

# The Empathic Movement



# The Empathic Movement:

*Empathy, Essence  
and Experience*

Edited by

Menotti Lerro

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# INTRODUCTION

## MENOTTI LERRO AND LUIGI LEUZZI

The pandemic season seems to be approaching its sunset, leaving behind countless victims, including the dead and people wounded in body and soul, perhaps forever forced to observe the signs and memory of an epochal tragedy.

The sidereal distance people have had to adapt to, in consideration of sanitary measures implemented as due precautions and prophylaxis, such as the use of medical devices like masks, have led to a loss of expression and abolished the smiles and outbursts of socialization, leaving an experience of smoothed emotions that will be difficult to process for those who remain.

The season of distancing has left inside each of us lesions of the soul that will be difficult to heal and, at the same time, an awareness of a lack of being that somehow represents the need to restore in society an empathic attitude and a civilization of mutual recognition. The recognition is already particularly difficult, especially in the Western world, due to the hypertrophy of the ego and the pressure to attain a valuable and sectoral excellence. This excellence implies too often (if not always) the oppression of the other person to be able to aspire to the few places of power and prestige that apparently can lead to the coveted happiness—utopia—albeit unconsciously, that every human being aspires to, because it refers to the perfection of nature and the person that they lost or never had.

With regard to this new timid post-pandemic scenario, it is clear that the first mass reaction has been to implement some attempts at reparation, especially of interpersonal relationships, which, however, remained mostly on the surface almost as elements of an unlikely alchemy of virtual life consumed especially in social networks and mostly transited into unlikely algorithms of coexistence.

It is a delegation, almost, of the lack of the encounter at the point codified by communication tools that are governed by artificial intelligence and communication techniques marked by an inevitable emotional distance.

The human ability to quickly forget the past, eventually idealizing it somehow, makes it seem that only now, after the pandemic, has an unknown difficulty emerged in recovering an authentic encounter with the other person by the self. This malaise, to tell the truth, already afflicted humanity, but it has, without doubt, been exacerbated in the two years of lockdowns that we have crossed. It has even segregated many persons in the loneliness of their homes without the “least” comfort of a second person, therefore, making us perceive as even more problematic our notion of the self, which, as Charles Taylor has clarified, is inextricably connected to the understanding of our condition and moral action.

This opportunity for distance has however highlighted that the unique use of information technologies, and in psychology related trials of cognitive techniques, have met the needs of a parched humanity that is less and less inclined to the search for beauty and goodness through the exemplarity of poetry and all the arts. For centuries, these arts excellently “saved” humanity from brutalization, providing lights to be kept in the avenues of the ego to prevent us coming across what Joseph Conrad brilliantly defined as the heart of darkness that obscures “the god of human nature,” to quote Horace, “the god we have within us.”

Meanwhile, however, the distance and the lack of empathic correspondence have barricaded themselves behind misunderstandings and mistrust that even pertain to a security drive. And therefore it is evident that these circumstances constitute unavoidable reasons for founding an empathic movement, Empathism, as an intentional act that invests all the arts and orientates again towards a way of being together, in common disciplinary attitudes, since the encounter with the other by himself not only modulates in an empathetic attitude, but refracts the symbols and ethical values that pertain to a *communitas* that is capable of exchanging authentic gifts, made of warmth and the joy of sharing. Therefore, the authors of this movement find themselves issuing a choral invitation to unite the arts and the world, recognizing in this unity a primary saving good.

Everything arises, as it always happens, from the visionary nature that poetry determines, with the certainty of its function so that humans can pursue that right to happiness we have mentioned.

And behold, looking into the deep structures of the fragmentary present time, a fragile dream appeared, of atavistic origin, materialized in a community civilization founded on Megalithism, in which an ancestral religion held together in some way the various individual souls in proximity and founded a *res lego* that constituted the *anima mundi* and, at the same time, otherness.

Thus, it is an empathic microcosm recognized in a macrocosm based on an *axis mundi* that persisted until the end of the last century and survived in part to the present day in the sub-region of Cilento and in neighboring territories through festivals and Marian extra-urban cults that still now welcome the symbols and ethical values of transhumance and agropastoral traditions. Many villages, scattered between Cilento, Lucania, and Bruzio, are cemented by an ancient solidarity and coexisting community. In other words, they offer the opportunity to experiment and encourage the birth of an empathetic and deeply human attitude found in the origins of this ancient land. Hence the choice of Monte Stella [lit., Mount Star] (where there is an important megalithic complex symbolically recognized by us as the place of the first ancient empathic gods), as it is a mountain capable of still radiating and feeding its children and, symbolically, the world.

This led to the request to the various municipalities of Cilento. The values proposed in the *New Manifesto on the Arts* try, in their own way, to innovate without denying tradition and to keep in mind the lessons on modern (or experimental) and postmodernist art of Sir Ernst Gombrich, and authors such as Deleuze, Nietzsche, and Foucault. However, they try to go beyond certain nuances of these incomparable teachings, through the indirect, direct, and universal language of poetry and the arts in general. In a suddenly changed world and society that already appeared particularly complex in the pre-pandemic era, as it is well illustrated by Paolo Macry in *The Contemporary Society*, at the end of the twentieth century, Cilento community members recognized themselves. They agreed to join in a symbolic Cultural Pyramid of internal dialogue that opens to the other person, starting from the place, from its precise geographical position in space (which is one of the fundamental questions analyzed by Jacques

Derrida in his essay *Margins*), transforming the territory in the microcosmic epicenter that transits into a macrocosm where we can find a new reason for common life based on authentic being in the empathic sharing of artistic and literary attitudes based on ethical and community values.

In other words, this volume highlights how empathy is an intentional act that, starting from the original foundation of the *communitas*, is invested in the humanistic and artistic sciences, orienting them towards an overcoming of the distance from the other by the self and remedying an inescapable emotional awkwardness that is typical of our time and that we could rubricate like alexithymia. This is an expression not only of societal malaise but also of the outcome of a vision of society based exclusively on egocentrism. The return to empathy corresponds to a lack of being that we must give an answer to, that is not only surface, but that, through an ethical and aesthetic reflection, can re-find not only the artistic and literary disciplines but also all the relational attitudes, allowing the discovery of an intersubjective world that surpasses clichéd related social networks. In other words, the authors, retracing and deepening the cardinal principles of the *New Manifesto on the Arts* and, therefore, of the Empathic Movement, born in Italy in 2020, believe that we must not find—to say it like this—only a smile to sweeten an attitude of fashion, but also recognize its coexisting roots in the mystery of its origins.

The historically rural Cilento area, now transformed through an innovative pyramid of cultural excellence, led to the birth of Empathism. The area welcomed the movement's regenerative and reparative human vocations in an ancestral context where the ancient suggestions of the pagan-Christian syncretism of the high-seas civilization still today suggest a way of participating in one or more collectivities, which are held together by a *res lego* capable of bringing together the otherwise unrelated parts of an ancestral society based on ethical, aesthetic, and valor sharing.

# PREMISE

FRANCESCO D'EPISCOPO

## Synergies

### **The Eleatic School, the Medical School, the Empathic School: the cultural triangle of the territory of Salerno, from Parmenides to Lerro**

It now seems that the decisive and concrete moment has come to join and to coordinate, rather than to divide and separate, as today, in most cases, they are proposals, prospects, and creative and critical drives, linked to specific territorial realities, places, and characters, that have marked, and continue to mark, the story of an overall and joint relaunch of their most authentic and authoritative motivations.

We are the sons of Parmenides, born at Elea (Velia, then Ascea). The extraordinary example he set as a philosopher, poet, and doctor can and must establish the basis for a movement that unites the arts and confirms the fundamental principle of feeling by thinking and by thinking to feel on which Giambattista Vico lay the foundations of his “new” science.

Our proposal (started by the leader and founder of Empathism, Menotti Lerro, who, as in his creative work, shows himself always to be a worthy heir to the great predecessors) is to re-found this movement, linking it to another prestigious movement, the Southern School of Salerno, which, during the Middle Ages, along with Montpellier, a French city that our Italian city is twinned with, represents an indispensable beacon of interdisciplinary culture, where the same medicine claimed a space—not autonomous, but shared with other disciplines—aimed at healing the soul as well as the body.

All this, to which much more could be added, in modern and contemporary times had to converge and flow into the great sea of “empathy.” This is a gift that in life is reserved for all those who—endowed with a culture to share with others and, above all, a marked sensitivity to

grasp common elements, and precisely those people who can share—tend to experience the processes of collaboration and of aesthetic, ethical, and operational conjunction. In this sense, the school is intimately and intensely connected with life, and not so much and not only institutionalized and regularly practiced life, but life that is invented, putting it in close relation to the triple, cultural, hereby-indicated direction.

# CHAPTER 1

## EMPATHISM: A LITERARY-ARTISTIC-PHILOSOPHICAL AND CULTURAL MOVEMENT, BORN IN ITALY IN 2020

MENOTTI LERRO AND ANTONELLO PELLICCIA

### ***Reasons for a New Manifesto on the Arts***

Our millennium is entering its third decade, and it is time to build together a vision of the world in the name of beauty and harmony. Interdisciplinarity and the idea of the “Total Artist” (a single person or a combination of contributions by people engaged in different cultural fields) proposed in the *New Manifesto on the Arts* are proposed as a basis to grab the “fragmentary truths” of this historical period that, never more than now, needs the figure of the artist as a guide. From 2019, the Contemporary Centre of the Arts is acting to this end, bringing many innovative artistic and cultural initiatives of great importance to the national territory and Cilento, animated by a fundamental common feeling for empathy and feeling close to each other as human beings and as artists. For this reason, the Contemporary Centre of the Arts has established the School of Empathy, which exemplifies the educational and formative purposes that distinguish it. From the triangle of the ancient area of Cilento (Vallo della Lucania, Omignano, Salento), new impulses will be released for the development of the arts and culture through the emotions.

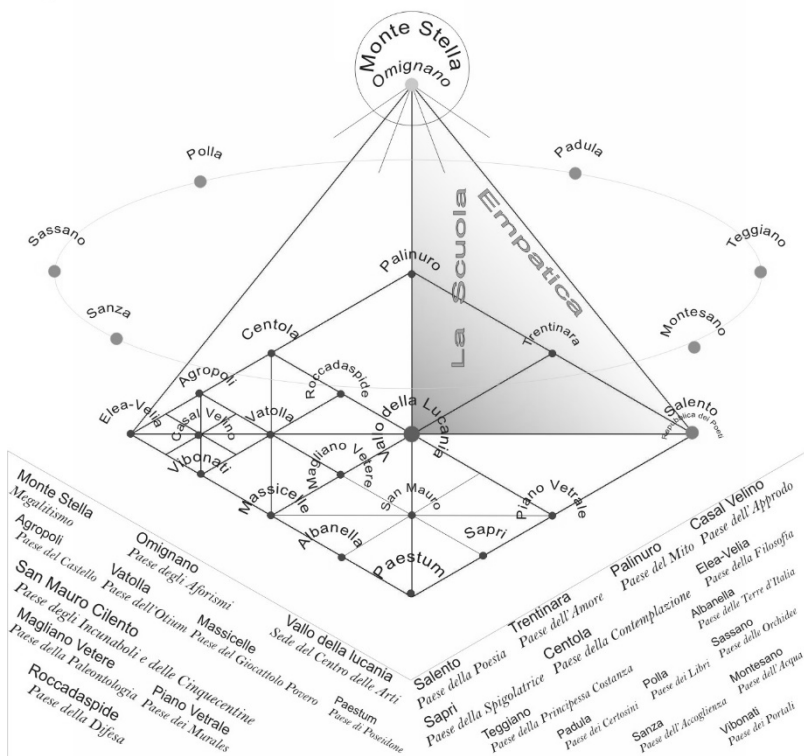
Menotti Lerro

## The pyramid and the cultural triangle of ancient Cilento

2020

### PIRAMIDE CULTURALE DEL CILENTO

IDEATA DA MENOTTI LERRO



A cultural triangle encloses the magic of a territory, its *genius loci*, rich in myth, history, and traditions, the place of union between humanity and nature: Omignano, Village of Aphorisms; Salento, Village of Poetry; and Vallo della Lucania, Location of the Contemporary Centre of the Arts, which is the guardian of the artistic-literary values unveiled in the *New Manifesto*.

This triangle fits ideally into the proportion and harmony of a quadrilateral that has a pyramidal apex on Monte Stella, whose gateway is



Omignano, while its nodes are Paestum, Salento, Velia, and Palinuro. The projection of light from the star on the basic plan of Cilento coincides with the “Centre of the Arts.” The ancient pyramid reveals a pulsating soul.

Menotti Lerro  
Antonello Pelliccia

## **New Manifesto on the Arts**

I have decided to join forces with those dear friends of mine who are anchored by artistic roots, albeit different from mine, because, in the end, I understand that art is only seemingly divisible.

In fact, if we accept such a point of view, almost all of us, and I first of all, are—in so many words—incomplete artists, mostly capable of developing and deepening a single aspect of what perhaps the art would require (in truth, it has never asked anyone anything and only gives to those who know to ask . . .). At any rate, on second thought, it happens almost the same with all things: do we not use, for example, too little of the body and mind compared with how much we should and could? And, perhaps, objectively, is our knowledge not limited about every doctrine and the world?

If I think of a doctor, I realize that he will only know one branch of medicine well. It is not by chance that he will tend to specialize in that particular direction. Furthermore, will he not always remain a capable doctor, if out of necessity, he deepens other aspects of his discipline?

Therefore, I think, real artists follow similar criteria: they are an artist because they possess the fundamental characteristics to be one—sensitivity, intelligence, creativity, curiosity, innate or acquired technical tools, talent, and so on. But they will soon decide, for one reason or another, to devote themselves to a peculiar aspect of ingenious human activity, which finally will increase wisdom by beauty or beauty by wisdom, leading to them identifying themselves with the role of a novelist, a painter, a sculptor, a musician, and so on.

I came to these conclusions when I realized that all the arts belong to me more or less equally, or, at least, I felt that I belong to them equally. More than twenty years ago, I approached the principles that lead humans to seek

the exact word for poetry and prose; but now I realize that I can perceive the other aesthetic expressions that the world proposes and that I have learned to recognize deeper and deeper.

I feel the music pulsating in my chest like a broken beat and I confess that I have to keep away specifically from musical instruments, because it would be sufficient a spark to make me devote myself to the keyboard (or to another instrument), permanently, and, putting it bluntly, it would subtract from my writing. In truth, time is already too limited even for this sole art that crept furtively into my flesh, leaving there its deadly mark, when the air of the woods was yet to weigh on the shadows that crowd my dreams.

Therefore, I am aware of the temporal limit that makes difficult the idea of trying to learn something else to the level that I would like—so as to be able to express myself, rendering honor and glory to the art, without disaster, as, in this new millennium, humans seem to have often decided to do. At the moment, all this suggests to me that I should let it go, so that I am not kidnapped, except by curiosity about what I do not have, avoiding mixing the cards, and, in this case, at the risk of not being able to tell, in the future, in the highest and most effective way, what I care about.

However, I confess that the temptation is strong and if my life had not been the life of a wanderer, forced to work three times more than many others who I could define as being more fortunate concerning material goods, then, perhaps, I would give free vent to the development of new impulses. I think I could also express myself better than I do in letters using brushes and chisels (just like when I was a child, in our carpentry, to which I always return): I realize this when the soft madness assails me and if I see colors, a canvas, or scattered chips, so that already in my mind a thousand overlapping shades bloom, capable of giving voice to the immensity of a clear inner mirror.

I tremble if I see someone dancing or singing or designing an object—because design is an art, though many people say just the contrary—and a thrill assails me in front of a photographer or a director who sees everything differently from how other people deceive themselves to see. I just close my eyes and realize that, in myself, there would be sublime visions to be transposed on the scene, if only I learned to operate a camera, to create an

effect, to light a candle with a *ciack*, or to make a swing move without a push.

I confess I perceive an unbridgeable void before the arts that I did not learn and I do not promise that one day I shall not find myself wearing “cloaks” that are different from the ones I am now wearing. But, even if I will never do it, just as reason suggests to me, I know that the Artist is the person who knows he or she can wear all such cloaks with dignity—those colorful cloaks that we usually wrap ourselves in to escape the sun, which would like to dissolve us in a single color or in the cold, which would turn us into statues for a sea museum without salt. He or she would be called a “Total Artist,” or an “Artist” with a capital A; in other words, he is someone who is capable of describing the picture using every single musical note.

For example, rather than writing about the torment of this evening, I would like to play it in a cathedral or paint it on a wall in a desert, although I never learnt to knead a color or to spread the paint or to blend it and dilute it. At the end, while my window almost succumbs to the hail of January, I would like to give breath to all the instruments of creation to express the sweetness and pain that I have inside—and maybe they would not be enough to tell you all. At the moment, I nearly faint for the emotion in confessing it to myself: I need every art to be able to vibrate as I should like, to say as I would like, to represent it as I feel and see. The poet (that is a synecdoche, in this case) being sufficient for himself, has not yet probably understood what is necessary.

The greatest painters I met were debating in verses, playing violins, and dancing in the street, so the great musicians hid their paintings and sculptures; one could speak also about the novelist who became dedicated to a virgin stone in order to discover the burning eyes for love that had escaped from the worn out cards.

Thinking about it again, all this happened frequently years ago—when I already had the fortune to be welcomed by authentic masters, although I had not realized it yet far away from the wisdom of the person who showed the route. But, today, having some white hair, everything is suddenly, terribly, and wonderfully semi-clear. On one side, this condition excites me, and on the other it throws me into a strong feeling of discouragement. The discouragement comes from thinking that one life cannot be sufficient to

learn all that I would like, and I cannot breathe because I feel like a prisoner of my temporal limits or of the vastness of the field.

I return to the figure of the doctor I have boldly borrowed: I often wondered, in past times, how a doctor could choose his specialization, radically abandoning the other areas of the body. Now I know: it is a painful choice, which is perhaps necessary for excellence, before joining forces with other fields . . . And if this also applies to art, then, it will be this union that gives us the Total Artist we are looking for!

This thought consoles me a lot: to choose a specialization means to create sectoral eminences, allowing us to give the best of ourselves to other people, considering the lack of time; and nothing will prevent us from giving this to the world, although we are not satisfied with all our personal impulses that, perhaps, in art, unlike in other spheres, still have a reason to be.

However, we have to add that, in truth, even in the same artistic branch, we feel different needs: it is not by chance that we frequently remain within the literary environment, we write poetry, then theater, essays, aphorisms, and so on. I wonder, in return, why we do not specialize, then, in only one subgenre, thereby following the same logic of the limits that the mournful woman with her prompt scythe imposes or in the practical concerns of specialization.

In the latter case, we let ourselves go: we follow the instinct and the impulses that lead us now in verse, now in prose: yellow, black, or pink prose. Perhaps, this happens because, in the cases mentioned, one has less time to devote oneself to learning different things that only a short jump requires: in these circumstances, one move one's attention to subjects that have a common etymology. What a thorny issue! The war between my own hands.

In fact, the enthusiasm arises from the awareness that every journey has a coveted destination, but the path that leads only there may be equally precious. Some people who reach a destination without travel, following a recommendation, will find themselves suddenly in a place in which they do not know how to remain; they will not understand how precious it would have been to have had to move every stone in order to find the way that leads to the top, arriving there without suffering the dizziness that

accompanies the climb, and with awareness of having acquired the map that is necessary for the almost inevitable descent.

Therefore, you must not be voracious, but enjoy the dish using all the senses, perhaps discovering new ones in the process. The arts that we know are the food that makes us gluttons, of which we sometimes taste small bites that in every palate generate explosions . . . No, I shall not be voracious and as I do not allow childish despair, I do not taste it due to lustfulness.

I shall have to be patient and settle for that part of the world I can see. And I will practice patience if I need to return to those same places: I learn to look at them and find in them other mythical details. This is the saving magic of the art that allows us to “satisfy” every palate even just with our favorite dish, the one we chose or the one that occurred by chance and that we have learned to love and, above all, never want to give up. These are partial, vaguely consoling answers.

I feel small and powerless before my gigantic urges that inevitably push me towards other shores. But it is still the willingness to be content, all the same, to continue the journey knowing that, at any rate, the intermediate stage is a place in which to stay and, although still, to be able to go on digging, wandering everywhere, creating, dreaming . . .

Moreover, the same universe can never be known in full, although we would like, and we do not feel prostrate faced with such an unbridgeable lack. We must abandon any conviction about how to grasp the unambiguous and objective truths of a vision. Every truth contains fragments that are not possible to grasp, because they are always observed from subjective points of view and, therefore, are unique and unrepeatable since space and time will inevitably be different for anyone wishing to repeat the experience.

There is also a reflection on the type of art that is developing in our society, considering the changes to communication and new artistic proposals that are often extravagant and tend to level down. If we accept, as I have heard said by many around me—and not only by members of youthful artistic movements—that everything can be “poetry” (critical judgment of absolute beauty, which is applicable to every single art), then “poetry” risks being downgraded. Poetry would no longer be the same subject of study as it was in past centuries, but would become a set of suggestions and effects that are, in truth, fruits far from what the god of the

artists demands, as it is said in the rigorous gospel that inspired people have transmitted to us over the centuries.

And then, would the poetry we want and need really be so unwise? Perhaps, once again, we should start from the classics instead of giving credit to new fashions that tend to impose their vision of art; sometimes these are the children of extemporary intuitions that do not have solid bases, and, at other times, they are the child of the arrogance of those who wish to rule by birthright.

People thought the new millennium would bring wealth and peace. It has proved to be very problematic: we are living through a tremendous historical period in terms of communication (I avoid going into other fields, where the drama would be considerable . . .). Social networks—the real revolution of which will not be to have arrived but to be got rid of—are the masters and they gave voice to those who had little or, more usually, nothing to say, in return, silencing the wisest men and those richest in spirit, inhibited by the general chaos.

Our societies appear in too many aspects neo-medieval, as evidenced by the immeasurable army of those who, while having the good fortune to have a fairly stable job, fail or barely manage to sustain themselves economically to the end of the month (this is to say that our states are self-styled and not really civilian). One should enter every field; but here we clearly limit ourselves to debating poetry, as we are aware that, after all, artists have to strive to locate the path. But, therefore, what is poetry, now understood as a literary text in verse, so that it is possible to propose it for our contemporary scenario? Fundamentally, I said, it would start again from the classics, once again and always. In every art, those who try to innovate forget tradition, creating a mostly ephemeral revolution that is often less innovative than the one lived by artists in previous centuries. However, artists who have absorbed their forebears' teaching try to improve aesthetic products either to distort them or to create new ones, knowing that people in previous times were in truth better able to innovate than those who proclaimed the need for a *tabula rasa* (for example, thinking of the Futurist movement and comparing it with the early twentieth century imagist movement).

There is, in fact, no innovation without knowledge and the continuous struggle that every proposal requires to subvert an institution. The lyrics in verse—but this applies to all the arts—must be compared with the modern

phenomena of globalization that has made available to everyone a wider knowledge of places, traditions, and languages . . . All this must be considered. The new poem will easily feed from the texts of others because of the immediate possibility of “possession” today.

For example, let’s think of Eugenio Montale and how he was influenced, probably not in innocent good faith, by the concept of “impersonality” or the technique of “the objective correlative” by T. S. Eliot. Montale knew that Eliot’s innovative compositions were fresh off the press and up for translation, so Professor Mario Praz enthusiastically showed them to him, sitting at the Giubbe Rosse literary café in Florence, just when he came back from one of his numerous trips to the island of Albioni.

It is impossible to “hide” the work nowadays, to let it be sufficiently decanted to show it, as one’s own, to the eyes of the world; therefore, it is right to acknowledge and transform all this into a general advantage, or disadvantage. Poetry written in our present time is full of influences (other than simple *anxiety*) that never happened in the past. Above all it is full of casts of new elements just printed by the artists who sometimes live on the other side of the globe and who, maybe, do not know our language and cannot imagine who will instantly appropriate those verses, disguising them as their own. But it is all right. Be aware of this, and have the courage to say that this is happening!

But let’s discuss basic needs. Poetry needs a fabric of experience as well as imagination and feeling; but above all, it requires study. We cannot stand, at any rate, poets who have nothing to say and even less to teach but who continue to pour onto paper insufficiently linguistically reworked fantasies that are often taken from sterile daily experience without any artistic value—that is to say, without those primary requirements that poetry and art all together underlie.

Especially, poetry needs a well-cultivated talent from intense study that is able to exalt it. There is no art that comes from nothing or, better yet, there is no art or talent that you do not take advantage of through preparatory exercises and constant study.

I also propose a reflection on a question that arose with the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to the singer-songwriter Bob Dylan: it would be “easy” and ungenerous to say that it was not a happy choice, although I confess I did not share the view of the committee. However, perhaps we

should take note that the most likely reason for the attribution of such recognition to a lyricist is to be sought in the modesty of contemporary poetic production. But let's leave aside these considerations and look again. Antonello Pelliccia, who with me conceived this interdisciplinary journey among the arts, adds in the next paragraphs the following consideration to indicate the clear path that the Contemporary Centre of Arts wants to trace and also to clarify the reasons that have animated him.

\* \* \*

Starting from a reflection on Wittgenstein's statements on the "representative theory of language" (the pictogram-graphic conception of language), I opened a new process of my thought, of my idea of contemporary art in its complex articulation and relapse in the world and in society.

I think it is appropriate to clarify my position as an artist and as a man just as responsible subjects, aware of the changes in tastes, fashions, and expressive languages. Art has always influenced the social climate, identifying, suggesting, and anticipating possible solutions to the problems of living and living together.

My research focuses on the definition of a new artistic interrelationship, with particular attention to sustainability and visual culture, as a reference and connection with the theses by Wittgenstein on the interpretation of the aesthetic result, maturing the refusal towards the formalistic reading of the work of art and leading me, finally, to the election of a multi-disciplinary approach as an essential methodology of reading art history.

In recent years, the interest of the new vision of practitioners and visual cultures have focused on a reflection of and an observation on doing—in other words, individuating in the artist the role of a director but also of a mediator among the various arts through the artist's work, contextualizing the historical and cultural background of the epoch. It is a journey through the labyrinth of new media, theatre, performance, landscape design, poetic reading, video, cinema, music, multimedia installation, and related arts; an attempt and temptation to get out from ordinary frames; a direct confrontation between the artist and the visitor, in search of freedom; the concept of opposing, overlapping, and inviting a response and the responsibility to keep alive the memory of the world; an investigation of the new potential



of mass communication, internet technologies and new forms of interaction, connections with photography and the world of design, as well as the relative socio-economic repercussions.

I believe that the role of the artist in social reality today is to empower artists towards researching the definition of their place in civil, cultural, and intellectual society, so as to trigger networks of co-development related to solidarity between artists and productive interaction not only between artists but also with other types of professionals that can encroach on many areas, from the introduction of cutting-edge lifestyles to the organization of events, from art galleries to artisan laboratories.

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What my fraternal friend expresses seems to me to integrate my thoughts and I think it will make me feel less lonely, on pilgrimage among the labyrinthine paths of art and days. But here I am getting to the conclusion of this discussion. I thank all those respected artists and far-sighted people who have joined this new project.

Today, my friends, I come with you to the Contemporary Art Centre of Vallo della Lucania. Perhaps, this place will clarify my ideas better and, above all, it will tell me, I hope, who I am and how I want to express myself or, maybe, it will just make me crazy with the desire to play with what I do not know and my wishes, just like a child who craves cotton candy or a balloon.

Finally, forgive me for the longing and for this bold philosophizing. Maybe, I will tell you better later on, when the matter may be clearer to me so that I will be able to argue otherwise.

Meanwhile, to conclude, it will be the task of the Contemporary Centre of the Arts to attempt to discover where the Total Artist hides himself.

Menotti Lerro  
Antonello Pelliccia

## **A myth unveiled: Unus and his Brothers**

Love is the name for our pursuit of wholeness, for our desire to be complete.

—Plato's *Symposium*

In the beginning was Unus, born from Zeus the supreme and a mortal woman. Statuesque in body, adorned with majestic, mutating paintings, he stood in the sunshine of each day. His soul was music, his words verses; he glided amongst men, if not danced. A demigod!

His spirit was like milk: absolute happiness. Without looking for carnal deeds, by himself he was fulfilled.

But—as always throughout eternity—the joys of one are thorns for another. Although wonderful to see, he was soon detested by his half-brothers clad in immortal armour, who were ready for revenge for the suffering of Era, their mother, who yielded to the sinister betrayals of the royal libertine with his subtle devices.

Thus, incited by her, they chose to dismember—into slices the number of which can be counted on the fingers of one hand—the unwary righteous Unus. Violently torn apart in a vineyard, his remains were thrown into the noble waters of the Alento river, in whose waters each fibre decomposed into an essence of Dance, Poetry, Music, Sculpture, and Painting, ready to be reincarnated and divided in selected creatures of the world.

The Almighty, touched by his pierced beloved, once more ordered the androgynous figure of Eros to bring about “Peace and love in each reunification of the Arts” by holding high those who have art inside themselves and recreate the misplaced unity of the first Total Artist who, in the darkest of days, was wickedly pulled apart by the envious gods.

Through a dream as clear as a mirror, Father Zeus to the modern poet shows the light of Unus without shade, revealing his horror and, being there, disavowing the Son of Abraham who had banished him from mankind.

Thus far, the Arts look to each other, like pulsating and betrayed blood.

Menotti Lerro

## CHAPTER 2

# THE EMPATHIC SCHOOL: BETWEEN EMPATHY AND EMPATHISM

LUIGI LEUZZI

### **Definition**

The Empathic School is a literary, artistic, philosophical, and cultural movement, born in Italy in 2020 within the new cultural triangle of ancient Cilento, which has its epicenter in Omignano, the Village of Aphorisms; Salento, the Village of Poetry; and Vallo della Lucania, the seat of the Contemporary Centre of the Arts. The school starts from the values and ideas expressed in the *New Manifesto on the Arts*, putting the empathic relation at the center of its interests and, therefore, the person as an ontic and ontological constitution (intersubjective).

As a result, every creative and didactic experiment cannot ignore a process of identification in another person, different from the self, from the cultural world, and from the contemporary as an occasion to study and share knowledge and stories of inner life, of the epiphanies of the present time, and of past historical moments.

The horizon of this direction implies a vocation for the territory and a civil promotion of society, articulated by individual and community growth, according to ethical and valuable finalities mediated by an aesthetic dimension: that of art.

Menotti Lerro  
Luigi Leuzzi

## Paragraph 1

**Proposals for the development of the Empathic School movement**

Empathy is the ability to empathize with others, from the self, in order to seize the intrapsyche. If this attitude is transcended in a sympathetic approach we run the risk of merging with the subject-object of our knowledge and we would be unable to re-enter ourselves to differentiate ourselves, recognizing the otherness of the interlocutor.

On every path of the knowledge of the self, of the other, and of the world in which we coexist, we cannot give up the binomial I–you of Buberian<sup>1</sup> ancestry that, on one hand, evokes an ethical and valuable vocation of being there, especially in the extreme experience of otherness, and, on the other hand, leads to the narrative dimension of the “we.” We are a conversation as well, Friedrich Hölderlin says. Man inhabits language, Martin Heidegger would say.

Therefore, these last two apodictic attestations of intersubjectivity can direct us towards an attempt to understand how an empathic school is thematized. Especially for the function of the implicit teaching in the term, we propose a Socratic and maieutic approach that excludes a reassuring ex-chair position, developing through a continuous questioning until, in a series of references, we can reach the central question that gives meaning to our teaching: whom are we looking for in the other person and in the world and, moreover, in whom do we identify ourselves?

I would like to propose some heuristic notes, at the same time, creating problems for a possible use of empathy in the practice of a cultural foundation. If I want to know in depth the world in which I live, it will be necessary for me to identify myself in the self-world, that is to say, to find myself again, or rather to suspend judgment for a moment and catch the eidetic evidence without referring to preconceived categories and to ideologies that can collude with a reductionist and objectifying attitude.

This means living the Husserlian epoch by theming, from time to time, historical periods, lifestyles, customs, and artistic or cultural events in full authenticity, as if the person who is the subject of knowledge is, in turn, the object of pre-categorical experience in the world he knows, as in the surface

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. M. Buber, *Il Principio Dialogico* (Turin: San Paolo, 2000).

of creation, where we are caught by the gaze of God just at the moment we try to know him. Thus, the unknown breaks into our reassuring dwelling of the *ex abrupto* consciousness to initiate it into the wonder of an unexpected transformation, which brings about a new world.

It is precisely starting from the premises of a hermeneutic-empathic circle whereby an interpretation is given so that it is modulated necessarily by the experience of identification with the other; we impose, in the foundation of an empathic school, the adherence to some essential, programmatic lines. We shall deepen the various thematic areas assigned to each one by competences with an approach that is not only doctrinal but also interpretative and comparative, in order to grasp the type of cultural and anthropological direction for a territory that is otherwise closed in an idio-cosmos.

If we grasp the *anima mundi* of our territory, it is probable that we can also perceive its discomfort; consequently, a purely rhetorical or notional attitude runs the risk of disregarding those factors of transformation that prove to be indispensable for a real development of our ethno-cultural environment.

## Paragraph 2

### **“Temporality and creativity”: fundamentals of an empathy-oriented teaching**

No-Time is the endless dialogue  
among the Artists.  
—Menotti Lerro

If empathy directs the dialogical interactions of those who aspire to a school inspired by intrapsychic grasping of the other, it is permissible to ask a meaningful question concerning which temporality can welcome this disposition of the soul.

Undoubtedly, we shall have to deal with the enigmatic figure of a shared present that is capable of wiping out narcissistic foreclosures to constitute an original intersubjective time in which the past goes back to welcome the next and future event, the occasional moment of the meeting with the other.

This is “the time of grace,” as Aldo Masullo would say; that is, it is the time to tell of the mystery that flows from the fleeting moment when on the horizon of the direction to which one is accustomed, otherness comes and gradually unfolds in proximity. This epiphany of the other is the original moment of the artist’s creation that gives shape to what becomes a work of art and an autonomous and phantasmatic presence.

The artist always moves inside a magical-mysterious register in which he inscribes his creation, which by definition is always cosmogonic. It is a new world that meets the world of the others; at the same time, it becomes the gravitational centre of a new universe.

The artist’s time aligns with an original moment in which all the previous experiences are offset to be synchronized in a unique moment, beat, pulsation. The past and the future are synthesized in a single present that becomes immanent; eschatological time transcends into a cyclic and timeless condition. Thus, the moment is transformed into an eternal representation of the mystery of an instant that initiates daily time, and thus narration becomes history.

Of course, these reflections on temporality have some implications: it is obvious that if we relate empathically to the territory, for a moment, we would suspend all our prejudicial attitudes linked to our subjectivities and with a sensitive intuition we would grasp contemporaneity, crossing our world, discerning the subject that is waiting to be understood and welcomed.

Our time will no longer belong to us, if it ever did, as it is synchronized with the motions of the *anima mundi*; we will catch its imago and, lost, we will descend into the world to grasp the enigma that inhabits our mystery: the otherness of our origins in the cosmos, as a wonder of artistic creation.

### Paragraph 3

#### **For an empathic practice for the humanistic, technical, and artistic disciplines**

Once empathy is defined as an intrapsychic grasp of the other and introduced as a vector of an attribution of meaning—the “hermeneutic-empathic circle,” that is to say the modulation of the knowledge of the other through dialogical interaction—a coexisting declination of the various