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Techniques of presence. Beyond presence and its crisis

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Presence: a cornerstone of De Martino's reflection

The concept of presence is central to Ernesto De Martino's reflection and philosophy[1]. De Martino was surely an ethnologist and a historian of religion, but also an outstanding philosopher, dealing with a wide range of tendencies from the beginning of his work. Among different approaches converged in De Martino's work, I recall the Italian existentialism of Nicola Abbagnano, Enzo Paci (probably De Martino has been inspired by the latter for the concept of presence), Luigi Pareyson; further on, he was influenced by Martin Heidegger's, Karl Jaspers' and Jean-Paul Sartre's European existentialism themes; the historic materialism (Marx and Gramsci's debate on the relationship between dominant and subaltern); Pierre Janet's dynamic psychiatry, a central author in De Martino's philosophical project; Freud's psychoanalysis (for the relationship between ritual and repetition) and Jung's psychoanalysis (to whom De Martino was inspired by his thoughts on the function of symbols); Binswanger's and Minkwoski's anthropoanalysis, for the analysis of the patient being-in-the-world; Callieri's phenomenological psychiatry, Henry Ey's psychiatry and Alfred Storch's work on the links between schizophrenia and mythical-magic disease.

As the concept of presence was the main core of De Martino's work, we can consider his work mainly as a phenomenological description of the crisis of presence. However, we mustn't neglect the different meanings of presence. Italian contributions to the concept of presence tend to emphasize the dramatic aspect (correlated to its crisis) and to trace its philosophical genesis and prehistory (Pastina, 2005; Barbera, 2016). Despite this, there is a discontinuity between a Kantian conception of presence

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1   Every excerpt from De Martino's books will be my translation.

seen as a synthesis of the transcendental apperception and the following opening to a dynamic conception of presence (Valisano, 2017; Vincenti, 2019). This development can be found in the prepared materials in the last section of the unfinished book *La fine del mondo* (Techniques of the body; see De Martino, 2002) and his philosophical notes, later published as *Scritti Filosofici* (De Martino, 2005). In his late writings, the attention paid to the themes of the construction of the presence is conditioned by the political situation of Western countries threatened by the risk of nuclear war (in 1962 the Cuban crisis left the world breathless). De Martino identifies the crisis as permanent and not restricted to a precise historical time, "from the cot to the grave" ("dalla culla alla bara", Lanternari, 1978). Magism shouldn't be considered a drama of human origins, but a permanent risk to human beings, societies, and cultures. The crisis is a continuous peril for societies and, more specifically, for Western civilization: after the Holocaust and the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we must face the possibility of self-destruction and the catastrophic destruction of the planet Earth. Hence, De Martino dealt with existentialist literature and with the mutation of the "human condition" in the second half of XX century, in the shadows of the nuclear holocaust underlined by the German philosopher Gunther Anders (De Martino, 2019: 220; Dei, 2018).

Through attention to the "techniques of presence," we can focus on the operations and processes which allow the emergence of the subject in the relationship subject/world (Zanardi, 2011). This perspective is often dismissed by the theoretical stance in philosophy (in which the object faces us from a certain distance) and by all the perspectives which prefer the analysis of discourses, representations and values to the study of dispositives, operational processes and technical aspects (e.g. Bruno Latour's constructivism[2]; Mancini, 2018). De Martino's late writings and the focus on the "techniques of presence" are an important contribution to every reflection on human nature which however avoids the shallows of the naturalistic approach typical of certain cognitivism (for which human nature is one and universalizable) as well as of theology, which postulates an essence revealed once and for all, marked by original sin. Furthermore, De Martino's reflection on technique is strongly inventive: if 20th-century philosophy has often identified technique as a late degeneration of the relationship between human beings and the world, according to De Martino, the technique is a transcendental which has an anthropogenetic character and which allows the transition from vitality (nature) to utility (culture). It is the inaugural dimension of human being-in-the-world as well as a bridge between immediacy and culturally significant mediation. In this regard, De Martino (2000: 41) writes:

> a priori it is certainly the technical power of man, whether he turns to the domination of nature with the production of economic goods, with the manufacture of material and mental instruments of practical action, or instead, he turns to prevent the presence from shipwrecking in what passes without and against the human being.

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2   Bruno Latour's constructivism is a form of constructionism in the broad sense that the French author applies to the field of the sociology of science: scientific facts emerge as the result of specific networks of processes, technologies and institutions. In his attention to the role of mediations in the construction of facts, Latour differs from the classic approaches of social constructionism, exemplified in a classic like *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966) by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann.

The research of Pierre Hadot (1995) and Michel Foucault on the ethopoiesis practices of ancient philosophies (Foucault, 1988; 2001a; 2001b) and the more recent ones on the anthropotechnics of German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk (2009) share the same family resemblance. The common premise of these authors' research is a plastic and self-poietic idea of the subject. It is a question of studying and analyzing the conscious and voluntary construction practices of the individual; everything is practice and technique for ancient spirituality: physical exercise, body care, rhetoric, the practice of arts, social life, and political activity. Practices that Michel Foucault (2001b: 1032) renamed as "technologies of the self" or

> les procedures, comme il en existe sans doute, dans toute civilisation, qui sont proposées ou prescrites aux individus pour fixer leur identité, la maintenir ou la transformer en fonction d'un certain nombre de fins, et cela grâce à des rapports de maîtrise de soi et de connaissance de soi par soi.

Foucault's studies focused on late antiquity, especially on the Stoic authors; Peter Sloterdijk's contribution is more recent and has gained wide recognition even outside the academic field. In his *You Must Change Your Life. On Anthropotechnics*, the German philosopher sets out to outline the features of "a general anthropotechnology" which describes "humans as the creatures that live in the enclosure of disciplines, involuntary and voluntary ones alike" (Sloterdijk, 2009, kindle). According to Sloterdijk, anthropotechnics are "methods of mental and physical practicing by which humans from the most diverse cultures have attempted to optimize their cosmic and immunological status in the face of vague risks of living and acute certainties of death" (Sloterdijk, 2009, kindle). Therefore, humans produce humans in a way that is constitutively different from what is meant by frustrating expressions such as *Homo faber* (who objectifies the world in the ways of doing) and *Homo religiosus* (who addresses the otherworldly world with surreal rites): "It is time to reveal humans as the beings who result from repetition" (*idem*). The human being produces herself/himself through a life of practices, a term by which Sloterdijk means "any operation that provides or improves the actor's qualification for the next performance of the same operation, whether it is declared as practice or not" (*idem*).

Presence/crisis of presence

The central thesis of *Il mondo magico. Prolegomeni a una storia del magismo* (1948) is that another epoch, the magical world, was engaged in the effort to "found individuality [...] presence, that for us is a given or a fact, in that epoch, in that historical age, stood as a task and matured as a result" (De Martino, 2022: 174). The human presence itself, therefore, is a product of history. However, there is no clear and positive definition of presence in *Il mondo magico*, but it is defined only in negative terms, through its crisis, or by evoking the risk that threatens it. Although it shares some traits with the classic philosophical conception of consciousness as an operator of psychic contents, the concept of presence overcomes the substantialist conception of consciousness. In *Il mondo magico*, De Martino claims that there are mental states observed by ethnologists, whose name varies according to the language and the culture (*olon, latah, amok*), in which the distinction between presence and world is lost in an "indiscriminate coincidence". It is a question of a fusion of presence and the world. One of the typical

symptoms of this crisis is the mimetic echo: what happens fascinates me to such an extent that I cannot physically detach myself from the thing I'm observing. De Martino (2022: 54) writes about the *olon* state, observed among Tungusi in Siberia:

> if we analyze the *olon* state, we recognize, as its peculiarity, a presence that abdicates without compensation. Everything happens as if a fragile, unguaranteed, ephemeral presence, not resistant to the shock determined by a particular emotional content, could not find the sufficient energy to remain present to it, re-understand, recognize and master it in a network of defined relationships. In this way, the content is lost as the content of a present consciousness [...] The distinction between presence and the world [...] collapses: the subject, instead of hearing or seeing the rustling of the leaves, becomes a tree whose leaves are stirred by the wind, and instead of hearing the word becomes the word that hears, etc.

Similarly, in the *latah* state observed among Malaysians, the individual loses, for more or less long periods, "*the unity of his own person* and the autonomy of the ego" (De Martino, 2022: 54 – italics of the text). As in the state of *olon*, so in the state of *latah*, following a strong emotion or a surprise, the person is impressionable: if her attention is attracted by the oscillating movement of the branches shaken by the wind, she will passively imitate this movement. Any difference and distance are abolished: I am a thing; I do what things do. The distinction between the self and the world fails and collapses because it is the result of an operation that, like any operation, can fail (Leoni, 2013). This distinction is an artifact introduced by the use of a technique: magic, in the perspective proposed by De Martino, is above all a technique of presence that has the objective of drawing a boundary, producing the object and, by producing it, magic produces the subject itself[3].

"For a collapsing presence", writes De Martino (2022: 75), "the magical world has not yet appeared. For a redeemed, consolidated presence that no longer feels the problem of its lability, the magical world has already disappeared". The empirical individual is not given and guaranteed by one's being, but subject to continuous lability: the history of the person moves between the two poles of crisis and redemption. Except in the idealistic abstractions of some philosophers, there does not exist a presence that is a given, "an original immediacy sheltered from any risk, and incapable in its own sphere of any drama and any development: that is, of a history" (Jervis, 2011: kindle ed.)[4]. Therefore, firstly, presence is cultural dynamism, a movement that transcends the situation in terms of value. If presence is movement, a crisis is stagnation of the valorization activity. In these moments of crisis, the distinction between me and the objects of the world can disappear: the distinction between subject and world, thus, emerges as a derivative and constantly to be done.

De Martino (2022: 161) writes:

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3   "The appropriateness of designating a particular historical form of the sacred as magical or religious depends only on the degree of development and complexity of the mediation process" (De Martino, 1995: 83).

4   The psychiatrist Giovanni Jervis began collaborating with Ernesto De Martino in 1959, following the advice of Giancarlo Reda, Jervis' department head at the psychiatry specialization school. The influence of De Martino's work and thought on Jervis' research on the theme of psychological identity (*self*) is lasting and recognized by Jervis himself who carried on with De Martino's research according to a naturalistic perspective with the findings in the field of cognitive science and social psychology. See Jervis (1984; 2011).

Kant assumed the analytic unity of apperception as an ahistorical and uniform datum, i.e., the thought of the ego which does not vary with its contents, but which understands them as its own; he placed the transcendental condition of this datum in the synthetic unity of the apperception. But just as there are no elements and data of consciousness (except through abstraction), so there is no presence at all, an empirical presence, which is a datum, an original immediacy sheltered from any risk, and incapable in its own sphere of any drama and any development: that is, of a story.

According to De Martino, the philosopher from Königsberg had not considered the process of formation of the person and the risks associated with this making, assuring the empirical level to the transcendental level that precedes and founds it and avoiding the possibility of "multicolored, diverse a self as I have representations of which I am conscious" (Kant, Guyer & Wood, 1998: 247). In "the magical world", the autonomy and unity of the person are a conquest. Thus, the person is always exposed to the risk of not being in a dimension of structural lability (Talamonti, 2001; 2005).

In the writings subsequent to *Il mondo magico*, more specifically in the so-*called Southern trilogy* (*Morte e pianto rituale, Sud e magia, La terra del rimorso*), the crisis of presence is correlated to the so-called "critical moments" of existence, nodal points of becoming (birth, death, illness, marriage) in which can arise the risk of not being able to objectify the critical situation in any form of cultural coherence; this risk was particularly common for the peasant communities of Southern Italy, crushed between economic misery and social oppression. The critical moments can be heterogeneous: "sexual life, the crisis of puberty, mournful episodes and natural catastrophes, the recurring and key episodes of hunting, gathering, and pastoralism [...] the relationship with the familiar, social and politic authority" (De Martino, 1995: 81). The presence, through magical and religious techniques, appropriates the situation in which it is entangled and becomes master of herself by repeating the crisis, according to a double movement of *catabasis* (a downward movement) and *anabasis* (an ascent). De Martino considered magic and religion as vital defense techniques to recover the human presence from a crisis situation and, at the same time, they allow to reduce the number and intensity of new traumas. They function both as therapy and as existential prophylaxis of the risk of not being in the world, in those critical moments of existence in which history is protruding. De Martino's approach seems to remain the same, even in the ethnographic writings of the 1950s: the presence moves between the poles of crisis and redemption. According to the author, however, the previous postulation of a magical world as a "historical age committed to founding presence in the world, before and independently of the unfolding of the individual categories of doing" (De Martino, 2022: 278) should be rejected. A valid core remains:

the thesis of the crisis of presence as the risk of not being in the world and the discovery of an order of techniques (to which magic and religion belong) intended to protect presence from the risk of losing the categories with which it rises above blind vitality [...] and also intended to rediscover, through mediations, the world of values compromised by the crisis (De Martino, 2022: 278)

Habit, use, and domestication

In most cases, the term "presence" coincides with the Kantian analytic unity of apperception. In his last writings, on the contrary, De Martino conceived it as *Dasein*, following an encounter with existentialism and Heideggerian phenomenology in the mid-1950s. The attention to the theme of the construction of presence reflects a paramount conceptual and existential change: the crisis as a permanent possibility is no longer limited to a precise historical era, but it goes along with us "from the cot to the grave". If for some civilizations and some eras, the way to resolve the crisis was using techniques such as magic and religion, modern Western civilization precludes this possibility. Western societies have become aware that the religious way is a "*détour* to reach the human, [...] a long way opposed to the short way [...] the mystification arises from the obstinacy on the long way when the exploring awareness of life has discovered the short way" (De Martino, 2019: 471). The late De Martino (2019: 532) prefers the expression presentification to the concepts of presence/crisis of presence, thereby indicating the operations that allow the human being to build and maintain being-in-the-world[5].

Presentification means that presence is always in the situation, in the decision and in the act of transcending the situation: presence is presentification because it is "being-in-the-world, and its norm of existence is wholly enclosed in that dash between words that actualizes being and opens up to being" (De Martino, 2019: 532).

The attention to the processes of presentification occurs through De Martino's reflection on the concepts of use ("Heideggerian usable"), habit, and domestication. Alongside the pages dedicated to reflecting on these themes, it is no coincidence that De Martino reflects on the body, the central fulcrum in the construction of any horizon of familiarity and domesticity correlated to the existence of a world. The time marked by the solar or lunar calendars is possible because, De Martino (2019: 514) writes, "the request for a staying and a return is already embodied in our living heart". Let us read his poetic words:

> The living heart of one's body scans the internal calendar of our existence in the most visceral way. A long time before the celestial rhythms, the beating of the heart participates in time and reveals it, marking the epochs of creative joy and despair, trembling expectation and melancholy, voluptuousness and anger, sensitive to such an extent as to react to the same solicitations of the unconscious [...] If the time of heaven [solar and lunar calendar, ed] is known, it is because the request for a staying and a return is already embodied in our living heart (De Martino, 2019: 513).

The body is the primary place of presence[6]: the familiarity and obviousness of the body are the basis of our roots in time and space and are obtained through the repetition of organic experiences.

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5   A world is an order of "intramundane entities with their overall horizon" (De Martino, 2019: 452) articulated in a community project.
6   The most significant passages on the theme of the body and the living body have been expunged from the recent edition. I will therefore refer to the previous 2002 edition.

The background of the obviousness of our body is experienced, not known because we have consciousness of our body only when some variations arise. De Martino (2002: 604-605) writes:

> Kinesthesia, the continuous feeling that we have of our body, is a ceaseless repetition of organic experiences which, through this repeating, become the obviousness and normality of being there as corporeity, and that "we can only know this by the variations that raise it above or lower it below the norm" (Ey, III, p.444) [...] The body schema, this system of references through which we are aware of the different parts of our "own body", this "total center of references that indicate things" (Sartre), the existential basis of our perceptions, the ever-present and constant horizon of the events of our life, "way of being knotted or rooted in the world" and "à l'espace" (Merleau-Ponty).

The construction of presence begins with the body and with the fabric of habits that make every horizon of domestication possible, starting from the first house of the body. The bewilderment that follows every awakening, when the texture of bodily and mental habits that form our daily presence is silent in sleep, is overcome precisely through the reconquest of the body in relation to the outside world.

Habit

An affinity between presence and the concept of habit could be already deduced, although negatively, in a passage from *Il mondo magico*: "presence [...] flees and is discharged through the openings of the body, it is stolen in solitary wanderings [...] falls in awe of the appearance of some new event, which breaks the *habit*" (De Martino, 2022: 167 – my italics). The pages of *La fine del mondo. Contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali* present a systematic reflection on the theme of habit, in the section *Tecniche del corpo* (De Martino, 2019: 514-520). The section employs the title of a homonymous essay by the anthropologist Marcel Mauss (*Les Techniques du Corps*), who defined them as "les façons dont les hommes, société par sociétè, d'une façon tratidionelle, savent se servir de leur corps" (Mauss, 2017: 30).

The body, Mauss maintained, is human beings' first and most natural instrument, their most natural object and technical means; the body is not a simple natural object, but a socio-cultural object that varies according to the place and time in which it is observed: every movement of the individual life is mediated by the society to which the individual himself belongs, through the cultural habits inscribed in each culture. De Martino radicalizes Mauss' position: the body in itself is the result of a collective history of effort and domestication. The gesture of salting soup, for example, is a habitual action because it condenses a series of capacities of which the subject is no longer aware. De Martino (2019: 516) writes:

> In the habitual gesture, in the skill exercised at a twilight level of consciousness, all this was there, but latent: and precisely because it was there, even if latent, the hand had become so obvious with its skills that they could be easily performed, a liberating habit of other habits to be learned and invented.

Furthermore, he adds: "all this was possible because he was never alone, thrown into the world, but accompanied, supported, guided from personal and collective history, unfolding over the time of human generations, in the flow of their valuations of the world" (*Ibid.*). It is not easy to fully outline the theoretical function of the concept of habit, given the fragmentary nature of the text, but De Martino (2002: 617) clearly explains it in this point:

> Habits are formed through more or less intense and prolonged learning processes and effort, then they tend to become mechanical, leaving space to further life enrichments. The conditioned response is the easiest case of habit, the formation of which involves the intervention of higher mental functions. A habit is an economic form of activity.

The example of walking may clarify De Martino's perspective on habit. Walking is a skill gained with a lot of effort by everyone during our childhood and which no longer requires our conscious attention. It condenses an individual and, at the same time, collective and multilayered human history: every individual motor development is the result of all the efforts, research, inventions, and knowledge of the human being in the painful acquisition of the upright position by our hominid ancestors. This obvious skill is regained every time you are in the process of walking; it is precisely the unawareness linked to this daily activity that will enable the possibility of new learning and innovations. In De Martino's (2019: 518) own words:

> This "limited awareness", this "relative" forgetting, this easy unfolding of walking ability in a "relative" unawareness [...] is an integral part of that ever-renewed liberation from givenness which constitutes the emergence of the presence, the continuous renewal of its margin of availability for value.

However, walking is always walking here and now, in a very precise context: when we need to pay attention to where we put our feet or move around in a dark room or when we are exhausted from a long outing, all the technical effort is concentrated on the problem of walking and the margin of availability for other transcendences narrows.

Habit, therefore, takes on a positive value: it creates space for the free and creative activities of human beings; at the same time, it forms the texture of presence, defending it from the possibility of crisis. In this direction, De Martino's reference to the theme of the awakening in Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Proust, 2015 [1913]) should be read.

Use

There is no place dedicated to a systematic reflection on the concept of use. In *Scritti Filosofici*, however, and in the posthumous work *La fine del mondo* (1977) De Martino returns to it repeatedly. De Martino (2005: 100) writes: "Presence is always in 'making a difference that enables the presence; on the contrary, when it does not occur the presence disappears". A statement that pairs with the follo-

wing: "Presence is, above all, being in the upright position and in the usage of the hands, finalized to a community plan of use (De Martino, 2002: 612).

"Making a difference" is the result of the continuous process of presentification, the exercise of a continuous discriminating function that aims to separate the things of the world and one's own body. Thanks to human beings' technical capabilities, the world becomes a familiar place, and, becoming a familiar place ("appaesare"[7] in De Martino's words), the presence includes it in its cultural horizon, fixing reality according to schemes, signs, and orders. As mentioned above, technique arises as a transcendental dynamic, promoter of the transition from nature to culture, authentic a priori (De Martino, 2000: 41).

If I can distinguish the inkwell from the ashtray with which it is optically in contact (this is the example De Martino gives, taken from David Katz; see Katz, 1948) it is because the "inkwell" operative project is different from the "ashtray" operative project and such distinction "cannot be interpreted otherwise than as an invitation not to dip the pen in the ashtray and not to throw the ashes into the inkwell" (De Martino, 2002: 595). David Katz's *Gestaltpsychologie*, according to De Martino, refers to forms already fixed in historical-cultural contexts, but operational projects are necessary, in order to distinguish one object from the other. The collapse of the ability to distinguish objects and to use them, as daily use allows, is an indication of a psychopathological crisis. In the psychopathological crisis, for example in delusional experiences, there is the dissolution of the background of domesticity which makes the world of the habitual and the familiar possible. When the objects separate themselves from the network of domestic relationships, the risk of their chaotic relationship is asserted. The collapse of the background of domestication implies a fall in the derisive, without the possibility for recovery in the face of trivial data; it is not this or that banal datum that is at stake but the very givenness of the world: things are no longer within their framework. The perceptual fields can be involved in a defect or an excess of semanticity (De Martino, 2019: 396). In the former case, the objects detach themselves from the weighted relationships that sustain them; in the latter case, a tendency to a dark and suspicious allusiveness is manifested, an internal tension that predisposes the objects to a kind of explosion, up to the deformed and monstrous with chaotic mixtures. Objects lose their concrete usability and become "signs of": Antoine Roquentin[8] warns that there is something new precisely in his most habitual acts, such as taking a pipe or a fork (De Martino, 2019: 391). When this "first and fundamental guarantee of being-there [that is, the world of the usable, Ed.] is hit by a crisis", daily acts become problems and they "open wide, so to speak, onto nothing" (*Ibid.*). In this case, the instrumentality of one's own body is also problematized, losing the character of an instrument through which we continuously appropriate our limbs and organs.

The concept of use is also fundamental for establishing a relationship with one's body, for distinguishing I/not-I. Here, the privileged interlocutor of Ernesto De Martino is the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty, and De Martino reports different excerpts from *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Merleau-Ponty, 2005). Although he does not comment on the excerpts from Merleau-Ponty, quoting some of them can be useful to highlight the renewed importance of the body in the processes of building the

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7   "Appaesare" literally means "make his own homeland" a hitherto foreign place, including it in one's cultural horizon through knowledge and values.
8   The protagonist of Jean-Paul Sartre's *La Nausée* (Sartre, 1938).

presence. Indeed, "in the genesis of the objective world, the constitution of our body as an object is a decisive moment" (De Martino, 2002: 580). Through the use of the limbs and the constant handling of objects, motor schemes and projects are organized, allowing one's body to be distinguished from other objects. Use plays an inaugural role in the constitution of presence: "bodies are what can be made of them" (De Martino, 2002: 533).

The emergence of presence, however, and the concept use can't be separated from the common condition of the *das Man* ("the They" or the "community project of the usable"), where the human being is protected and at home in the anonymity of the objective spirit; shared techniques give shape to presence, developing specific use relationships with the body and the world; that is, a dense network of "they do like this" (*that's how they talk, that's how they walk, that's how they mourn a dead person* etc.). As De Martino (2019: 512) writes:

> The truth is that even when we don't feel the desire to be with others, even when we believe we are alone, others live in our habits, in the techniques of our body, in the world as a horizon of usable, in the odological space whose operational *itinera* bear the sign of that collective domestication which refers to society and its history and which, precisely because of that sign, is constituted for each of us as a living and operable worldly space.

Domestication

The complex of mental and bodily habits, of *itinera* or operational paths, compose the fabric of presence, together with a system of symbolic references that give a horizon to one's being-in-the--world. Habit and use found the phenomenological category of domestication. It is always a precarious acquisition, built and rebuilt every day; it may happen that in some cases, this grid of references fails. As Giovanni Jervis (1993: 333) writes: "The category of domesticity phenomenologically expresses the (subjective) experience of organizing environmental reality according to criteria of distance and controllability [...] we use our world like an old habit".

There are two passages in which De Martino approaches this theme. The first is the episode of the "bell tower of Marcellinara"; the second is the theme of awakening in Proust's *Recherche*, evoked by De Martino in the pages of *La fine del mondo* (De Martino, 2019: 497) and in the essay *Apocalissi culturali e apocalissi psicopatologiche* (De Martino, 1964). With regard to the first episode, the theme had already emerged in the essay *Angoscia territoriale e riscatto culturale nel mito achilpa delle origini* published in 1952: the world comes to be defined as a culturally founded existential homeland, the result of a process that makes the world familiar ("appaesamento"; De Martino, 2022: 229-243). In the pages of *La fine del mondo*, De Martino (2019: 364) recounts the following episode:

> I remember a sunset, driving along some lonely Calabrian Road. We weren't sure our itinerary was right, and it was a relief for us to come across an old shepherd. We stopped the car and asked

him for the information we wanted, but his indications were so confused that we begged him to get in the car and accompany us to the right crossroads, a few kilometers away [...] He accepted our request with some mistrust [...] Along the short journey his distrust increased, and turned into real anguish, because [...] he had lost the familiar view of the bell tower of Marcellinara, the point of reference of his tiny existential space. When the bell tower disappeared, the poor old man felt completely lost: and he became so agitated [...] that we decided to bring him back [...] until finally when he saw it again [the bell tower, Ed] his face relaxed, his old heart pacified, as if for the reconquest of a lost homeland.

The episode took the form of an apologue, which De Martino worked on for a long time to illustrate an issue that he particularly cared about and which illustrates the notion of "cultural homeland", obtainable in reverse through its loss (De Martino, 2019: 350). To highlight it, he uses not only the apologue of the "Marcellinara bell tower", but the situation that the Bambara groups faced in the suburbs of Accra (in the film *Les maîtres fous* by Jean Rouch, 1955) and through the poetry of the Lucan poet Albino Tursi. In the first case, the forced abandonment of the cultural homeland of the Bambara was followed by the rapid spread of mental sufferance among the community; the poem of the second, on the other hand, is read as a document of the bewildered existence of a Lucan emigrant in Rome. The way to overcome the crisis is by remodeling over and over the domesticity of the world.

The most insidious characteristic of Western apocalyptic lies precisely in the threatening shrinkage of any operable future horizon. "Marcellinara's bell tower episode" illustrates how presence is in crisis when one no longer sees the signs of his/her cultural homeland. The view of the bell tower guides the presence which risks being lost in the absence of limits of sense; making the world our homeland is also building a web of habits and domestications that make silent objects, the signs of human work and one's own identity. This work allows the presence not to get lost and, if it happens to be lost, it allows her to return to herself. For example, in sleep, we abandon the network of bodily and mental habits that make up the fabric of our daily presence and we only reappropriate them as we wake up. De Martino (2019: 497) devoted some pages to "the theme of awakening" in Proust's *Recherche* (Proust, 2015) and he introduces them by writing:

familiarity, homelessness, the normality of the world [...] enclose a message whose warmth is confused with the same obvious feeling of being a living body: "Come on, you are not alone" – says this message – but on the way of the work of an infinite group of human beings, which embraces the dead and the living and which, even if it reaches you through your most direct educators, actually makes you a participant in waning ages and vanished civilizations (De Martino, 2019: 496).

In the *Recherche* Proust describes how it happens to Marcel, the protagonist, to wake up in the middle of the night without knowing where he was or even who he was, plunged into an existential abyss in which he felt "more devoid of everything than the caveman". However, the crisis is recomposed:

Then the memory - not yet of the place where I was, but of some of those I had lived in and in which I could have been - came to me like a rescue from above to get me out of the void from which I could not have gotten out by myself; passed in a second over centuries of civilization and the confusedly glimpsed image of oil lamps, then shirts with turned-up collars, gradually composed the original features of myself (De Martino, 2019: 498).

The path that Proust finely describes - from the vertigo of total disorientation to the recovery of himself and the world - takes place through the restoration of the domestic references of his own domestic world, composed of fixed signs, practical orders and habitual objects internalized as habits.

Conclusions

The attention paid to the techniques for building presence allows us to consider the theme of presence and its crisis from a different point of view. The process of presentification appears, in fact, as a continuous work of domestication of the world and oneself's body; this process is a continuous and always-in-progress work, never concluded, exposed to the risk of crisis. The abandonment of the Kantian conception of self-awareness coincides with the attention to the constitutive dynamics of presence and to the centrality assumed by the body through a dialogue with phenomenology. We can glimpse, in silhouette, the traits of the clumsy animal we are, who uses life without ever reaching total familiarity with it and, at the same time, without being never completely extraneous to it (Virno, 2015: 162).

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TECHNIQUES OF PRESENCE. BEYOND PRESENCE AND ITS CRISIS

Abstract: In the following pages, I will outline some meanings of the concept of presence in the work of Ernesto De Martino, starting from the *Il mondo magico. Prolegomeni ad una storia del magismo* up to the last writings of *La fine del mondo. Contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali* and *Scritti filosofici*, collected by Roberto Pàstina. The concept of "presence" initially coincides with the Kantian synthetic unity of apperception and its crisis, but in his later writings, it is replaced by the concept of presentification. My aim is to highlight how De Martino's latest writings open up to the themes of the construction of "presence". The process of presentification emerges as the result of the relationship of use between the body and certain techniques. Therefore, I will analyze the three contiguous concepts of use, habit and domestication.
Keywords: Dasein; Ernesto De Martino; body; technique; habit.

TÉCNICAS DA PRESENÇA. PARA ALÉM DA PRESENÇA E SUA CRISE

Resumo: Nas páginas seguintes, procuro delinear alguns significados do conceito de presença no trabalho de Ernesto De Martino, a partir de *Il Mondo Magico. Prolegomeni ad uma Storia del magismo* até seus últimos escritos: *La fine del Mondo. Contributo all'Analisi delle Apocalissi Culturali* e *Scritti Filosofici*. O conceito de "presença" coincide inicialmente com a unidade sintética kantiana da percepção e sua crise. No entanto, em seus últimos escritos, essa noção é substituída pelo conceito de "presentificação". Quero sublinhar como a reflexão tardia de Ernesto De Martino se abre para o tema da construção da presença. O processo de presentificação emerge como o resultado da relação entre o corpo e o uso de certas técnicas. Finalmente, analisarei os três conceitos contíguos de uso, hábito e domesticidade.
Palavras-chave: Dasein; Ernesto De Martino; corpo; técnica; hábito.

TÉCNICAS DE PRESENCIA. MÁS ALLÁ DE LA PRESENCIA Y SU CRISIS

Resumen: En las siguientes páginas esbozaré algunos significados del concepto de presencia en la obra de Ernesto De Martino, a partir de *Il mondo magico. Prolegomeni ad una storia del magismo* hasta sus últimos escritos *La fine del mondo. Contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali* y *Scritti filosofici*, recogidos por Roberto Pastina. El concepto de presencia coincide inicialmente con la kantiana unidad sintética de la apercepción y de su crisis; sin embargo, en sus últimos escritos esta noción es sustituida por el concepto de presentificación. Quiero subrayar cómo la reflexión tardía de Ernesto De Martino abre a la temática de la construcción de la presencia. El proceso de presentificación es el resultado de la relación entre el cuerpo y el uso de ciertas técnicas. Por último, analizaré los tres conceptos contiguos de uso, hábito y domesticación.
Palabras-clave: Dasein; Ernesto De Martino; cuerpo; técnica; hábito.