularizing 17th-century religious drama, and for spreading drama linked to the Passion, both in terms of its theatrical expression, and processions (the two forms, however, were once much more closely related than today as manifestations of popular religion). Also Leonardo, according to contemporary chroniclers, was able to attract thousands of people, and his performances had both ritual and pragmatic traits. In addition to guidance and confessions, Leonardo stressed the importance of certain acts of popular devotion aimed at strengthening catechesis: the daily recital of simple short prayers and of the Rosary, the devotion to the name of Jesus, Eucharistic piety, frequent Communion, joining brotherhoods, basic religious education and, above all, the pious exercise of the *Via Crucis*, which transformed the devotion to the passion of Christ, practised only in Franciscan churches, into a prayer shared by the whole Catholic world, especially in the period of Lent[1]. Leonardo's fervour however encountered, also within the church, difficulties and incomprehension, so much so that only after 22 years of insisting on the beneficial effects of this *devotio* did he obtain permission to set up a *Via Crucis* also in non-Franciscan churches.

Historians have dwelt at length on the complex process of re-evangelization that affected the whole of Europe that had not been touched, or barely, by the influence of the Protestant Reformation. In this perspective, Italy, and particularly rural Italy, has been subject to special attention for its strategic importance in the Catholic context. It is well-known that Italian figurative art (but also theatre, music, and some literature), from the late 16th century onwards was closely related to the strategies and tactics of the Counter-Reformation. The *Sacri Monti*, complex architectural, pictorial and sculptural groups, which combine an extraordinary (and romantically striking) natural environment with the celebration of the passion of Christ and which are often linked to burial and funeral practices, are part of this context, and represent one of the tools used in the staging and strategy of amazement and marvel, to which the Catholic Church often entrusted its

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[1] For an outline of Leonardo's thought, as it transpires from his writings, see the *Dilucidazione delle indulgenze concesse dai sommi pontefici a tutte le Via Crucis erette dai frati minori*, Lucca, 1715; the *Manuale sacro, ovvero Raccolta di varie devozioni proprie di una religiosa che aspira alla perfezione*, Roma, 1734; the *Discorso mistico-morale*, the *Direttorio della confessione generale* and *Il tesoro nascosto, ovvero Pregi ed eccellenze della S. Messa*, all printed in Rome in 1737; and the *Via sacra spianata e illuminata*, Roma-Lucca 1748. The vast *corpus* of Leonardo's manuscripts was published after his death in the *Collezione completa delle opere*, Roma, 1853-54 (with French translation, Paris-Tournai, 1858-60), and in the *Opere complete*, Venezia, 1868-69. On Leonardo, also see, in addition to the volume of the *Bibliotheca sanctorum*, VII, coll. 1208-1221, *sub voce*, the studies by G. da Roma, *Soavità di spirito di s. Leonardo. Manifestata in 86 sue lettere*, Roma, 1872; *Manuale della vita divota di san leonardo di Porto Maurizio. Coll'aggiunta dei proponimenti e della Via Crucis del medesimo Santo*; Firenze, Scuola tipografica Salesiana, 1903: the three volumes, edited by B. Innocenti, *Prediche e lettere inedite*, Grottaferrata, 1915; *Operette e lettere inedite*, Arezzo 1925; and *Prediche delle missioni con l'aggiunta di necrologie, lettere e documenti inediti*, ibid., 1929.

fortunes in the period in question. Although fairly well-known in the fields of History of Art and the History of Christianity, they have been entirely neglected by scholars of cultural and social Anthropology. And the *Sacri Monti*, in turn, served to stress and emphasize that culminating scene, linked to the death of Christ, which had already been codified, in a Catholic scope, through an extensive figurative tradition encompassing both important and minor artists. Examples include works such as the "*Grief of the Maries*" by Niccolò dell'Arca, the "*Lamentation over body of Christ*" by Guido Mazzoni, or the work by Romanino in Val Camonica.

Leonardo's heartfelt sermons, his advice to seek penitence and a virtuous life, mediated through the local church authorities, and taken up by a large group of imitators and followers, led to a desire in the small community of Cerveno to build a Via Crucis for the redemption of its souls, in a mountain chapel on the edges of the town. This became reality thanks to the parish priest Don Andrea Boldoni from Saviore, and to Don Giovanni Gualeni. This complex enterprise, costly from an economic point of view, was made possible, according to many of the people to whom I spoke (but I also found confirmation in the archives regarding the community's economic situation in the early 18th century), by the community's relative collective wealth, achieved as a result of the extraction and working of iron mentioned above. In 1752, then, significantly one year after the death of Leonardo, the job of sculpting the 14 stations that make up the work was entrusted to Simoni (who came from the same town, according to reliable historiographical theories, as the parish priest himself). He brought his family with him and would work *in loco* until 1764, almost completing the job. Simoni was an unusual, nonconformist artist, who was also influenced by craft and popular traditions widespread in the area (such as the wooden sculptures depicting shepherds, but also by the tradition of local artists such as Pietro Ramus(1639-1682), one of the most significant wood sculptors in the second half of the 17th century in Val Camonica, and fifth child of Giovanni Battista Ramus (1613-1665), a sculptor from Edolo-Mu, or his pupils and followers, such as Giovanni Battista Zotti, Giovanni Giuseppe Piccini and Andrea Fantoni)[2].

In sculpting his statues, Simoni, as some historical sources report and as is confirmed by contemporary oral sources, used many of Cerveno's inhabitants as his models. His work, composed of 198 life-size polychrome statues in wood and gypsum, emphasizes the meanness, arrogance and cruelty of the persecutors of Christ, whilst portraying the latter and his circle of pious men and women in an understated, soft style. The Passion of Cerveno, basically, as interpreted by Simoni, far from following the religiously observant and reassuring pattern of the other *Viae Crucis* and of the other *Sacri Monti* designed by Leonardo, seems to be an almost heroicized exaltation of negative emotions and feelings rather than the performance of a good cause. The work is religiously provocative, and represents a world turned upside down, in which injustice, violence, and a gratuitous curiosity about torture and the suffering of others are magnified, while goodness and justice are annihilated and fade into the background as useless virtues. This, then, is an inverse Passion, in which the bad (who have, we should not forget, the features of the Cerveno villagers), take centre stage, while the good (Jesus, Mary, and the pious women), almost disappear, overwhelmed by the triumphant, sneering evil of the persecutors.

Although the present state of research on contemporary sources does not allow absolute confirmation, what seems to emerge through the work of the 18th century sculptor is that a close

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[2] On Simoni (the *Via Crucis* and the *Santa Crus*) see, by way of introduction, G. Testori, *Beniamino Simoni a Cerveno*, Brescia, Grafo Edizioni, 1976; T. Alabiso, *Cerveno. La santa Crus*, Comune di Cerveno, 1982; L. Tesei, G. Zerla, *La santa Crus*, Breno, 1982; R. A. Lorenzi (ed.), *Immagini. Arte, culture e poteri nell'età di Beniamino Simoni (XVIII secolo) e oltre*, Brescia, Luigi Micheletti Editore, 1983; Id., *Intorno alla Via Crucis di Cerveno*, "Appunti, Rivista del Circolo G. Ghislandi", VI, 19, 1992; O. Franzoni, E. Giorgi, G. Zerla, *La Passione di Cerveno*, Breno, 1992; F. Minervino, *Beniamino Simoni*, Milano, Mondadori-Electa, 2000; *Il popolo della santa Crus. Il laboratorio della sacra rappresentazione di Cerveno*, Brescia, Grafo Edizioni, 2005; F. Bossini (ed.), *Il legno e la Passione. Beniamino Simoni e la Via Crucis di Cerveno*, Roccafranca, Compagnia della stampa Massetti Rodella, 2009.

relationship must have been established, at the time, between this insistent representation of negativity, with its corollary of sufferance, emotion and voyeurism, and local social dynamics, with their baggage of strategies, tactics, conflicts and mediations.

Anyone, who has the slightest familiarity with the history of Italian art, above all that of the minor towns, knows how much the clients, the presence of an artist working on site in a city or town, the performance of the work, its inauguration, its daily use in everyday or feast-day contexts, and its possible alteration or destruction, were vital, and at times central elements, in local socio-political life. Extremely important power games were played out around the work of art, in front of it, and behind it. The emotion that the work of art aroused, the reactions of affection, identification, and refusal that were generated (above all when art showed the presence of the supernatural and divine) constantly set in motion political processes and were used as a powerful weapon of manipulation, as a disturbing element, as a tool for reaffirming states and roles. With artistic representation, the power it manifested and the upset it caused, people were spoken to, messages were sent, theories supported, and statements made[3].

In Loreto Aprutino, in Abruzzo, to provide just one example from the many possible, which I studied from an ethnographic point of view some years ago, we find encaustic frescoes in the church of *Santa Maria in Piano* representing the universal judgement[4], carried out, according to some historians, towards the beginning of the 15th century by an anonymous artist, in fact known as the master of the judgement of Loreto Aprutino[5]. The division into good and bad of the figures, to

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[3] On a large scale, see, D. Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago and London, Chicago University Press, 1989.

[4]This genre of painting, popular with innumerable Italian artists, from Giotto and Luca Signorelli, to Orcagna and Michelangelo, which was widespread in Abruzzo, in all likelihood originated with the transposition into images of the similes from the apocryphal text of the Shepherd of Hermas and, closer to home, of the so-called vision of Alberico da Settefrati. The vision of Alberico is purportedly the narration of a dream that the Benedictine monk had at the age of seven when in the grip of an illness, and that he had transcribed, by dictation, much later, when on the point of death, probably in 1127, by Paolo Diacono. In it, as in its painting tradition, we find elements taken from Islamic culture, probably due to the contacts that Montecassino, the Abbey where Alberico lived, had with the East, and that influenced the written version of his vision. In particular, the so-called "ponte del capello" ('bridge of the hair'), through which the souls of the purged cross the river of pitch and go to have their souls weighed, is an element taken from the Persian tradition of the Chinvat, which is also a bridge, placed over the abyss of hell at the beginning of which the angels Mithra and Rashnu weigh souls before they are allowed to cross. The vision of Paradise as a "garden of delights", as a place full of flowers and fruits, certainly also owes a debt to some suras of the Quran, thus showing an unusual marriage of elements from extremely diverse cultural environments. Apart from such philological observations, we find here a sequential relationship between forms of popular imagery as rooted in the oral stories, forms of writing and forms of iconic representation, of extreme interest and complexity, to which specific attention should be dedicated. On the cultural roots and semantic archetypes of universal judgement, see, in extensive literature, A. Di Nola, *Il passo di san Giacomo*, in "Mélanges de l'Ècole Française de Rome", tome 103, 1991, 1, pp. 217-272; A. Appiano, *Forme dell'immateriale*, Torino, SEI, 1996; C. Gizzi, *Il Ponte del capello. Elementi della tradizione islamica e della Visione di Alberico nella poesia di Dante*, Pescara, 2008. With more extensive and comprehensive references, see also J. Le Goff, *La naissance du Purgatoire*, Paris, Gallimard, 1981.

[5] There are still many uncertainties regarding the attribution of the fresco. It is thought that the so-called Maestro di Offida, who painted the frescoes in the apse of the church of Santa Maria della Rocca in the town of Offida in Marche (in the province of Ascoli Piceno) and also a cycle with Marian and Christological stories, in the third chapel on the right of Santa Maria del Piano in Loreto Aprutino, may have been directly responsible or may have delegated to one of his close assistants, also working with him at Offida, the responsibility for supervising the works of the counter-façade and then the performance of the entire vision. (C. Pasqualetti, *Per la pittura di primo Quattrocento ai confini settentrionali del Regno di Napoli: sulle tracce di una bottega itinerante tra Offida e Loreto Aprutino*, doctoral thesis, Università "Federico II",

which for centuries, rightly or wrongly, the community attributed similarities with local notables, was the source of tensions over time, which were resolved only in the early 20th century, when the faces of those who had been placed in hell were removed[6].

I feel I can say that similar feelings must have animated the social theatre of Cerveno during the years spent producing the work, and must have made an impression on the consciousness of the local people. Local people would have seen themselves transformed, day after day, into representations that on the whole gave them the characters of irascible, violent torturers and persecutors. These representations every day increasingly showed the kind of world turned upside down that usually belonged to Carnival, rather than Lent. And every day they increasingly seemed to present an inverse reality, without the profound light of Redemption. Even though this light need not illuminate the daily life of most people, however no one is authorized to deny it to anyone without important social consequences.

The unflattering reflection of the community in the *Via Crucis*, the internal lacerations that this caused, and opposition from the local and episcopal church, extremely concerned about the turn that the representation was taking and its social consequences, probably led (and the hypothesis is widely supported by the bibliographical and archive checks so far performed) to a violent conflict between Simoni and the inhabitants of Cerveno, and to a progressive refusal of the work. Simoni was forced to dramatically abandon the project, unfinished, and along with it, the town. The work would then be continued by artists of different views and temperament, without doubt more observant and more agreeable to the church hierarchy, in particular Donato and Grazioso Fantoni.

I said above that the 18th-century sources, although on most occasions reticent, mention the rifts and conflict that revolved around the production of the *Via Crucis*, even if it is difficult to understand in depth the system of collective emotions and social dialectics that unfolded, and to map their interactions, which is, as has become clear, one of the aims of my research. But the echoes of such rifts and conflict, albeit attenuated, can still be heard in the overall consideration in which Simoni's work is held today.

Something about the present

This consideration is ambivalent. On one hand the chapel of the *Via Crucis* is perceived today as an historical asset. The work characterizes the town and represents its possible entry into a tourist circuit, albeit not a very extensive one. It encourages the individual and collective reconstruction of the identity of a town threatened by depopulation and by the loss of its own recognizable physiognomy, which can be exploited on a wider regional, national or global level. Moreover, it is a work that can allow the creation of the *Cerveno brand*, also to differentiate it from, and compete with, the omnivorous Val Camonica brand represented by the famous rock drawings, studied, amongst others, by Emmanuel Anati[7]. It is also, however, a work that arouses real mistrust in the local population.

Napoli 2003). For the "Maestro del Giudizio di Loreto Aprutino" a more certain catalogue of his works is still being studied.

[6]I collected in the field, in 2004, by talking to the elderly, stories regarding the attribution of the faces of the damned of the past to disliked citizens of the time and the consequent socio-political tensions (or those which found expression through this).

[7] By way of example see, in an extensive bibliography, E. Anati, *I Camuni, alle radici della civiltà europea*, Milano, Jaca Book, 1979; Id., *Il caso Valcamonica: rapporto uomo-territorio nella dinamica della storia*, Milan, Edizioni Unicopli, 1982; for a visual ethnographic approach, see F. Roiter, *Naquane. Decouverte d'un pays et d'une civilisation*, texts by C. Roy and E. Anati, Lausanne, La Guilde du Livre, 1966.

Thus the *Via Crucis* represents the most original, the most particular, and for many the most beautiful or aesthetically valuable of the *Sacri Monti* scattered over the Alps; some linger on the peculiarity of its architectural arrangement, others on the dramatic realism of its large statues. Many connect, with greater or lesser historical precision, its existence with that of the living representation which we will examine shortly. Many affirm, I am unsure with what cognition of the facts, that the work of Simoni, and its current replica, were attentively studied by Pier Paolo Pasolini for his *Il vangelo secondo Matteo*, or by Mel Gibson for his *Passion*. Basically, there is an attempt to identify the community in the work, to express a *laudatio* with the evident task of constructing around it a complex, illustrious genealogy, skimming over or completely failing to mention, the tensions and contradictions of the past, which led to the artist not finishing the work and forced him and his family to abandon his lucrative commission and the village.

But, at the same time, some clues lead us, as mentioned, to the system of problematic suspension in which the work took shape. It is thought inadvisable for expectant mothers to visit the sanctuary during their pregnancy, or to stare in particular at the malignant expression of some faces, at the risk of miscarrying or giving birth to a deformed child. Many villagers confess that they have never been to see the work, while others go so far as to express their disappointment, still today, for the way in which the 18th-century town was represented. Someone described it to me as "a motley collection of deformed men, a diabolic view of humanity that makes you forget Jesus Christ, that certainly doesn't put us in a good light"[8]. Some characters, moreover, are particularly loathed by the community, that finds them "frankly repugnant"[9].

Certainly the *Via Crucis* lies at the heart of Cerveno and still exerts a strong, problematic tension, a tension steeped in *pathos* that can be interpreted in many different ways, as we shall see. We could say that the *Via Crucis* of Cerveno shows in a somewhat peculiar form the mechanism of cultural intimacy so effectively illustrated by Michael Herzfeld[10]. Here, perhaps adhering more to the disemic formal model (which the British scholar defines as representing "tensions codified between collective self-knowledge and collective self-representation"[11]), it displays to the outside world a compact cultural heritage, considered a source of identity, whilst allowing the community to express its differences and segmentation internally. Thus everyone praises the *Via Cruci*s when dealing with the outside world, because it is convenient to do so, whilst also claiming the privilege of having their own internally multi-faceted perspective. There is nothing embarrassing, however, in its cultural vision, only a danger for that process of asset exploitation that contemporary experience indicates as convenient, useful, and economically and socially profitable.

I have previously, on various occasions, discussed a sacred representation that takes place in the village. Let's look a little more closely at this.

To purchase indulgences, perhaps also as an act of atonement for what had been experienced as a sacrilegious act, starting from the end of the 18th century, the inhabitants of Cerveno, every

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[8] Eugenio Battisti, summarizing opinions widespread among the scholars of Simoni's *Via Crucis*, recalls in reality a possible Jansenist influence, widespread in the valley, in outlining the anti-heroic and modest representation of the figure of Christ which Simoni seems to favour. See E. Battisti, *Le incerte frontiere del conflitto*, in R. A. Lorenzi (ed.), *Immagini. Arte, culture e poteri nell'età di Beniamino Simoni (XVIII secolo) e oltre*, cit. pp. 9-17.

[9] On this topic I would like to refer to the only folkloric study, that by Italo Sordi. Cf. I. Sordi, *La Santa Croce: ideologia e forme di un rituale folklorico*, in R. A. Lorenzi (ed.), *Immagini. Arte, culture e poteri nell'età di Beniamino Simoni (XVIII secolo) e oltre*, cit. pp. 175-226.

[10] Cf. M. Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy. Social Poetics in the Nation-State*, New York, Routledge, 1997.

[11] See above all, M. Herzfeld, *It Takes One to Know One. Collective Resentment and Mutual Recognition among Greeks in Local and Global Contexts*, in R. Fardon (ed.), *Counterworks*, London-New York, Routledge, 1995, pp. 124-142.

twelve years, stage a religious representation, which involves the whole village and takes over a year to organize. The whole of the village, which is decorated and prepared, each district dealing with its own part, and the immediate surroundings, become at the same time the stage and theatre for this drama, which presents the fourteen stations of the *Via Crucis*. Slowly, over time, there became established the custom of taking inspiration from the work of Simoni, so that the clothes, styles, ornaments, attitudes and physiognomy of the actors tend to imitate, and thus bring to life the series of 18th-century statues. The event, which is run through with a dynamic, complex sentiment of revenge, that stages the strong emotions and sentiments that the artist impressed in his work, interpreting them according to a script linked to contemporary social needs, has recently become a strong emblem of local identity for the village, invaded for the occasion by thousands of visitors. Many of the inhabitants - children, adults and the elderly - take part as actors, extras, technicians or craftsmen, in the play, directed by an outside director to whom the fate of the spectacle is somewhat reluctantly delegated. But, as often happens, the expression of identity directed outwards sets in motion a process of the appropriation of responsibilities by individuals and groups that, by accessing that level, consolidate their relative position in the context of local society.

I had access to the documentation of the past editions of the event, and I had the opportunity to observe some phases of the preparation of the one soon to be staged, even if I have obviously been unable to watch it being performed. As far as I have been able to see so far, the evident or hidden consideration of Simoni's *Via Crucis* is translated into a complex system, that is concretized in the sacred representation of the present day, and that is projected, for a significant interval of time, on local social and political strategies. Apparently paradoxically, we can say that due to the strong emotional system he promoted and established, Simoni still clearly influences contemporary life in the Alpine village. In fact, local life takes a sharp turning point when the committee for the organization of the *Santa Crus* first meets and starts to work. From that moment on there is set in motion a complex process, which redefines roles and redistributes power and prestige. We see new strategies for recomposing the social body, new dialectics between generational groups and genders, new tensions between the town and the surrounding area, new hypotheses and realities of internal and external mediation, new collective and individual aspirations. It would not be going too far to say, as research stands, that social life in the Alpine village displays cyclical phases of 10 years, corresponding to the interval between two editions, which characterize both the emotional system of daily life, and the major choices of administrative and political power. Local social life is structured around the organization of the event. The event, it should be stressed, is an *Easter* one (hundreds of similar events take place in the rest of Italy, in Holy Week), shifted forwards in time, for a series of reasons linked to seasonal changes in the Alpine village, whose production system keeps the inhabitants busy in agriculture and livestock rearing until early May, and due to the organizing committees' strong need, emphasized on various occasions over time, to be independent from church control[12].

The characters that animate the sacred drama seem to adapt, in Cerveno, to a double input of loyalty/transgression, and it is this that provides the particular emotional timbre of the event. On one hand, we have the aspect most commonly dealt with in the field by ethnographers of European life, i.e. the coincidence between person (in the social context) and character (in the ritual *fictio*)[13];

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[12] It has been widely documented, in both anthropological and historical studies, that the important dates in Lent, even more than in other periods of the liturgical calendar, are in Italy an opportunity for a sometimes extremely harsh clash between the bishop's see and religious orders, and between the Church as a whole and lay confraternities. Thus clash has a significant effect on the socio-political order of various small and large towns.

[13] See, for example, C. Fabre-Vassas, *La bête singulière. Les juifs, les chrétiens et le cochon*, Paris, Gallimard, 1994; Id., *Il teatro della passione*, in G.Charuty (ed.), *Nel paese del tempo. Antropologia dell'Europa cristiana*, Napoli, Liguori, 1995, pp. 105-141.

on the other, there occurs a tense conflict between the character one plays (that one *is*, therefore) and the character in Simoni's work to which it corresponds. The tension to which each person is subjected, therefore, is manifested in two scenarios: that whereby one aims to subject one's role in the representation to needs of social credit, to be spent in the intervening ten canonical years; but also that whereby one's role in the representation must be compared faithfully and innovatively, at the same time, with the sort of archetype represented by Simoni's character. This seems to determine a complex marriage between the strategies of social optimization and the strategies for governing emotional systems - regarding the individual, specific to the restricted group of reference, and of the entire community. The person who will effectively have to play a given part in the representation of 20 May, is determined by the role's figurative archetype (or prototype) - an ancestor, then, albeit of uncertain identity - and by the social strategies that the person exercises to affirm his importance in the village's daily life. This dual, suspended system of reference, centred on the essential unity of the person, but articulated between past and future, between being and appearing, also involves, in less conspicuous but more sophisticated ways, those who perform organizational duties related to the representation. Through their choices, their decisions, and their practices, they constantly try to intervene in the complex connection between character and prototype and in the equally problematic link between the dramatic actor and the social actor.

Two aspects, in particular, should be kept in mind here: the play of similarities and memory.

My research is not yet at a stage in which I can confidently state my theories, even if they may be sufficiently supported. These theories will be assessed during further work in the field in coming months, when I return to Italy. But I can already outline them in general terms. In the town there is an underground, but noticeable, play on similarities, and naturally this play finds in the *Santa Crus* its perfect outlet. Since it is widely accepted in the community that Simoni used models from the town for his work, it is inevitable to try and look for similarities between its previous and modern-day inhabitants. To try, in other words, considering the relative recurrence of the families, from the 18th century to the present day, to give a surname to the various characters found in the stations of the *Via Crucis.* This attribution of identity prefigures a draft genealogy. The modern inhabitant X of the town, due to a physical similarity, may seem to be a descendant of a certain family, perhaps the great grandchild of a certain Y, to whom popular memory attributes the characteristics of a tireless miner or hardened blasphemer. It is, of course, not necessarily true that the modern inhabitant X of the town chooses the same role as that of his presumed ancestor. He may place himself, due to his own wishes, in a completely different area of the picture, perhaps a brighter one with greater prestige. His choice may however to some extent be censored by those who are responsible for organizing the dramatic presentation, thus leading to tension and, in some cases, conflict (the conflict between individual desires to embody a role, collective needs, and organizational decisions is, moreover, found here just as in all the other places in Italy where similar events take place[14]).

However, whatever role the subject assumes within the variegated presentation of the *Santa Crus*, it requires an extremely wide-ranging and complex exercise of individual and collective memory. One needs to compare one's own image with the archetype of reference. One needs to compare one's own image, the one constructed during the rehearsals and manifested on the day of the event, with one's own past image, that belonging to any other edition(s) one has had the good fortune to take part in. Such a comparison is no simple matter, considering the significant changes in fashions, styles, and rules of behaviour, over the timespan of 10-20-30 years and sometimes longer. It is also necessary on the other hand to rely on a good memory for the rules, whereby some things are done and others are not, some things are possible, and others are decidedly reprehensible.

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[14]I observed this in the study of a region in southern Italy, Calabria, for example in the ritual events of Tiriolo and San Pietro Apostolo, in the province of Catanzaro. For the Holy Week in Calabria, see F. Faeta, A Ricci (eds.), *Le forme della festa. Materiali per lo studio della Settimana Santa in Calabria*, Roma, Squilibri Editore, 2005.

The holders of this semantic memory are those who have a great influence on the staging of the event, but also those who can most effectively manipulate individuals' strategies of affirmation and consensus within the ritual competition. Much of this mnemo-technical exercise clearly takes place through images, bearers of a stratified, complex memory which short-circuits and bundles together times and time, as has been observed on various occasions by George Didi-Hubermann[15].

Towards a first interpretive hypothesis

I have briefly, and, I realize, with many omissions and simplifications, outlined a picture of the relationships in Cerveno between the 18th-century *Via Crucis* and the contemporary *Santa Crus*. Let's try to understand now, from a hermeneutic point of view, what the artistic and ritual events of this small Alpine village suggest. There are three exegetical lines which make them interesting for a social anthropologist who hopes to examine issues linked to visual arts and representations.

The first of these lines regards the relationship established, over a long period of time (around 300 years), between various communicative and representational tools, each of which however originates from another (from the semiotic codes of another). At the basis of the modern living representation of the Passion, with its variegated range of phenomena, are words, oral and written, produced in the context of intense Counter Reformation preaching. Such words, in reality, come from afar, from apocryphal literature whose roots are in the proto-Christian era. *In principium erat verbum*, then, even if this word takes form in a unique way, through the artistic inspiration of an extraordinary artist, in a powerful, compact group of simulacra that animate a highly transgressive representation and in turn trigger off intense, complex emotions. This representation is also linked to an extremely profound collective imagination, rooted in community life, generating a complex web of beliefs and customs that go through time up to the present day, certainly with significant modifications but also with noticeable faithfulness. From the mass of sermons and scriptures, simulacra and *superstitiones non laudabiles*, there emerges the contemporary representative structure, that melds together diverse linguistic canons and historical cross-sections in a construction that is, in theory, entirely original. What is the parentage of the ritual word that visitors will be able to observe, in a few weeks' time, in this Italian village? Does it originate in ancient apocryphal writings, in the moral dictates of the Counter-Reformation, in superstition, in the medium-term collective memory, in a need to establish contemporary social hierarchies? And, from the point of view of semiotic structure, does it originate in a written or spoken word, in a sculptural and architectural representation, in a mnestic deposit, or in the staging of a theatrical work[16]?

I mentioned above the problem of memory, on which we should dwell further when looking at the second of the exegetic lines I mentioned. Working in Cerveno, it becomes clear that community life as a whole, and not only the performance of the ritual script of the *Santa Crus*, is subjected to an intense, multiform operation of mnemonic elaboration. A distant past is remembered, brought up to date through a series of ceremonial and ritual practices, projected into daily life, and used to build an identity that has a much stronger performative force than normal village life. How do these levels of construction of memory work, in a continuous modulation between individual reception and collective elaboration? How does the temporal shuttle move between past and present, to build the web of a shared and socially useful representation of community life and of its significant aspects today? And, if it is true that memory always represents an acquisition linked to the interest of the social actors in configuring the present according to

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[15] For just one example, see G. Didi-Huberman, *Devant le temps. Histoire de l'art et anachronism des images*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 2000.

[16] For a first answer to this kind of questions, see, A. Gell, *Art and Agency. An Anthropological Theory*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998.

consistent strategic lines, as Maurice Halbwachs shows[17], how do the various memories sedimented in the work of art amalgamate or possibly collide in daily life, in superstitious imagery, and in theatrical practice?

The third line of exegesis is that which most directly links me to this venue and to some of the lines of research studied here. This is the aspect in which I am obviously most engaged in my time here. It was, really, the first that came to my attention, with all its difficulties, two years ago, when I first started thinking about the study in which I am engaged and which I am discussing here.

As part of some days of study hosted by my University, David Freedberg was presenting in Noto, in south-eastern Sicily, his work on the emotional charge found in the vision of torture and suffering in artistic representation, which culminated with the display of the images of Abu Ghraib[18]. In observing the tightly-packed sequence proposed by David, which started with the sources of the western iconography of suffering, and continued through time, stimulating the observer's imagination, with an educational and regulatory aim (a sort of brilliant attempt to start a dialogue between Michel Foucault and Samir Zeki), my thoughts went to the representations of the Passion, with which I had come into contact many times during my researches. These ranged from those in Gothic and Renaissance art up to cinema images, and from those in the *Pianto* of Jacopone da Todi to those in the thousand popular theatres of contemporary southern Italy, in which so many Christs bear their crosses to Calvary and are put to death. And the question that presented itself to me, as a social anthropologist, regarded the relationship between the emotion caused by the representation of suffering and the collective elaboration of the social strategies induced by that emotion. How, in other words, that *pathos*, linked to the staging of the suffering of a good man, to the dramatization of a paradigmatic death and to the elaboration of a paradigmatic mourning, which we know to be cyclically recurring in the life of the communities of Catholic Europe, managed to be used as a tool to manipulate community social life and to implement power strategies.

Closer to hand, we could say, I thought of an Italian author who I have had long dealings with, during my education and later research, namely Ernesto de Martino, and his study on funeral weeping in Lucania (which also involved an *excursus* on funeral weeping in Greece and Rome and on the mourning of the Virgin Mary, linked to the death of Christ)[19]. De Martino worked on a connection that I found very interesting, one that made possible, within the archaic dimension of southern Italy, the domestication of pain through ritual; the transformation of an unconnected and potentially destructive suffering, through the sequence of ritual images, into something individually, and above all socially useful.

What I was thinking about in the initial moments of this study has become, I feel, its central aim. Cerveno helps me understand through what paths of artistic representation (both in the form of architectural and sculptural series and in that of theatrical performance) emotion is created, not as a cognitive object, but as a social phenomenon. It shows how this emotion is insinuated in the social organization and community politics, and helps us understand how power - in the case in point, local power, but I think that by varying the scale of observation the phenomena may be recurring - uses the emotional systems expressed through a work of art and channels them inside the hierarchical structure that it needs to create for the purpose of its maintenance.

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[17] See, over all, M. Halbwachs, *Le cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Paris, Alcan,1925; Id., *La topographie légendaire des Evangiles en Terre Sainte. Etude de Mémoire collective*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1941; Id., *La mémoire collective*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1950 (posthumous).

[18] Cf., *Forme e modelli. La Fotografia come modo di conoscenza*, Noto, Facoltà di Scienze della Formazione, 7-9 ottobre 2010.

[19] Cf. E. de Martino, *Morte e pianto rituale nel mondo antico: dal lamento pagano al pianto di Maria*, Torino, Boringhieri, 1958.

Is this study nothing other, basically, than an exercise in that "power of images" and representations to which David dedicated illuminating studies some years back? This is true in part - it is well known that we anthropologists dedicate ourselves to futile discussions, which others have already brilliantly tackled and resolved, and to questions of detail. I have, however, overturned the hermeneutic approach, by not starting with a general assessment of the reasons of power, then, but with a detailed exegesis of the social practices that allow power to be such and allow images to exercise their specific function in the human domain.

Something about the method, at last

I like to briefly mention the methods I used. I am trying to perform the research I have outlined here by combining and creating a dialogue between the tools of cultural and social Anthropology and those of the History of Art and Christianity, with a crucial contribution provided by techniques taken from visual ethnography, in an investigation spanning a wide period, from the 18th-century origins of the *Via Crucis* up to the representation of 2012. I am taking into consideration, in particular: the relations between Counter-Reformation preaching, as expressed in the sermons of Leonardo, and the popular religion of the first half of the 18th century, as seen in archive sources (*visitationes ad limina*; parish registers, synods and episcopal decrees, etc.); the dynamics of the commission, planning and construction of Simoni's work, as seen in the complex documentation found in the parish, episcopal, notarial and state archives and the many personal testimonies, transcribed through printed sources; the structure of the work, as a whole, and in its details, reconstructed through detailed photographic and video analysis; contemporary popular memory, organized in mythopoeic forms, articulated on a generational basis (the elderly, the young), regarding the construction of Simoni's Passion; the historical testimonies of the living representations of the past, through printed texts, photographs, films and videos; the ways of preparing the modern representation in 2011-2012; the performance of the sacred representation in 2012.
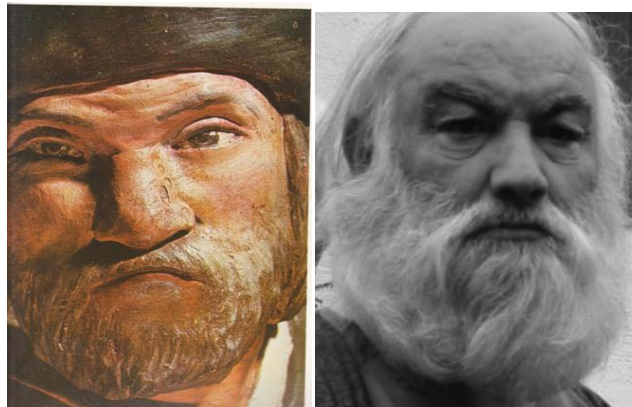
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