

Nico Vascellari
Alessio (2023-24)
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“States of collective affinity”
by Andrea Lissoni

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States of collective affinity

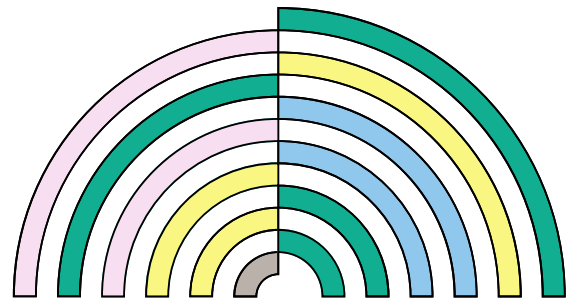
I have had the privilege of accompanying Nico Vascellari's career over a number of years. Years of shared experiences, collaborations, but above all, conversations, exchanges and comparisons. I have frequently had the opportunity to experience exhibitions and performances where, inevitably, those dialogues have been mirrored in the most diverse ways, often simply echoing from a distance.

Some of those conversations were before an audience. Others took the form of written pieces with two authors, or they became critical texts.

In reflecting on Nico's artistic career, I come back to certain recurring questions, concerns that have gradually become evident and consolidated. For example, his relationship with the territory, with the sources, with the substances and materials, with sound, inevitably, with sculpture and with a specific history of late modern sculpture. Or the interpretation of the tradition of epic, as a personal journey into the many facets of his own personal life story. Two foundational elements surfaced. One is collage as a process of immersion in a material dense with stories, generating imaginary and filling a personal archive, and the other is feedback, as a linguistic element that Nico handles impeccably to integrate the context and incessantly regenerate the work in its making and transformation.

The performance *Alessio* (2023), presented at the Salone dei Cinquecento in Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, uses and amplifies all these aspects. Similar to other occasions, I was able to take part in its genesis, to see *Alessio* in the flesh in “his” environment at the bar near Nico's studio in Rome, to share opinions and attend the actual performance. As always, Nico swerved intensely in the preparation stage, offering the audience a rearticulated and complex work, uncompromising and demanding from all points of view: 26-year-old *Alessio* is on the big screen for about forty minutes, the result of a sequence of just under two minutes per loop. A group of performers that grows from one to thirty-two gradually enters the stage, facing the audience with the projection behind them. Each one repeats *Alessio*'s gestures in unison, following his polyphony of sounds like a score.

Alessio has made me rethink Nico's work, giving me an unprecedented perspective that runs through questions I had not considered, and a line of performances over time,



from *I Hear A Shadow* (2009-11), to *Gnawing My Own Teeth Behind A Closed Door* (2009), *DOOU* (2020) and of course, *Alessio*.

Repetition

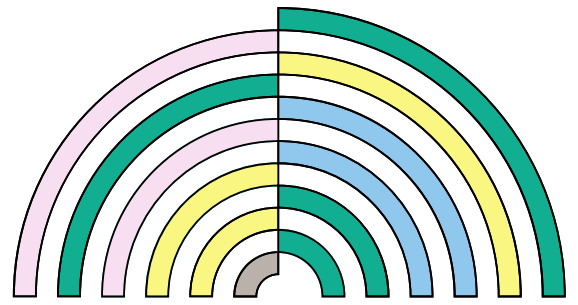
The attempt to reduce a boulder to dust by repeatedly beating on it with a bronze cast for twenty days in a row takes the form of a gruelling, endless loop. We are in a room in the lower part of the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester, and the performance is *Gnawing My Own Teeth Behind A Closed Door*. In a way, it could be a sequel to *I Hear A Shadow* - where Nico repeatedly beats on a monolithic bronze structure, generating a sound and its echo, like an extension of the feedback process. A dialogue with the metrical structure definitely surfaces, which one would spontaneously be associated with Nico's musical history, where repeating voice and percussion, both deep and cadenced and dense and compulsive, have been and are a constant. In different forms, first in *DOOU* - a 24-hour livestream involving Nico in a bare room, equipped with only a microphone, repeating the phrase that gives the performance its title, following the same intonation but changing its extension and its rhythmic succession - then in *Alessio*, the principle of repetition is foundational. For Nico, repetition is a tool for creating rhythm, generating narrative tension and probably highlighting a human condition. By inviting the audience into a cyclic and in some ways hypnotic experience, he compels the public to pay great attention to detail, to search for meaning, but, above all, to be involved in the confrontation with a form of language that is much more complex than it appears.

Posture

The posture is frontal, raw, with no set decoration. The tools are the minimum necessary: the place and its state as a medium - in the sense that it can resonate and amplify, like an empty room - amplification equipment, a sculptural object or an entire frescoed hall. Whether the gestures are simple and iterated, or complex and articulated in a language and deliberately looped, they are expressed through an unfiltered posture. The performance space is the room and it is frontal, like a stage. The body or bodies are moving non-stop, whether upright, bent over or executing a choreography. Context, instruments and gestures belong to a *mise-en-scène* in which the posture stands out in a special and unique way, sharpening and intensifying all the way from *I Hear A Shadow*, *Gnawing My Own Teeth Behind A Closed Door*, to *DOOU* and *Alessio*.

The performance body

For these staging conditions, the body plays an interesting role, extending from an individual body to an expanded body. A new body takes shape, the performance body. Such a transition is clearly manifested in *Alessio*, where the obvious process of amplification from the one - *Alessio* - to the plethora of performers' bodies, is the completion of a transformation that has taken place in previous performances. Nico has never actually insisted on his body as much as on intensifying the scene, on making it dense and orchestrated. His body, as in the compressed documentation of *DOOU*,



inhabits every corner of the room, and in the live experience, the space gradually becomes denser. Nico follows a process of combining, where the elements on stage, the medium, and postures are composed and short-circuited virtuously. The performance becomes a living body independent of Nico as a performer. Inasmuch as it transmits and is transmitted, generating a memory in which the whole takes on body, it assumes an independent presence and communicates through a singular language.

Sounds

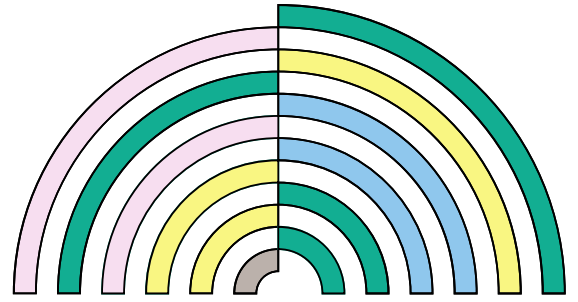
Without a doubt, Nico composes and orchestrates. His entire artistic practice is developed in the arrangement of the dialogue between noise and sound. Each of his performances accompanies the audience from the presentation of basic sound elements to the manifestation of a composition, which can undoubtedly be defined as musical. *DOOU* and *Alessio* represent a more obvious step in this direction, but in *Alessio*, the orchestration of sounds into musical composition is formidable. *Alessio*'s expressive repertoire is distributed, shared and inevitably amplified. Each movement, blow, beat, and pop is an element of a personal language that is transformed by being repeated and interpreted by a crescendo of performers: from a score and notation system that punctuates silence, it becomes a melodic and emotional musical composition, where the background noises of the street - such as passing cars - participate in the best tradition of contemporary music.

The medium

In orchestrating the performance space destined to become a composite and independent body, each element is a medium charged with potential. Used in its main function as an instrument, a microphone, a beam, a cast, a sculpture, a body or a body part, each element is a transmitter. With apparent simplicity, Nico arranges, utilizes, slides a short-circuit into the form of a composition through repetition. And with masterly recognition of the function of feedback, resonance and echo, he interprets each element as an absolute medium whose function is not only given by its form or role, but by the specific nature of the material and more precisely, the living material that composes it. In this sense, each element is a medium primed with potential: Nico not only knows it intimately but also "plays" it, and manipulates the invisible substance between the element, the body, the bodies of the audience and the plethora of intermediate spaces.

In a performance work where the individual gesture is a potential language, where iteration is an instrument, where the body is distributed, where the sound is articulated in music and every element is a medium primed with potential, the question is: What happens to the public?

DOOU and *Alessio* undoubtedly herald a new awareness on Nico's part. And this has developed over a period of time since the performances of the early 2000s. The intensity of actions that have been compounded and plunged into biography, territory, and his own musical practice, has fermented into a metamorphosis in which a new echo is nurtured from performance to performance. This long tail has consolidated an



original performative language that is open to rapid artistic and cultural transformations, free from the pressure to respond to or belong to pressures and categories of the present, but always resonating with the central questions pertaining to being human in the world.

I am not sure that I can give an answer about what really happens to the public when watching *DOOU* online for 24 hours or being exposed frontally to the diversity of *Alessio*.

But I do know that these visionary interpretations of everyday forms of otherness that Nico gives shape to, generate empathy, elicit involvement and induce disturbing states of shared collective affinity.

States of collective affinity that can only leave you entrenched in your own uncertainties.