

PIERFRANCESCO GAVA
IN CONVERSATION WITH
AERNOUT MIK

ABOUT THIS FOLDER.

Anybody invited to realize a project in 1646 is asked to engage in conversation with a previously unknown correspondent.

This conversation takes place via e-mail and stretches through the whole period during which the artists develop their initial idea into final results. 1646 invites the correspondent at the other end of this contact to figure his/her way through this actual process. In trying to picture what result the artists' work is going to, such exchange can become a reflection on the amount of otherwise untraceable choices of the moment which make up to the artists' practice.

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#2.2

CONVERSATION THE ONGOING

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1646.

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In my latest work, I have been dealing with the Pope's speech given to the European parliament on the 25th of november 2014. The religious leader was invited by Martin Schulz, the president of the european Parliament, during his previous visit to the Vatican on 11 October 2013. If there is a separation between church and state, why did the european parliament invite the Pope? Could it be that, through the invitation, the parliament admits indirectly that it has lost its power to think and implement solutions that could bring a real change in the present crisis? Europe is going through an economic crisis as well an identity crisis. The European Union is also confronted with the upcoming radicalization of Islam and terrorist violence. Therefore Europe by going back to it's Christian roots and, through the authority of the religious leader, tries to bring back unity, identity and especially power, in terms of authority. To reclaim its power, politics brings the 'sacred' into its environment, like the ancient kings needed the divine investiture to legitimize their role.

The whole speech is a 35 min. speech. I reduced the footage to 13 minutes following the strategy of consensus. That means that I selected all the sentences / parts of the speech at which the audience applauded. With the shorter speech, I want to question the power given to the speech, related to the function of who is declaiming it, regardless of the content of the speech itself.

In a first version of the work, the english translation of the shorter speech was declaimed by an woman, an american native speaker. This video was projected opposite to the looped found footages of the applauding parliament audience. In doing so I hoped to stress the question: does it matter what is said? Is everything that is said get consensus just because of the 'speaking' leader or because of its content?

December 24, 2014

First meeting at Aernout Mik's studio

AM: In what stage is this work? Is it still in process or do you consider the video a finished work?

PFG: No. I think the video shows some of the elements of my research that I want to highlight but it needs some fine tuning.

AM: I have some problems with this work.

PFG: Can you be more specific?

AM: On one side the Pope is ridiculed with the looped applause and on the other hand, the speech itself is actually supported by her strong performance. The work takes two directions. While the tension and the nuances of the footage are completely pulled apart instead of being activated.

PFG: I asked her to perform the Pope's speech with her own voice to emphasize the question about the consensus. Are they applauding the Pope because of his status or because of what he says? I thought that, if the content of the speech is performed by the voice and the body of someone else and the looped applause disturbs the speech, perhaps I can emphasize that concept.

AM: You say that the applause is meant to ridiculing the parliament, but in the way you present it, it is actually ridiculing the Pope. The concentric shape of the parliament and the Pope as a white 'phantom' in its center, is an

incredible strong and strange image. But the endless applause makes of him a more ridiculous and helpless image, this is what you say with your video.

PFG: I asked her to perform the Pope's speech, because she definitely doesn't represent an ideal substitute of a leader of the catholic church: she is not white and she is a woman. It is also a political choice to use her, she communicates, by her presence, that she stands for her rights.

AM: I understand your choice for her. She has a strong presence. But I miss the connection with the body of the Pope through his voice. Now he becomes physically isolated and is a strange doll. With the performance of the woman, it feels like that such a speech is coming from a pamphleteer. The choice of this woman, her perfect american accent and her interpretation, supports the content of the speech and therefore gets more attention compared to the footages of the looped applause.

PFG: I also made several versions of the Pope's speech against the Mafia. On June 22, 2014 Pope Francis, visiting the region of Calabria in the South of Italy, expressed for the first time an official excommunication against the 'Ndrangheta, a Mafia-type criminal organization, centered in Calabria. I was interested in the power of the word as a performative act. The excommunication by the Pope of the criminal organization (which means excluded from the religious community), is not enforced

by the police but lay on the value of the words resonating in the conscience of every single person. To question the value of the spoken word and in relation to its performer, I divided the voice from the body, the words from the Pope. I performed the speech, lip synching the voice of the Pope in different settings and backgrounds. One, is recorded in front of the old olympic stadium of Amsterdam.

AM: I think it's much more interesting.

PFG: Is that because what you hear is not my voice? And how can someone recognize that is it not my voice? Just because of the movement of my lips, which are sometimes delayed?

AM: Not only that, but the viewer can also realize that your voice and the sound is not from the same footage; that a mass interrupt the speech by applauding. There is no audience around the stadium. Further what I think you should develop more is the balance between the words and your body. Most of the time the viewer get to see just your face, while you're lip synching. I was wondering if it would be different if your body language were more exposed. The difference between the version you shot at your studio and the one you shot at the stadium is that in the latter, I can see more your body's reaction while you are performing the speech. Therefore you're connected with the surrounding, you are really a part of the space.

PFG: In the footages I shot in my studio, I chose to focus the image on the face because I wanted to emphasize the power of the words, the sound of the voice related to the movement of my mouth. In the second at the stadium, I experimented more with the concept of an absent audience. I questioned the value of the words addressed to the Mafia. Nobody knows who the mafia is and therefore it is difficult to define the audience of the speech itself.

AM: It is on the border between serious and hilarious. The image is loaded, the stadium architecture refers to crowds and in a way also to the Italian fascism

PFG: What is interesting in the image is that, while I'm declaiming/lip synching, life goes on around me...

AM: I really think you should perform it wearing regular clothes. A formal suite doesn't work really well here. Often things that are so overly explicit, communicate the idea but are not palpable. A work where you can just nod in front of it, but not feel it.

PFG: I am reminded of a conversation about what I want to achieve with my work. My answer was awareness within the people. Awareness should also come from the disturbed perception of the image, the disturbed consensus. I think what you said about the previous work of the speech at the parliament is true. The speech of the woman, is an excellent speech, which can be believed, but it is just presented over again in a credible way. It is not disturbing the consensus, perhaps in perceiving the image, on the contrary is supporting it by her extraordinary performance.

AM: There were two moments that I found interesting in the work about the parliament. First, when she was filmed from the side, because she was addressing, with her speech the parliament, so the two images were more in relation to each other. Secondly, when the Pope was occasionally close-up in the picture, and his image was the same size as the woman...

PFG: As if a kind of dialogue existed...

AM: ...also because the eye of the viewer has a chance to jump easily from one image to another, ...that's what I meant by making him physical. If you put her image beside the footage of the parliament, she becomes part of the space, and the other way around. The spaces and the bodies become intertwined.

*January 09, 2015
second meeting at Aernout Mik's studio
I made a new version of the Pope's speech at the parliament. I used the original voice of the Pope and I asked the same woman to lip synch him. Besides that, I choose more footages of the parliament than just the fragments where the audience is applauding. I also decide to make the image of the Pope more present to almost get the effect that he is listening to his own voice.*

AM: What is the difference between this version and the previous one for you?

PFG: For me, this version is much more challenging. I realize now that in the previous version I randomly put together the two videos of the parliament and the woman performing the speech.

AM: What happens to the images now?

PFG: I think it is interesting because I used many more details and nuances of the found footages, and these footages are more in relation to the video of the speech I shot.

AM: The big difference now is that the audience of the parliament all listen to her. That aspect was not present before, the two images had nothing to do with each other. Now the Pope himself listens to her, and she becomes him.

PFG: It happened by accident. I was editing the the footages and the figure of the Pope happen to be there. I thought that it worked out. I wondered if it would make sense that he listen to himself. My answer was, yes. It works as a reinforcement of what he says and as a question about his function as reciter / performer of the speech. It also posed the question: Can what he says, be said by other people, or does the content's value change?

AM: There is a difference between the institution he represents and the person he is. He performed his speech as an institution. By detaching his voice from his body, his function is handicapped and he becomes more of a person again. Furthermore the images now have to deal with each other: the people are all listening, the Pope is listening too, but the woman is also interacting with the audience, she is waiting when there is an applause. Now the work gives the viewer the possibility to listen to the speech and at

the same time to look at the situation all together, and that's intriguing. By mixing her body with that of the pope, by giving her the Pope's voice, you do something subversive and brutal and that is very interesting. I also think it's still important to see the Pope's presence in the footages. Both, when he is listening or standing in the middle of the assembly, it is essential to see him. At the same time you can't logically explain why he is there in the picture. I do not know why he stands in the middle of the european parliament, now he is not speaking anymore. But I do know he is there. It is a given fact. It is also a given fact, that the woman stands there and I do not know why and where she is. This makes it more of an encounter between the two.

- the research process is still in progress -