

CANTI OF THE EYE
By Erika Dagnino

Translated from the Italian by Emilia Telese and the author

Translation is always the renewing of a “Pascal’s Wager” each time the translator has to feel a sort of abyss and setback experience. The key concepts seem to be bet and risk, magic and rationality, personality and empathy within the two non-antithetical polarities: a creative technique and a technically configured creativity. Why a translation of *Canti of the Eye*? Massimo Caviglione writes in the book’s postface that “*Canti of the Eye* are—as the word *Canti* implies—the verbal and musical emission of sounds belonging and concerning the hearing and the ear—auditory organ—but at the same time *Canti* are referring to eye—visual instrument per antonomasia. The *canto* wants a *subject*, although the most *absconditus* one, and wants an *object*, probably the most abstract and elusive one, and it is the very eye contemplating and contemplated that comes to have that double function, matter and intonation, referent, and inspiring *incipit* of the poems.”

—*Erika Dagnino, writer and poet*



Curiosity for transformation is the driving force in my work. My concern is with art as ever-changing communication— a dynamic language varying with its message. I have been interested in non-verbal communication in society and art since the start of my practice in 1996. I believe that good art should not provide answers, but instigate questions and change lives through continuing conversations with society. My work is concerned with the continuous questioning of social constraints and conventions. I try to generate knowledge through the visual representation of these questions, and the deconstruction of society's clichés.



My work focuses on the way the mind and body are affected and transformed by external elements and impulses, and the inter-relation between intimate consciousness and public perception.

I never liked the term "multimedia artist", because I found it too simplistic and almost reductive. You can of course imply that multi-media means multiple media, where a medium is anything from a pencil to a processor. But that term ended up defining people who make CD-rom art, or digital art, or net art, as the main aspect of their practice.



My work often engages with electronic media, in the form of interactive technology, film, audio and net-based art, but I also use low-tech media like performance, visual arts, design, and more. I use different media according to the most suitable ones needed to create particular projects. I decided to use the term "cross-over artist" because I work across art forms. I could say I am like a Swiss knife, an artist who crosses over different means of expression to find the most appropriate one according to need and inclination.

—*Emilia Telese, artist and translator*

CANTI OF THE EYE

XXI

Between lightning and darkness let us not fall asleep,
let us not wake up,
the shadow is golden under that thread, under the long
rope stretched between one mouth and the other.
To the lips the darkness of the mouth; we are the sum of
each darkness of our sound,
of each silence of light. Thus as air is
to water, and vice versa,
pallor is obligatory if the wan palm expels the
beats,
debris to debris in the turgid disintegration of some impure throb.
If eyes are eyes with an empty stomach,
they look at the backwash by looking up, the
fog, the rigid and tense gusts.
Gesticulating aimlessly, I try to defend the palms
from certain conversion.

XXII

Our friction cuts off, our veins.
If I split and join hair in two thick orderly
locks,
it's to ruffle it from the brow to the humus.
I stare at your eyes so that in and out of them,
the body overflows shapelessly, like a nebula sinks,
tangles on the skin like jolts of blue and purple
around the skin from feet to fingers, and jolts, and
scratches, and threadlike.
Weighed down by impatient heels forcing
footprints still soaking, in blood-soaked mud,
thus stopping disintegrated bones, exhausted gates; or
giving in or giving in
or one couldn't be disenchanted anymore
or disembodied or my love we access all
our waits, their extermination as they're insects
suffocated or drowned or fallen or all this from
the lightning and the ground.

XXIII

We are fed to our arms we are fed
to our eyes. More insatiable than wild animals they
devour us and all of our debris.
We would never want to be our own vultures and our
own meat. We would like to be our own vultures
and our own meat.

Whips of branches snap, could they be foliage, could they be remains could they be without the foliage. We don't defend yet we defend ourselves from the collision of shadow neither from their sight.

Overcoming the length of our enormous bell, the overlong clapper breaks through the air surrounding it and surrounding us and the water and the dew.



Emilia Telese is an artist and writer based in Sussex, U.K. Born in Italy, she graduated from the Fine Arts Academy in Florence in 1996. She has exhibited worldwide since 1994, including in the New Forest Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (2005), Ars Electronica (Austria), ZKM (Germany), Chashama (NYC), Centro Cultural Telemar (Rio De Janeiro), Manege (St Petersburg), Leeds City Gallery, ArtSway(New Forest) and the Freud Museum (London). Her practice includes interactive and body-responsive technology, film and live art, installation, literature and public art. Often site-specific, it deals with conscious engagement, political and social debate, non-verbal communication and the questioning and deconstruction of behavior.

Emilia Telese is Artsway's Associate artist scheme and is a Regional Council member of Arts Council England, South East. She teaches art economics and professional practice at a number of UK and Italian institutions, such as the Pistoletto Foundation, Biella; the Fine Art Academy in Palermo; University of the Arts, London; fabbrica Gallery, Brighton. Telese founded the artist-led initiative Edible Construction Company in 2006 with Chris Biddlecombe and Guyan Porter, creating socially-engaged art in the public realm. In 1998, she helped set up the Artists' Resource, the largest library for artists' professional development in the South East of England, which she

managed until 2004. Emilia Telese produces and presents Radio Sophia, a radio show in Italian and English on Radio Reverb FM. Further information at www.emiliatelese.com

About the author



Writer and poet **Erika Dagnino** has contributed to literary and music magazines such as *First Literary Review-East*, *Levure Littéraire*, *Quaderni d'Altri Tempi*, and *SuonoSonda*. Her poetry, fiction, and drama have appeared in various anthologies and have won several awards. Her works were published in Italy, France, and the USA.

Her musical collaborations include the CD liner notes for **Anthony Braxton**'s Italian Quartet, Standards (2006), recorded live at PP Café, Brussels, and works with Italian violinist **Stefano Pastor**, English saxophonist **George Haslam**, and American pianist **Chris Brown**. She has toured in Italy, England, France, and USA, performing at festivals and events like **Clusone Jazz Festival (I)**, **Fiera del Libro di Torino (I)**, **The Evolving Voice Series (USA)**, **The Abingdon Arts Festival (UK)**, **Oxford Jazz Master Series (UK)**, **COMA Show at ABC No-Rio (USA)**, **The October Jazz Revolution Festival NYC (USA)**, **Festival Poestate (CH)**.



She has performed in New York with **Ken Filiano**, **Steve Dalachinsky**, **Dominic Duval**, **Satoshi Takeishi** and many others; also collaborating with the American poet **Mark Weber** and with a number of visual artists. She has founded in New York the **Erika Dagnino Quartet** together with **K. Filiano**, **R. Moshe**, **J. Pietaro** and the **Erika Dagnino Trio** with **K. Filiano** and **Satoshi Takeishi**. She is a member of the **Dissident Arts Orchestra** and the **Radical Arts Front** in New York City. Further info at www.erikadagnino.it

