

Chapter 11

Mental, Social and Visual Alienation in D'Alessandro's Photography

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In this chapter I turn my attention to photography, and in particular to the first of several photobooks that accompanied the process of the reform of psychiatric health care in the 1960s and 1970s: Luciano D'Alessandro's 1969 *Gli esclusi* (D'Alessandro and Piro 1969).¹ According to Sekula, a photograph is an “incomplete” utterance, a message that depends on some external matrix of conditions and presuppositions for its readability’ (Sekula 1982, p.85). If the ‘meaning of any photographic message is necessarily context-determined’ (Sekula 1982, p.85), the aim of this chapter is to establish the philosophical, socio-political and cultural context within which D'Alessandro's photographic message becomes readable. The ‘readability context’ I will unravel is determined by the notions developed by the psychiatrists who were fighting against the regressive system of Italian psychiatry, chief among them Franco Basaglia.

Luciano D'Alessandro (1933–2016) was a Neapolitan photographer who dedicated his life to photojournalism, working with major Italian and international magazines and newspapers, such as *L'Espresso*, *Europeo*, *Corriere della Sera*, *Life*, *Stern*, *Le Monde*, etc. D'Alessandro immediately accepted when Sergio Piro, director of the Materdomini mental asylum in Nocera Superiore (Salerno), invited him and film director Riccardo Napolitano to document the abysmal conditions in the institution. This was part of Piro's anti-institutional strategy, much like Basaglia did in Gorizia with Berengo Gardin and Cerati.² Piro was in fact a phenomenological psychiatrist and outspoken supporter of Basaglia's reformism. He was second only to Basaglia in introducing the therapeutic community into Italy.

An initial selection of D'Alessandro's photos (21) was published in 1967, in the 117th issue of *Popular Photography Italiana*, under the title ‘Il mondo degli esclusi’ (D'Alessandro 1967). The images were accompanied by a short presentation by D'Alessandro and by an article by Piro, entitled ‘Fotografia e alienità’ (Piro 1967). In 1969, some days after Piro was fired from his post

because of his reformist impetus, *Il Diaframma* published the photobook *Gli esclusi: Fotoreportage da un'istituzione totale*, consisting of a larger (98) selection of pictures by D'Alessandro, accompanied by a longer introduction by Piro.

D'Alessandro's photographic work in the Materdomini has so far received limited scholarly attention, overshadowed by the (arguably) more impactful photobook of the same year, *Morire di classe*, commissioned and edited by Franco Basaglia and his wife Franca Ongaro. *Gli esclusi* was well-received by critics. Grassi (1969, p.3), in the newspaper *Roma*, sees in it the sign that 'la contestazione è giunta nel campo psichiatrico [...] con estrema intelligenza e raffinatezza' and Stefanile (1969, p.3), in *Il Mattino*, regards D'Alessandro's first photobook as a 'grossa conquista, da salutare con rispetto e con amore.' According to Cesareo (1981, p.29), 'le immagini elaborate da Luciano D'Alessandro [...] sono strumenti di indagine dell'istituzione, strumenti di denuncia e di analisi, di mobilitazione e di lotta.' Manzoli (2004, p.4) maintains that D'Alessandro, and other photographers, such as Berengo Gardin and Cerati, 'entrano negli ospedali psichiatrici per documentarne l'orrore.' Schinaia (2004, p.467) sees in *Gli esclusi* the shift from the 'non detto o [...] dire scandalistico' of the previous (rare) reportage on asylums, to the 'tentativo di raccontare delle storie e di avvicinare emotivamente l'"altro";' Russo (2011, p.314) counts it among the 'fotoreportage umanitar[i]' of the 1960s–1970s in Italy; D'Autilia (2012, p.342) borrows Schinaia's words in regarding *Gli esclusi* as part of a trend 'estetico-emotivo' in the representation of psychiatric matters. Babini (2009, pp.252–54) includes *Gli esclusi* in her history of Italian asylums. Carli (2014, p.106) notes how its images 'esplorano e – al tempo stesso – accusano.' Foot (2015, pp.29–30) mentions D'Alessandro's photos only in passing, as co-initiator, with *Morire di classe*, of the wave of 'asylum photography.' Forgacs (2014) analyzes *Gli esclusi* in a section of the chapter 'Asylums,' tellingly named 'Limits of vision.' He claims that photography is limited

in its ‘capacity to record any kind of complex social information’ (Forgacs 2014, p.233) and that photos in *Gli esclusi*, as much as those in *Morire di classe*, are taken by photographers ‘from the outside [who are] perhaps inevitably, intrusive’ (Forgacs 2015, p.239).

Despite numerous scholars having mentioned D’Alessandro’s photos, at least in passing, no one to date has highlighted the individuality of D’Alessandro’s *Gli esclusi*: all scholars who mention *Gli esclusi* count it together with *Morire di classe*, certainly because both were published in the same year. In this chapter I will analyze *Gli esclusi* as an independent cultural product, framing it within the dominant theoretical strains that I believe influenced it. Among the most prominent notions there is certainly that of alienation. Through Sartre, existentialism and the work of phenomenological/existentialist psychiatrists, Basaglia developed a stance that recognized both the ill effects of social alienation and its inevitability in terms of development of the individual self. Such a conception feeds into the photographic language of the reform, as I will show. To this extent, in the next section, I will discuss the notion of alienation as it was received and elaborated by Italian reformist phenomenological psychiatrists, in particular Franco Basaglia.

1. Alienation according to Basaglia

Basaglia’s notion of alienation is very much indebted to existentialism, especially to Sartre, whose complexities cannot be untangled in this essay. I will limit my analysis to a brief outline of Sartre’s notion of alienation as he sets it out in *Being and Nothingness*. According to Sartre (1978, p.263) the ‘alienation of myself’ is ‘the act of being-looked-at;’ it is the look of the Other that ‘alienates [my possibilities] from me:’ ‘I grasp the Other’s look at the very center of my act as the solidification and alienation of my own possibilities.’ Alienation is also a fall, in that, continues

Sartre (1978, pp.274–75), ‘my being for-others is a fall through absolute emptiness toward objectivity. And since this fall is an alienation, I can not make myself be for myself as an object for in no case can I ever alienate myself from myself.’ Alienation is at the core of the experience of being oneself, it is a constitutional and constitutive alienation in the Other, it corresponds to being in a relationship with the Other, an object of the other’s look. For this very reason alienation is reciprocal, in that as much as I am defined by the look of the Other, which alienates me, I am the Other to someone else, and my look causes the very same alienation I undergo to others. ‘By the very fact of my own self-assertion I constitute him [the Other] as an object and as an instrument, and I cause him to experience that same alienation which he must now assume’ (Sartre 1978, p.410). Ultimately, according to Sartre, alienation is unavoidable:

the very meaning of our free choice is to cause a situation to arise which expresses this choice, a situation the essential characteristic of which is to be alienated; that is, to exist as a form in itself for the Other. We can not escape this alienation since it would be absurd even to think of existing otherwise than in situation (Sartre 1978, p.526).

While such a ‘reciprocal’ alienation is unavoidable according to Sartre, according to Basaglia it is where the encounter between the self and the Other, the establishment of a relationship, can become pathological. In ‘Corpo, sguardo, silenzio’, Basaglia (1965a) posits that there are two modes of being in a relationship with others. He calls them *alterità* (alterity/being other) and *alienità* (‘alienity’/being alien). In a state of *alterità*, the subject accepts the presence of the other and its necessity: there is no self, other than what others see. Otherwise, one could attempt to remove oneself completely from being exposed to the determining presence of the other. In this case, one would fall into a state of *alienità*. According to Basaglia, this indeed echoes Sartre:

I thereby recognize and affirm not only the Other but the existence of my Self-for-others. Indeed this is because I can not not-be the Other unless I assume my being-as-object for the Other. The disappearance of the alienated Me would involve the disappearance of the Other through the collapse of Myself. [...] But as I choose myself as a tearing away from the Other, I assume and recognize as mine this alienated Me (Sartre 1978, p.285).

Reciprocal alienation is played out on the body. According to Basaglia (1965a, p.304) 'è qui, nel mio costituirmi come persona che il mio corpo – aperto e vulnerabile – si staglia in mezzo agli altri e alle cose.' The body, 'thrown' in a Heideggerian sense into the Other, at the mercy of its look, is the subject's 'facticity,' everyone's quality of being a factual existence. There must however be an 'intervallo,' an 'interval,' a 'gap' – made of physical space and silence – between bodies, for them to 'salvaguardare ciascuno la propria intimità dall'altro' (Basaglia 1965a, p.307). This interval enables me to 'trovare il tempo ed il luogo dove poter accettare il mio corpo visto dagli altri, prima di accettarmi nel rapporto con gli altri' and gives me the 'possibilità di avere sull'altro lo stesso potere che egli ha su di me' (Basaglia 1965a, p.305). The state of *alienità* is the 'perdita dell'intervallo dove appropriarmi del mio stesso corpo [...] l'alienità è il rifiuto della propria fattità' (Basaglia 1965a, p.304). I have shown elsewhere (Sforza Tarabochia 2014) how this mechanics of unavoidable alienation / establishment of a gap in Basaglia maps well onto Lacan's theory of the ontogenesis of the self (as caught up in the pair alienation/separation), despite Basaglia's aversion to psychoanalysis.

For the purpose of this essay, it suffices to note that according to Basaglia *alterità* corresponds to the non-pathological mode of existence of every human being – we could venture to call it, with due caution, 'subjectivity.' L'uomo,' writes Basaglia (1965a, p.305),

non può attuare questo atto di riflessione su di sé se non attraverso lo sguardo altrui: è lo sguardo d'altri [...] che mi rende cosciente di me perché solo attraverso lo sguardo d'altri

io posso essere la mia oggettività, avvertendo contemporaneamente la soggettività dell'altro che mi determina e mi domina.

It is only in maintaining a *distance* from the other that I can acknowledge myself as, in turn, *other*. This *intervallo*, this gap between the other and myself enables me to establish the unavoidable relationship with the other: this is a state of *alterità*. Yet this distance cannot be a complete fracture with otherness, because that would cause a state of *alienità*: by refusing to be in a relationship with the other (that paradoxically I would refuse precisely to safeguard to the utmost my *distance* from the other, to make it insurmountable, to protect myself from the other) I would lose the *intervallo* and fade into the other. According to Basaglia (1965a, p.309), 'nel momento in cui l'uomo perde l'occasione di vedersi, di accettarsi nella propria fattità attraverso l'oggettivazione datagli dalla presenza dell'altro [...] l'uomo perde la propria alterità e si aliena.'

When in his anti-institutional 'manifesto' Basaglia (1964, p.267) defines the asylum as a 'luogo di istituzionalizzazione e di alienazione indotta', I believe he is referring to the condition of *alienità* he develops in the same years (1964–65): *alienità* is not, or at least not only, part of the pathogenesis of a mental disorder, it is caused by the institution itself that forces the inmates to lose the *intervallo*, the empty space and silence, which enables the subject to establish a reciprocally and not univocally alienating relationship with the other. In the psychiatric institution, inpatients lose the gap, 'dove poter appropriarmi del mio stesso corpo, abbandonato in una promiscuità in cui l'altro mi urge senza tregua, da tutti i lati e mi invade' (Basaglia 1965a, p.304).

Hence, alienation in Basaglia describes the pathological outcome of the constitutional and constitutive encounter with the other. While on the one hand in the 1965 paper 'Corpo, sguardo, silenzio' he regards it as a pathological process that is at the basis of mental disorders, in his 1964 anti-institutional manifesto he specifies that it is the institution of the asylum that causes alienation

in its inmates. In this double understanding of the notion, the social and psychological acceptations of alienation effectively converge. Not incidentally, this bridges Sartre's analysis of alienation with Foucault's theory of power, another pivotal source of influence for Basaglia. The institutional power wielded in the psychiatric hospital is not a form of sovereign power, an external imposition alien to the subject. Power does not come as an external imposition. Institutional power exploits the very psychological structures of subjectivity, it is exerted not only at the level of the bodies but also of their most intimate thoughts. In other words, it is a form of disciplinary power (see Foucault 2008).

2. Mental Alienation: 'Il mondo degli esclusi'

The first visual representation of such a multi-layered conception of 'alienation' in psychiatry emerges in D'Alessandro's initial selection of images in 'Il mondo degli esclusi.' More than half (12) of the pictures published in *Popular Photography Italiana* are details of inmates' hands. The remaining 9 images are portraits of the inmates: two are sleeping, three are in a straitjacket, two are close-up portraits, two show groups of inmates in the courtyard of the asylum.

In his presentation, the photographer remarks that he accounts his work in the Materdomini asylum one of his most interesting works of reportage 'diretti tutti a scavare nella realtà dell'uomo, colto nel suo lavoro, nel rapporto con gli altri, insomma nelle situazioni relazionali che nascono dal suo trovarsi, volente o nolente, in questo mondo' (D'Alessandro 1967, p.52). Significantly, D'Alessandro seems to be pointing to a visual exploration of Heidegger's 'being-in-the-world,' the constitutional state of being of every person that signifies the unavoidability of always being in a situation, in a place, in a relationship with others. His initial work, however, was confused, as

it produced ‘un materiale informe che non riusciva a prendere vita a sé, ad esprimersi attraverso un discorso preciso’ (D’Alessandro 1967, p.53). The key, according to D’Alessandro, was to understand his own work as a visual exploration of the ‘solitudine del malato mentale, rispetto al suo mondo di provenienza, rispetto agli altri, una solitudine che nasce dalla malattia’ (D’Alessandro 1967, p.54). The initial purpose of these pictures was thus to represent an existential solitude that he believed to be the product of the mental disorder itself – mental alienation. Already in his first theoretical writings in 1953, Basaglia (1953, p.57) refers to the existential condition of those suffering from a mental disorder as a *rimpicciolimento*, a ‘shrinking’ of the existential structure. In discussing the case of a patient, Basaglia (1953, p.57) says that ‘il mondo esterno veniva dunque a convergere su di lei e a comprimerla così da impedirle di espandersi e di esplicitarsi [...] nel tentativo di liberarsi dalle strettoie del processo di “rimpicciolimento” finisce invece con il precipitare più rapidamente in esso.’ In the 1966 paper ‘Ideologia del corpo come espressività nevrotica,’ Basaglia (1966, p.353) repeats, borrowing the words of the phenomenological psychiatrist Haffner, that in those suffering from mental disorders the ‘esistenza di una facciata monolitica [...] è espressione di un rimpicciolimento della struttura interiore tale da non poter sostenere giudizi, confronti e contestazioni.’ According to Basaglia, in order to defend oneself from the determining presence of the other, that is to say, instead of sustaining one’s own *alterità*, those suffering from a mental disorder fall into a state of *alienità*: the other is no longer the mirror in which subjects can find themselves, as it were.

D’Alessandro’s initial selection of pictures therefore focuses on individual solitude, what he regards as the mental alienation caused by the disorder itself. The predominance of details of hands, one of which occupies the entire title page of the article, while the remaining 11 are grouped together in the following two pages (pp.52–53), is very telling. The camera dwells on the intimate

dimension of silent gestures: in no picture are there hands that belong to different people. The hands portrayed carry food, play with a scrap of paper, rub each other, are joined in prayer, or are brought to the face perhaps to emphasize an emotion. They are not portrayed in actions of exchange, they don't seem to reach out for the other. In the article which accompanies the pictures, Piro affirms that 'le mani [...] sono un fattore importante spiritualmente perché permettono di manipolare il mondo' (Piro 1967, p.88). D'Alessandro however is portraying the hands of those suffering from a mental disorder: 'le mani dell'uomo che vive la sua alienità sono mani abbandonate, inerti, contratte, violentemente aduncate [...] esse parlano, nel loro modo occulto, il linguaggio della solitudine, dell'isolamento, dell'abbandono, dell'impotenza a vivere, dell'incertezza, della furia, della macerazione, della resa totale' (Piro 1967, p.88). D'Alessandro's selection of pictures indeed can be said to be an exploration into 'il mondo degli esclusi,' as he understood it. He presents it as a shrunken, impoverished, world and he symbolizes it through intimate portraits of hands, captured in non-expressive, at time meaningless, gestures. The remaining pictures capture this shrunken world more literally, in the form of idle moments spent on the floor of a run-down courtyard, in straitjacket, in despair, or contemplating the emptiness. The contextual origins of this exclusion and of the shrinking of the world are however omitted from the visual datum, and D'Alessandro's commentary points in the same direction: the solitude he portrayed is born of the mental disorder.

If there is a visual recognition of the institutional context in which the solitude of the mentally ill is isolated it is rather limited, especially when compared with the famous photobook that D'Alessandro will publish in 1969.

3. Social Alienation: 'Gli esclusi'

Two years later, in 1969, D'Alessandro publishes a larger selection of pictures (98) taken during his work in the Materdomini, including most of the 21 published in *Popular Photography Italiana*. *Gli esclusi. Fotoreportage da un'istituzione totale*, published by *Il Diaframma*, with an introduction by Piro, is the first Italian photobook on the asylum and D'Alessandro's first photobook. The title already points in a different direction compared to the article: it is no longer the 'shrunk' world of the excluded that will be portrayed, but it will be the excluded themselves. The subtitle adds that this is a photoreportage from a 'total institution,' a concept and term coined by the sociologist Goffman, which gained currency in discussions on mental asylums in Italy during the reform. 'Total institutions' are, according to Goffman, all those places, such as schools, prisons and hospitals, in which the totality of the lives of those who reside in them is regulated and dictated by institutional rules (Goffman 1961). Chief among these total institutions is the asylum. Basaglia himself repeatedly referred to the asylum as a 'total institution' (not for the first nor for the last time) in his introduction to the Italian translation of Goffman's *Asylums*, published by Einaudi in 1975 (Basaglia 1975). The subject of *Gli esclusi* is thus no longer the shrunken world of those suffering from a mental alienation, but the excluded themselves, with the implication that their existences have been shrunk into the asylum by society and the institution. 'Il lavoro fotografico gli è cambiato fra le mani' – comments Babini (2009, p.253) – 'ora l'unica strada che gli si apre davanti è quella della denuncia in termini sociali, politici e anche umani.'

The photobook not only includes a wider selection of pictures, it also provides a visual exploration of a wider conception of alienation that brings it even closer to Basaglia's. While the driving theme is still that of alienation understood as existential solitude, detachment from the other, the underpinning message is different and seems to indicate more clearly an external point

of origin for this solitude. In 'Il mondo degli esclusi', D'Alessandro speaks of an alienation caused by the mental disorder. In the photobook, on the other hand, a more visibly political take emerges, parallel to the blossoming of the reformist movement in Italian psychiatry in the momentous final years of the 1960s. Piro, in his introduction to *Gli esclusi*, acknowledges that, while D'Alessandro had initially attributed the solitude portrayed to mental alienation, Piro read the pictures differently: the solitude 'non era il risultato di una malattia, essa era la testimonianza diretta della violenza' (D'Alessandro and Piro 1969, no page). According to Piro, psychiatrists were the perpetrators of this violence, the cause of the alienation of those suffering from a mental disorder and he counted himself amongst them: 'io ero lì, paternalisticamente buono e mistificatamente comprensivo, quale strumento di fatto di quella violenza [...] costantemente impegnato in un ruolo che implicava il potere, la sopraffazione, la violenza, l'autoritarismo. Allora la solitudine che Luciano mi mostrava era l'effetto della mia violenza' (D'Alessandro and Piro 1969, no page). Regardless of the intentions of the photographer, Piro sees in D'Alessandro's pictures a well-deserved 'dito puntato dell'accusatore.'

Some kind of reform, however, was already underway in several psychiatric hospitals, as Foot (2015, p.24) argues in order to contend that the other famous photobook of the reform, *Morire di classe*, was 'a little bit of a fake product' in that the photos did not take into account these ongoing changes. *Gli esclusi* likewise portrays the state of decay of the institution and the abandonment of the patients rather than the reforms. Piro was aware of this – 'potrà qualcuno obiettare che dal 1965 ad oggi in molti Ospedali psichiatrici [...] le condizioni dei malati mentali sono migliorate' (D'Alessandro and Piro 1969, no page) – and contended that on the one hand 'negli Ospedali più arretrati le cose non sono cambiate' while, on the other, even if they had changed, 'la storia della solitudine rimarrebbe identica.' Piro concludes that 'la violenza rimane e

le immagini sono sostanzialmente attuali' (D'Alessandro and Piro 1969, no page). Whether as a place of violence and constraint or as a 'gabbia d'oro,' 'dove tutti i bisogni sono soddisfatti,' the psychiatric hospital remains a 'luogo di alienazione' (Basaglia 1964, p.267), perhaps even more so as a 'golden cage' in that 'il nuovo clima ospedaliero può produrre ora [...] uno stato di soggezione ancora più alienante, perché frammisto a sentimenti di dedizione' (Basaglia 1964, p.267).

It is not therefore the alienation of the mental disorder that emerges in D'Alessandro's pictures in *Gli esclusi*, but the alienation that the institution produces. 'Il vuoto è stato pienamente colto nelle immagini' continues Piro, 'ma questo non è il vuoto della malattia come ineluttabile condanna biologica, è invece il vuoto che l'apatia, l'inerzia e l'abbandono hanno creato in coloro che sono esclusi da qualunque movimento e da qualunque dinamica' (D'Alessandro and Piro 1969, no page). This of course does not exclude the effects of the mental disorder itself. The violence of the institution, its coercion, stack up with the effects of mental alienation, continues Piro: 'se già lo spazio dell'uomo era ristretto dalla sua alienità, esso viene ulteriormente ristretto dalla violenza e dall'abbandono' (D'Alessandro and Piro 1969, no page). Piro is echoing Basaglia here. According to Basaglia (1965b, p.271) mental disorders and effects of coercion overlap in 'institutionalization' understood as the 'complesso di "danni" derivati da un lungo soggiorno coatto quale quello nell'ospedale psichiatrico.' Institutionalization is

un comportamento legato al processo di "rimpicciolimento" dell'io cui il malato mentale è sottoposto dal momento del suo ingresso nell'asilo. Tale processo si sovrapporrebbe, in soggetti già psichicamente fragili, all'iniziale malattia mentale così da costruirne un complesso sindromico che spesso può venir confuso coi sintomi della malattia stessa: inibizioni, apatia, perdita di iniziativa, di interessi, ecc. (Basaglia 1965b, p.271)

The psychiatric institution therefore imposes a further alienation on psychiatric patients, turning them into inmates. However, continues Piro, it would be incorrect to see in D'Alessandro's pictures only the solitude caused by the mental disorder, just as it would be incorrect to see in them only the alienation caused by the institution. Neither is independent from the other, and 'in fondo è la solitudine dell'uomo (la grande solitudine ontologica) quella che [D'Alessandro] scopriva.' It is an ontological solitude that is exploited and brought to its extremes in the psychiatric hospital, as an effect 'della violenza, dell'esclusione, dell'abbandono,' which originate in the family and in society and that 'l'Ospedale [...] prolunga e [...] rende definitiva.'

With these considerations we have come full circle in the discussion of the notion of alienation: the 'shrinking' of existence that the institution imposes on the psychiatric patient is nothing but the symptom of the shrinking and weakening of society itself. According to Basaglia (1965c, p.291) 'questa necessità di isolare il malato di mente, di scrollarselo di dosso, è espressione dello stato di debolezza e di rimpicciolimento di una società che tende ad eliminare tutto ciò che turba la sua espressione senza tenere conto della parte di responsabilità che in questi processi essa pure gioca.'

The constitutional and constitutive alienation that characterizes the very ontogenesis of the self does not develop logically and ontologically into a negotiated *alterità* and the subject suffering from a mental disorder falls into a state of *alienità*, an alienation which finds no distance from the other, no space for subjectivation. The family, society and eventually the psychiatric institution latch onto this mechanism and reduce the *intervallo* even further, making *alterità* more difficult to achieve and precipitating the subject further into a state of alienation. But this is nothing more than a symptom of a society that is unable itself to achieve *alterità*. It is a symptom of a society that

fears difference and, instead of negotiating a distance from it, it attempts to tear away from it alienating it into the asylum, and at the same time alienating itself.

3.1 Hands

These considerations find visual representation in *Gli esclusi*. The photobook can be divided into two sections of similar length: images of men and images of women. Each section begins with an ‘establishing shot:’ a two-page spread wide angle photo of the courtyard. The male ‘establishing shot,’ at pages 2–3 is followed by 52 pages of images of male inmates. The female ‘establishing shot,’ at pages 56–57, is followed by 48 pages. As was already clear in ‘Il mondo degli esclusi,’ D’Alessandro is a keen observer of hand gestures. Of the 98 pictures in *Gli esclusi*, 27 are details of hands, 18 are portraits that feature hand gestures prominently, 9 are portraits in which the subjects seem to hide their hands on purpose. Piro indeed notices that ‘D’Alessandro fa parlare le mani,’ interpreting the inmates’ language since ‘se la comunicazione è altrimenti bloccata, le mani parleranno, quasi contro il desiderio dell’uomo, e racconteranno la storia della violenza, dell’esclusione, della discriminazione, della segregazione e dei soprusi.’ Hands and their gestures are not captured as potential symptoms of mental disorders, ‘quali segni convenzionali di una mostruosità,’ but they will be, according to Piro, ‘illuminati dal loro più generale significato, nell’insieme della loro completezza espressiva’ (D’Alessandro and Piro 1969, no page).

3.2 Idleness

The dominant feeling that emerges from D'Alessandro's selection of photographs is one of idleness. Hands and gestures are often used to convey this feeling. The very first image after Piro's introduction is a vertical shot of a courtyard wall. The whole left third of the image is occupied by an inmate standing, slightly out of focus. The remaining two thirds of the frame are occupied by the wall. The top right quadrant features an out of focus inmate standing; the viewer's eyes are led to him by the vanishing point of the wall. The inmate in the foreground has his eyes closed, head tilted upwards, possibly basking in the sun. The arms meet each other at the hands. The left hand holds the back of the right hand. It is a peaceful posture, but also a very inert, passive one. The photo on page 5 features an inmate sitting on the floor of the courtyard, ankles locked, legs stretched, looking at his shoes. He keeps his hands between his thighs in a humble, self-restraining, posture. The image does not suggest serenity but inertia, idleness, boredom. In the background of the image, where the lead lines of the tiles direct the viewer's gaze, other inmates lie on the floor, idle. A very powerful sequence starts at page 17. The picture is a close-up, *plongée*, of a crouched inmate in the courtyard. His left hand, slightly motion-blurred, reaches out for something on the floor. The following pages reveal that he was reaching for a used matchstick. The detail of his hand taking the matchstick at page 18, is followed by two smaller pictures featuring the detail of both hands handling the stick. Pages 20 and 21 feature a spread with the detail of both hands playing with the matchstick, which is concealed by the fingers. These images insist on a trivial gesture, by proposing a sequence of very similar pictures it seems to mimic a film roll, giving the viewer a sequential sense of movement. The movements however are minor, they describe an unimportant, unassuming and purposeless activity that suggests the boredom, idleness and ultimately meaninglessness of time.

In the following pages other details of hand gestures and inmates' postures give similar impressions. An inmate holds his hands in his trousers, in a very asexual posture, seemingly to warm them up (page 23 and 24–25); on page 28 an inmate looks at his hands; On the same page the picture is followed by two close-ups of hands rubbing. The spread on pages 30–31 details two wrinkled hands handling a crumpled piece of newspaper, establishing strong visual similes (wrinkled-crumpled; old-wasteful; abandoned-thrown), almost a visual iteration of the Heideggerian thrownness that characterizes all human existences, but affects, redoubled, those abandoned in the asylum.

D'Alessandro conveys idleness not only through details of hands. Already the two 'establishing shots' portray inmates either sitting or standing, but not engaged in any activity. Most other group or individual portraits feature idle subjects. The male establishing shot is followed by 7 pages of idle subjects, interrupted by a possible conversation on page 11 and by the images of the patient writing on the wall, discussed later. The female establishing shot is followed by 9 pages of idle subjects, interrupted at page 67 by the detail of a hand with a piece of bread.

3.3 Interaction and Action

Only twice does D'Alessandro portray hands involved in communicative interactions, capturing arguably significant gestures. Page 11 features the subject half-covered by the face of another inmate, in the foreground and out of focus. The subject looks to the left, with a very present look. He is probably taking active part in a conversation with someone outside the frame. The hands are joined at chest height, fingers spread, seemingly a variant of the Italian gesture for scepticism, doubt. Page 32 shows a gesture that is possibly part of a communicative exchange (thumb and index finger touching, forming an O as in the OK gesture), this is however followed by two details of hands rubbing. Page 13 and the 14–15 spread feature the same subject writing on the wall (possibly using a small sharp object to scratch the paint/plaster). The words are illegible, but it appears to be a rather long paragraph, in very small handwriting. The person looks intently at the writing, in the first picture his hand is writing, in the second he seems to be polishing the writing with the little finger. The photographer is very close to the subject, the shot is intimate. Yet, despite looking over the inmate's shoulder we don't have a feeling of voyeurism, possibly suggested by the use of the wide angle, which implies a closeness to the subject rather than the distance of a telephoto. The frame includes the back of the subject's head and part of his profile – we are not spying on his actions, we are participating in the writing and in his focused look. In three other instances, the images of hands involve food. At page 53 a male hand handles an apple core, at page 71 a female hand holds a sliced loaf of bread, and at page 67 an elderly female hand seems to offer a piece of bread to someone, perhaps the photographer, though the image is too close to know.

3.4 Intimacy, Abandonment and Despair

The postures and gestures featured in the images show abandonment and at times despair. On pages 6 and 7, for instance, two inmates are portrayed sitting. The first picture is taken from behind, slightly above the inmate's left shoulder and reveals that he might be tied to the gutter drainage pipe on which he is leaning. The second shot is a full-body right profile, the inmate's look points downwards, lost. He is also sitting on a low step; his hands are, significantly, concealed in his crouch. On page 22, a strong *plongée* frames an inmate crouched on the floor, sleeping with his hands and head between his knees. On pages 42, 44 and 45 inmates in straitjackets are portrayed. The first is a full frontal, looking intently at the camera, possibly wriggling in the constraints. On page 44 the inmate is sleeping, crouched, on a bench. On page 45 the inmate in the foreground is sleeping with his head down, in the background another inmate in a straitjacket, slightly out of focus, seems to be looking at the back of the head of the first inmate, as if he were watching over him. Page 47 features the detail of a pair of hands joined in prayer, followed by a close-up *plongée* portrait of an inmate whose head is covered by his jacket, hands joined in a prayer gesture, a monk-like figure seemingly pleading, the 'monaco scontento della alienità' Piro (1967, p.67) mentions in *Popular Photography Italiana*. The monk-like figure returns in the spread on pages 50 and 51, where he is pictured from an even higher-angled point of view, eyes not visible under the jacket/hood, the head out of focus, the hands joined in prayer – the only detail in focus in the picture. Among the women's portraits, pages 86–87 bear a large picture featuring three inmates crouching on the floor, the one in the foreground on the right with her eyes squeezed shut and head resting on the left hand, crying. In the middle ground, the woman has her right hand on her forehead, face entirely in the shade, expressionless. In the background, out of focus, a third inmate

is sitting cross-legged seemingly looking at the ones in the foreground. The picture is followed on page 87 by the portrait of a woman wearing an expression of dismay, looking past the camera, hands brought to the face.

3.5 Visual Alienation

We can certainly identify several main tropes in *Gli esclusi* (hands, gestures, idleness, limited interaction, abandonment, despair, etc). However, in stark contrast with the variety of images presented in the almost legendary photobook *Morire di classe*, the corpus of pictures presented in *Gli esclusi* is remarkably coherent and univocal. The photos are exclusively of patients, there is little to no interest for the facilities, the objects or the medical staff. The leitmotif of the photobook is their alienation.

All patients are presented as alienated from the world (they are, after all, *the excluded*) and from their own selves. This is not so much (or at least not only) because of the mental disorder itself, as D'Alessandro initially thought (see also Forgacs 2014, p.239), but also and especially because of the institution and society itself. The intimate focus on the hands and their humble, trivial, gestures presents us with individualized, atomized, activities, devoid of human connection. It shows us individuals closed in on themselves, deprived of a voice, who seem to entrust their hands with the task of communicating in silence. Inmates are shown as idle, abandoned, in a state of despair and dismay or unconsciousness: they are alienated from society, made aliens to it. The only actions portrayed are very limited interactions and eating. Their physical presence is visually shrunk: inmates hide under their jacket ('Il vestito copre tutta la testa ed esclude l'uomo dal mondo degli altri, come una bara;' Piro 1967, p.88), hunch their shoulders and crouch. The most extreme

example of this comes at page 97 where a woman is portrayed crouched, with her legs huddled under her vest. Quite often, the photographer uses different degrees of high-angle shots (24 pictures can be counted as *plongée* to different degrees, being more than a third of all images that are not details of hands). In contrast, there is only one picture in *Morire di classe* that can count as slightly *plongéé*.

All these elements are a visual translation of alienation understood as a shrinking, the ‘rimpicciolimento’ that the mental disorder initially causes but that is amplified by institutionalization.

4. Conclusion

With his work in the Materdomini asylum, D’Alessandro captured the multilayered notion of alienation as it was received in the struggle against institutional psychiatry. His photography contributed to the strategy of communication that would lead, in 1978, to the passing of the reform of mental health care, and the beginning of the closure of asylums. Far from being a scopophilic gaze, D’Alessandro’s camera captured the alienation of inpatients, showing it both in terms of mental disorder and of social abandonment and marginalization. At the same time, he also captured an existential condition, the state of thrownness and alienation in which we all live as human beings and which the processes of institutionalization leverage. Seen today, forty years after the ratifying of Law 180, his photographs show not only the inhumanity of the mental asylum of old, but also that the destruction of the mental asylum was certainly necessary, but it was also, quite simply, ‘obvious’ (Basaglia 1964, p.263).

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¹ The hard copy of the book has never been reprinted. A free online scanned version of the book was available until D'Alessandro's death in 2016. A cached version of scanned book is available through Archive.org 'Wayback Machine.' Piro's presentation is available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20090207170253/http://www.lucianodalessandro.com/esclusi/prespiro.html>, accessed on August 3, 2018, while the scanned photobook is available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20090205174019fw/http://lucianodalessandro.com:80/esclusi/esclus01.html>, accessed on August 3, 2018. The original printed photobook does not have page numbers. For ease of citation I have employed a custom page numbering whereby the first page with a photo is numbered 1. The pages follow sequentially.

² In 1968 Basaglia invited the photographer Carla Cerati to take pictures in Gorizia and other asylums. Cerati in turn asked Gianni Berengo Gardin to accompany her. A selection of their pictures was initially published by Einaudi in 1969, some months after *Gli esclusi*, in the photo book *Morire di classe: La condizione manicomiale fotografata*, edited by Basaglia and his wife, Franco Ongaro (Basaglia and Ongaro 1969).