A close-up photograph of a white plate filled with spaghetti. The spaghetti is light yellow and tangled. A portion of the spaghetti is covered with a vibrant red tomato sauce. The background is plain white.

Meeting Through Fasting

A one-day meditation about some plates and

A Smiling Dictatorship

Pantagruel and the Kamikaze

The Need of Incorporating Goods

including a dialogue between Emilio Fantin,
Giancarlo Norese, and Cesare Pietroiusti

2004

Meeting Through Fasting

The three of us, each one in his own place and city (Bologna, Novi Ligure, Rome), observed a whole day of fasting on September 26th, 2003. During lunch and dinner time we introduced an original subject that became the plat du jour and conferred on it instead of eating. We also tried to guess what the other two were thinking about the chosen topic.

Our project tried to reach an indirect, neither personal nor auto-referential, common thinking. We then collected our considerations together with some pictures of the sites where our action took place.

Emilio Fantin, Giancarlo Norese, and Cesare Pietroiusti
February, 2004



9 AM. BREAKFAST

► **Emilio**

Sorry for my “indigestible” file, but I didn’t realize that it was so big; anyway, we are talking about an abundant breakfast...

I have to get out now, I will tell you my considerations later.

I took care of one of my duties: cooking spaghetti for my family.

Hungry?... YES

Empty stomach, fine brain.

Dear friends, I’m working on Pantagruel; meanwhile, here are my considerations about breakfast, and a pair of classic pictures related to those family duties.*

* [a detail in the front cover]



«Youthfulness, youthfulness, spring of beauty...»* Cesare's endless singing is causing him to lose his voice and (together with that) nexus, sense and sound.

Cesare believes that dictatorship, and more so if it is a smiling dictatorship, has to be fought using the means available to each – manageable by each. A group of individuals is out there, and each one of those individuals is fighting his own battle.

Acting, each one can give much more than speaking. The smiling dictatorship doesn't crush you, doesn't run over you, but farts over you and then covers you with a shroud. First it ass-fucks you and then it annihilates you.

Cesare has gotten ready, he is getting ready and he knows that things can become even worse. He trains himself everyday: a jog, some fasting, a thought, some singing. He believes that an action, when it has been thought, led, carried on with constancy, even harping on, can be a good antidote for the dentures of regime. With lightness and hard work, he doesn't get frightened by either the smiling or the sneering.

* A well-known Fascist song.

Giancarlo, the inventor of the title, “the smiling dictatorship”, knows the world well. He also knows that there are some gentlemen out there who are making fun of us.

Here is what he believes: «How can you make fun of me if I already make fun of myself? The spot is taken! Go somewhere else to laugh.»

The only dictatorship that can subdue him is the dictatorship of love. It is the other cheek of the totalitarian love. To a smiling deception he answers: «The more you cheat me the more I work for free. Are you a trickster? I eat salad.»

Dictators are afraid of his wisecracks. (And we are too!)

► Giancarlo

For Emilio a smiling dictatorship is perhaps an everyday life condition that does not allow you to dream because dreams are ready-made, well packaged, and easily available at everyone’s home just using a credit card. The only saving grace that Emilio can think of is the everyday insertion of a little poetry and revolution in his and his relative’s lives. This would make them all safe from that poison.

Cesare thinks instead it is perhaps a strategic plan made by a secret organization with a family structure. The aim of such organizations would be that of creating chaos in what they consider to be the world, subtracting from it the indeterminacy and mystery that makes spots on the walls and traces of urine on the snow beautiful.

► Cesare

The terrace on top of the building in Piazza Monte di Pietà 30
Rome, 9.30-10.30 AM

Getting something to eat, bringing it to the mouth with one’s hand, a cracker left somewhere on a table, for instance – that is an automatic act done without consciousness.

You have to make a conscious effort to avoid eating. We often eat paying no attention to what we are doing – not realizing, therefore, what we are eating. Fasting is an awareness exercise that focuses your attention on what you mindlessly and habitually do – by avoiding to do it.

The smiling dictatorship gives you everything – taking away from you that kind of awareness that comes from lacking something. The smiling dictatorship takes away the taste of life by reducing satisfaction to an automatic act. The smiling dictatorship takes away pleasure because it abolishes pain by decree.

Giancarlo thinks there is something positive in being angry, as well as in being antisocial, because any forced kindness takes away value from the relationship.

For Emilio the smile of the dictator is a mask, functioning to hide pain from others, and also from itself. Perhaps power is not compatible with pain? Is there any man in power, any politician, who acknowledges his own pain? No. And that's because the struggle for power, the search for power, is based on a simple concept: what we want will give us happiness. Therefore, if you are not happy, you are a loser – you haven't got enough power. You cannot be unhappy if you are reaching power (i.e. if you are into a career), or you are in power.

Emilio thinks that this "power" is equivalent to a religion: you are absolutely happy only if you are in a state of grace and faith. Power, in society, is equivalent to the heavenly grace – to being touched by God.

Who struggles for power in society –the smiling dictator– attempts to make a God out of himself.

Giancarlo thinks there is a positive aspect in being angry, as well as in not being patient. He also thinks there is a strong relationship between stupidity and smiling, between a fake kindness and a hidden bad intention.

I think that the angry rebel is beautiful – and sexually exciting. It comes to my mind that the tuberculous patients, even if wasted and affected from cough, were considered sexually excited and exciting.

Giancarlo thinks that the smiling dictator wants to have you with a full stomach: EAT – DON'T THINK – BE HAPPY (paradoxical injunction, this one).

For Emilio, fasting can help thinking and restore the right value to what we have because we realize we could not have it. On the contrary, the smiling dictatorship tries to convince us that we have everything... forever.

Actually the only things that are never lacking in our society are food and TV (i.e. the image of anything you could desire).

Here is a question, as an introduction to our next meditation: is a certain amount of anger, an oppositional attitude, always necessary in order to renounce something?



1 PM. LUNCH

► Emilio

Hello guys.

Are you feeling well? I'm a bit late on the schedule. See you soon with Pantagruel. I'll be able to start my last meditation before 8 PM, after cooking dinner for my women. Let's keep in touch. With a great need of food...

It's now 8.09 PM, and I read all the incoming messages right away. I haven't reflected on them yet. A vague sensation of compassion came over me, both for your words and for the fragrance that cooking left on my hands. Could Pantagruel be the "double" of the kamikaze, nesting together inside of us?

If we assume that Pantagruel is within each one of us, he has to be inside of Cesare too. But I can't find him. And yet I seem to remember a little, tiny Roman Pantagruel being at one of the several dinners I attended there.

He was really a trifle – neither voracious nor excessive or exaggerated, paying due compliments to pecorino cheese and wine.



Hidden behind this, however, another Pantagruel rises much more imposing – the one who has the best ideas and takes the decisions. Actually, paradox of paradoxes, this Pantagruel is very similar to the kamikaze. In fact, as in each one of us there is a Pantagruel, so there is a kamikaze.

Cesare: The more I know the more I'm longing to know. The more I'm longing to know the more I act on my thoughts in order to see if it brings new knowledge to me. The more I know, the more I forget, which doesn't help my knowledge. And the more I forget, the more I'm longing to forget to the point that I don't have any knowledge at all.

This is when Pantagruel and the kamikaze meet. Having the most coincides with having the least.

The more the kamikaze deprives himself of his life the more he generates death. A thin thread links waste and deprivation, squander and sacrifice, in an indissoluble way.

The more you hate the man who explodes himself on a bus crowded with children the more it's difficult (at least for us, western people) not be fas-

minated by the courage shown by the kamikaze, who's scorning the death – the death we are terribly afraid of. Actually, we comfortable living beings always far from death by decree, we are the true voyeurs of the tragedy – all fascinated by the expectation of it.

But here we're talking about a kamikaze who blows up mental codes, psychological habits, functional thoughts. Even though the bursts are loud there is no blood flowing, rather fragments of ideas, rivulets of intuitions...

Giancarlo and his Pantagruelic double, who doesn't give a damn about him (but we do!):

- Giancarlo: Bresaola? (Air-dried beef?)
- Giancarlo: No, thank you.
- Giancarlo: Salamella da sugo? (Tomato sauce sausages?)
- Giancarlo: No, thank you.
- Giancarlo: Cosciotto d'agnello? (Lamb shank?)
- Giancarlo: No, thank you.
- Giancarlo: Pollo in fricasea? (Chicken in egg sauce?)
- Giancarlo: No, thank you.
- Giancarlo: Ciccioni di maiale? (Pork pastry?)
- Giancarlo: No, thank you.
- Giancarlo: Salmone affumicato? (Smoked salmon?)
- Giancarlo: No, thank you.
- Giancarlo: Polipetti rosolati? (Sautéed octopuses?)
- Giancarlo: No, thank you.
- Giancarlo: Polenta e osei? (Polenta with bird's skewers?)
- Giancarlo: No, thank you.
- Giancarlo: Fegato alla veneziana? (Calf's liver with onions?)
- Giancarlo: No, thank you.
- Giancarlo: Il porcheddu sardo? (Sardinian roast pork?)
- Giancarlo: No, thank you.
- Giancarlo: Filetto al pepe verde? (Green pepper fillet?)
- Giancarlo: No, thank you.
- Giancarlo: Civet di lepre? (Hare civet?)
- Giancarlo: No, thank you.
- Giancarlo: Gallina bollita? (Boiled chicken?)
- Giancarlo: No, thank you.
- Giancarlo: Lingua salmistrata? (Pickled calf's tongue?)
- Giancarlo: No, thank you.
- Giancarlo: Piedino di maiale? (Pig's feet?)
- Giancarlo: No, thank you.
- Giancarlo: Musetto? (Spicy pig's intestine filled with cuts of pork?)

- Giancarlo: No, thank you.
- Giancarlo: Spezzatino di vitello? (Veal stew?)
- Giancarlo: No, thank you.
- Giancarlo: Abbacchio scottadito? (Roast suckling lamb?)
- Giancarlo: No, thank you.
- Giancarlo: Baccalà alla vicentina? (Salt cod with milk?)
- Giancarlo: No, thank you.
- Giancarlo: Stinco di maiale? (Braised pork?)
- Giancarlo: No, thank you.
- Giancarlo: Anatra all'arancia? (Duck with oranges?)
- Giancarlo: No, thank you.
- Giancarlo: Pollo alla diavola? (Roast fowl?)

Dear Pantagruel, who is inside me, if I really were you there wouldn't be either the third world or hunger because rather than eat chicken I would fast.

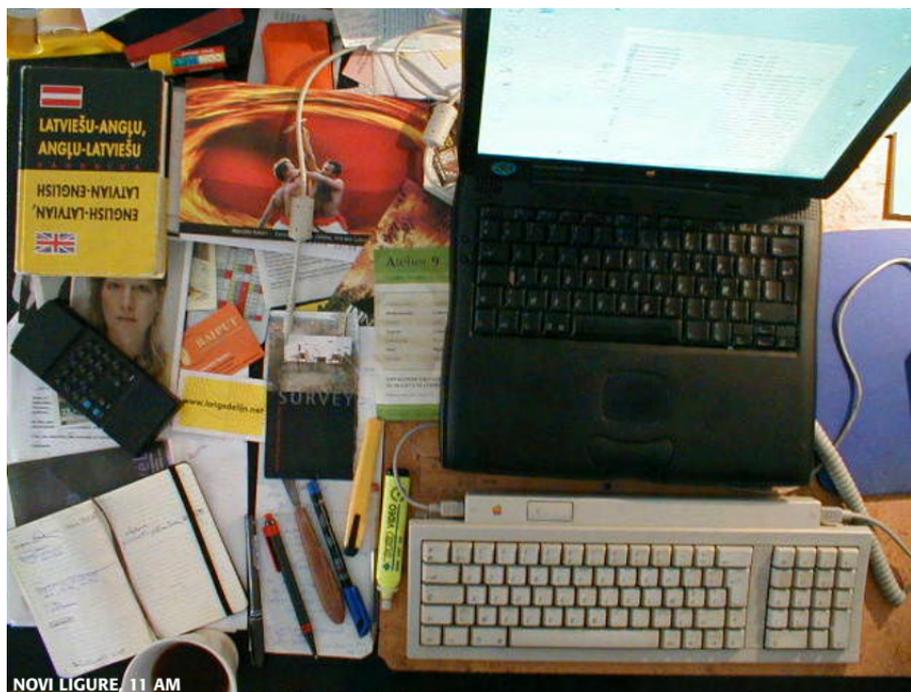
Giancarlo: Wandering through the city and never thinking about what I don't have, because I love three or four things only. Kamikazes make me sad because I know death. I don't really have bad thoughts towards them. And what if they were middle class students or graduates who drink whisky and smoke Marlboros? Like those of September 11th? Not so different from the soldiers of the Western Empire! Almost Americans! If I were a kamikaze, in the fatal day, I would be dressed in a dirty T-shirt.

► Giancarlo

I don't know much about Pantagruel, nor about the kamikazes. I have never read anything by Rabelais, but I am interested in the "Slow Food" movement.

Kamikazes were Japanese suicide air force pilots, but when you read that word in a newspaper, you don't think of Japan.

I think these concepts – of waste, of sacrifice – are relative to the different aspects of each man's primary needs. Emilio could see these extremes as fixed points around which revolve his own desires or his own limits. I imagine this mechanism as a Duchamp's door. It's a choice between the unhappiness of those who have too much without having anything, and those who can afford simply nothing for too long. Uhhh... although this interesting sentence seems appropriate for Palestinians, it doesn't sound like it can work for the fellows of the Japanese emperor.



Cesare thinks that too much food, as well as lacking a homeland, could be like the content of an empty room where you sit blindfolded without feeling guilty for for being granted both food and a homeland.

► Cesare

It's almost 4 PM...

A few pangs of hunger, just a few, not so strong... yesterday they were stronger, even if I had had a good breakfast.

I had a coffee this morning at 7.15 AM, and another one at noon, both with a pinch of sugar. I also had some water. Up to now, the only inconvenience of fasting is a little headache. Overall I feel good and light.

My studio in Vicolo Savelli, 3.45-4.45 PM

Pantagruel eats anything (part of his name says that, doesn't it?); he is not happy, but not so unhappy either. He is only afraid of missing something and,



in order to avoid this fear, he needs to incorporate everything. He also needs to feel powerful and, therefore, he prepares meals for his friends – meals so big that his guests cannot completely consume them.

There is always something left over after such banquets, something nobody can swallow.

If he could, Pantagruel would eat his friends also: he is an inclusive – he needs to incorporate everything. It is his way of expressing love towards the other.

The kamikaze, on the other hand, is inspired by sacrifice; he gives up his life for destroying the soft belly (a ship, a skyscraper, a shopping mall) of a pantagruelic culture that wants to include it all.

The kamikaze entropically redistributes the totality of the world through his death.

Pantagruel is the consumerist society, embodying both humans and goods. Everything, even all the brand new products on display at the supermarket, has already been eaten by this Pantagruel.

Emilio thinks that waste and sacrifice are two opposite extremes: on the profane side there is the desire of accumulation (becoming rich - 3D bulimia), and on the sacred side there is the abstinence that becomes an ideology, an absolute belief, and hence no longer a mean for reaching a new level of awareness (i.e. what the three of us are trying to do today).

Giancarlo fundamentally doesn't know what waste is – he can't conceive of it. He knows there are people who practice it and he doesn't love them. Perhaps he doesn't want to give them too much attention. He feels quite detached from the idea of sacrifice. Also, he doesn't love the word and the concept, he thinks, is too catholic. Renouncing is a choice, he believes, and it shows a certain degree of freedom.

8 PM. DINNER

► Emilio

Je suis cuit
here is my last...
I propose to review it all tomorrow. Buona notte.

Bologna, 8 PM, the kitchen room

In order to feel part of the world, one has to incorporate goods. The paths we have made with our words have taken many different turns: crossing, overlapping, colliding, vanishing and enriching. There is nothing in these paths that has anything to do with goods. Particularly today we have had very little to do with that, nearly nothing – in any case, less than in the days past. It would seem that the less you have to do with it the more you feel part of the world, if to be part of the world means to listen, to perceive, to stay together – near or far.

There is a corresponding desire to each good; a satisfaction to each desire; a sense of lacking to each satisfaction, and this sense of lacking is holy and it has to be kept light on. So: if goods are lacking something will light on immediately. But believe me, something will light on also if goods appear! Later I'll invite you for a healthy banquet, around a table, in your favorite city, and I will cook for you in order to demonstrate and materially verify this hypothesis. And hence: dream my friends, dream, because Cesare will have delicious weightless puff pastries, Giancarlo grains of rice as precious as pearls, and all of us sweet rivulets of red wine.

► Giancarlo

NL, 7.41 PM, the same room, viewing south

I am not very hungry, perhaps because I am pissed off. I like to read what we are writing on the two others' opinions, they look to me like little acts of love.

I believe there is as much strength in deciding to buy one thing rather than another, as in not buy anything at all.

The difference could just be in discovering whether we have such power. The impression I get from looking around me is that the politics of the supermarket "points" (as credits or coupons) and of the videogames is expanding towards a general economic and social politics for our country. If you drive in a safe manner, you won't lose "points" on your driver's license. But, when needed, you can earn back your "points" by paying some money at the right time. If you retire at a certain age rather than at another, you gain or lose «points». If you are smart and reliable, you get a special bonus (you also sometimes get a «game over» message, but nobody talks about that).

Cesare is very sensitive to the quality of the goods he buys. He knows that under particular circumstances quality is of vital importance. He needs life, even if the price for it is incorporating goods. This is why he tries to make quality thoughts also, without implying these to be luxury items.

The quality of his goods as well as his thoughts is absolutely functional.

Emilio does not need any possessions. He could live inside a tree without owning it, if it were comfortable enough.

He is able to write his name in the air with his head while keeping his arms open, and is able to forget his passport anywhere in his room without losing concentration. He knows that things are there even when he cannot see them.

► Cesare

Rome; evening

Tonight, coming back home from my studio, I realized that one can «turn blind from hunger». In fact, I have problems with focusing – whether my gaze, my attention or my will.

At 10 PM, I have started our dinner meditation: I'll begin eating again tomorrow morning also. This evening I drank a glass of fruit juice.

Immediately after my arrival in New York, I had the sudden feeling that goods were the real landlords of the city. They were, in fact, always very well displayed – clean and lined up, perfectly at ease while dictating proper behavior to those goofy guests, those humans trying to satisfy their desires.

And I seemed, therefore, to understand why every time I was walking in the street I was feeling the impulse to get into every shop where there was food for sale and eat everything. Evidently I was not responding to hunger, but I was trying to feel at home.

The consumerist society is based on the idea that you have to swallow everything.

It is the only way to get a sense of belonging.

Emilio thinks it is simply not possible to incorporate things that are very different from one another – and from us too. To be part of the world is a matter of harmony and agreement. He thinks of digestion as a relational process, a relationship between the organism – with its enzymes and organs on one hand, and the physical/chemical properties of a substance on the other. An indistinct incorporation is simply nonsense. The point is getting to know how to choose what to eat and, in any case, it's much more important to know ourselves – in order to know the ways of harmony and agreement – than to have a great supermarket next door.

Giancarlo, instead, thinks about evil. He thinks that the indiscriminate incorporation is dangerous because poisonous things are so many more than healthy ones. For him, any attempt to incorporate something in order to become part of the world is a potential offense to the world. Horribly, many people lack the understanding of how delicate this mechanism is.

That's why they choose short-cuts. And storing all that is storable, consuming all that is consumable – these are short-cuts. For Giancarlo, feeling part of the world means exactly the inverse of consumerism: leave the minimum trace of your passage through this world. Leave it as you found it.

This project was conceived and developed for the *First International Lunchtime Summit. A coming together of collective initiatives and socially engaged art in 16+ cities* (September 26th, 2003), organized by Sixteen Beaver Group, New York for

The Common Project

<www.16beavergroup.org/w-l/intro.htm#common>

Get rid of yourself

Artist Collectives and Collaborating Artists in the USA
ACC Weimar, and Stiftung Federkiel, Leipzig, Germany
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<www.acc-weimar.de>

24/7: Wilno - Nueva York (visa para)

Contemporary Art Center (CAC), Vilnius, Lithuania
September 12th until November 2nd, 2003

<www.cac.lt>

<www.16beavergroup.org/lunchtimesummit.htm>

Second edition. Booklet redesigned in 2007

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9am - Los Angeles (USA) [LMT: ask local contact]
 9am - Vancouver (Canada) [LMT: ask local contact]

11am - Austin, TX (USA) [LMT lunch/picnic: ask local contact]
 11am - Chicago (USA) [LMT?] [LMT: ask local contact]
 11am - Mexico City (Mexico) [LMT: 8pm-10pm]

12pm - Concord, NH (USA) [LMT: ask local contact]
 12pm - Durham, NC (USA) [LMT: 5:30pm to 7pm]
 12pm - New York (USA) [LMT dinner: ask local contact]
 12pm - San Juan (Puerto Rico) [LMT: 12pm-?]
 12pm - Toronto (Canada) [LMT: 12pm-?]

1pm - Tucum-n (Argentina) [LMT 1:30pm-?]

5pm - London (England) [LMT: 7pm-?]

6pm - Berlin (Germany) [LMT: 5:45pm-?]
 6pm - Bologna (Italy) [LMT: All-day fasting]
 6pm - Ljubljana (Slovenia) [LMT: ask local contact]
 6pm - Novi Ligure (Italy) [LMT: All-day fasting]
 6pm - Paris (France) [LMT: ask local contact]
 6pm - Rome (Italy) [LMT: All-day fasting]
 6pm - Skopje (Macedonia) [LMT 11am to 1:30pm]
 6pm - Weimar (Germany) [not confirmed]

7pm - Vilnius (Lithuania) [LMT: ask local contact]

9pm - Yerevan (Armenia) [LMT] [not confirmed]

12am - Krasnoyarsk (Russia) [LMT dinner: 5:00pm]
 12am - Manila (Philippines) [LMT 7pm-9pm, Sept 17th + 26th follow-up]