

Reading, *Because of Love*

By Andrea Pagnes (VestAndPage)

This is not exactly a book review, but my humble thoughts skewed one after the other— a visceral empathic response to Franko's life story, one of the artists who most inspired my journey through art.

When someone tells you of his/her life, exposing his/her heart, every moment assumes its importance, even the most apparently banal. As we get to know a person better, there is a natural process that acts on our affective sphere. It is a mechanism mostly responsible for building friendship and respect. At least metaphorically, it can be said that the people we know and value inhabit a part of our brain. We have a copy of them stored in our memory: not an exact reproduction but series of images valid enough to stimulate our intellect and emotional intelligence.

Some books offer very concentrated social information. They are to our social interests like fresh water is to the part of our brain when we are thirsty. For readers who are concerned with anything that has social and causal implications, those books are there to satisfy these interests. They stimulate reflection. Not all books, of course, but above all good essays and novels, and those with the focus on a single character, biographies and autobiographies.

I always feel a certain fascination when an author of a book unlocks the doors of his/her world through an uncompromised way of writing. It is like receiving an open invitation to enter inside a place once kept secret and share what is there to be found, and so to imagine, mirror, recognise.

Franko managed to get me into his kaleidoscopic life story with a genuine, immediate narrative style. Even the most straightforward sentence seems to echo his voice, as listening to a tape recorder and causes me to continue with the one that follows, my innate curiosity triggered to know what happens next. On a purely rational level, this curiosity may seem meaningless. Instead, it is something very profound, almost primordial. It is a need that belongs to the

sphere of instinct, there where the basic drive to learn and acknowledge has always been fundamental for survival.

In *his autobiography*, Franko bares his soul to the reader. He recounts all that he went through, encountered and outlived, spilling his guts “to make the unbearable bearable and confront the human condition in its most vulnerable and carnal state” (from Lois Keidan’s introduction).

The poetic preface by Tim Etchells anticipates the climax of the whole book, comparing Franko’s narration to his seminal performance *I Miss You*, “Going forwards always, as the blood falling writes the steady trace of his trajectory, a marking path forming one drop at a time – a story in blood on the floor. And so it is with words, here, now (...) there is little by way of explanation, still less by way of psychology. Things happen. Steps are taken. The words fall, tracing their line.”

Page after page, Franko recalls what it means to survive and learn to live, *because of love*. His words frame fragments of the beauty of his violated landscapes. His troubled childhood, because of privation, loneliness, isolation, suffered abuses and violence, abjection, powerlessness, and psychological traumas. His adolescence spent on the streets and in and out orphanages. His stingy feelings of solitude and belonging nowhere always present (rising even by gazing a simple bottle of water on his bedside table), rarely softened by moments of consolation, e.g. finding a bit of comfort sleeping close to other kids like him. His desire to become independent, an adult, to get power on himself and decision capacity over his life.

In the late 1970s, at the age of 19, Franko throws off the shackles of the hard, oppressive reality in which he had lived until then and venture out into the world. Italy, the country where Franko was born and grown until then, is going through the most critical period of the so-called “Years of Lead,” a term used to label a time of social and political turmoil that lasted from the late 1960s to the late 1980s, marked by waves of both left-wing and right-wing incidents, murders and carnages of political terrorism. Roaming from city to city, Bologna, Padua, Venice, Franko takes part in political demonstrations, his anarchist spirit

disliking wars and organised abusive authority in any forms. In those years he lives as a homeless, a wanderer punk. Then he manages to cross the Italian border with an invalid ID and reach London via France.

Let go and let God. It may be useful in hard times to invoke the gods, but it is far better to move the arms. The gods help and save those who help and save themselves, as an old Russian proverb says. Even though his survival is put to the test continuously, in the book there is no concession to self-pity, no yield to complain and no rhetoric in everything he writes. Franko does not dramatise nor glorify his narration; does not use complacent superlatives; does not iconise his *mémoires*. He recounts real facts, events of his life as they were. Even in those moments of profound dejection and understandable discouragement, which are all human-so-human, Franko does not lose heart. Questioning himself and make sense of his life to find a luminous trail while living “at the margins,” the solution to the problems he has to face from time to time seem always to reside in his lust for life and a kind of pervasive sense of hope that do not cease to pulsate in his chest.

“When you come from nothing, from *trash*, you have to learn to get by on your own,” as Franko said in a recent podcast interview with Gary Mansfield. And so he did. In Brixton, he lives as a squatter, humble works in restaurant kitchens to sustain himself. Parallel to this, he is politically engaged in activities in defence of human rights and animal rights, operating as Front Liner and ACTUPtivist. His political idealism is a vital spark that nurtures him, contributing to forge and mature his ethical armature as a person, and that also will be at the root of his poetics.

About Franko’s art, many other authorial voices have written extensively, for instance beautiful pages by FAM (Francesca Alfano Miglietti, whose daughter Giuditta Fullone has made the drawings for the book); Dominic Johnson, Amelia Jones, Ron Athey, David Thorp, Vaginal Davis, Jennifer Doyle and Achille Bonito Oliva, Franko himself.

To this matter, one of the most revealing passage of his autobiography is the one when he met with Art. visiting the Rothko Room “where it seemed that in an instant you found a reason, a strategy to be and stay alive because you could try

to express the inexpressible using art as a language to try to somehow make sense of what I'm doing here and how this can be shared."

Franko will always say that art has been very generous to him because it gave him life. Hence, for him "it's important to share this generosity."

Enduring extreme living conditions, being able to not to succumb to his inner wounds, empowered his capacity for compassion, openness and insight. Patty Smith once said: "Those who have suffered understand suffering and therefore extend their hand." Those artists who know about suffering, for having lived and proved it on their flesh, once they come to terms with it, they express it through their art, outsourcing from their acceptance and resistance to suffering. In this sense, Franko is an artist that has been able to create and deliver beautiful images and survive them, overcoming acceptance and resistance themselves (personal and political) as the highest form of poetic rebellion.

From this perspective, *Because of Love* is not just an autobiography, but moreover the real story of a quest of liberation pursued by relying on the inextinguishable power of love, radical empathy and existential creativity: forces, which should always inhabit an artistic soul regardless any hostile social and political context.

With this book, Franko offers us his direct testimony of how vital is for an artist to draw inspiration from the hardest life struggles and transform them into a magmatic material to create thought-provoking, genuine art where the personal becomes universal. We are all made of the same substance: love and suffering, but no materialistic vision or approach to life and reality — Franko writes — can help us to find what is missing, that is some meaningful state or sense of fulfilment if we do not "share what 'we' have got first, which is 'our' self in the most naked, vulnerable state. To be able to *mostrare* (show) and be able to receive, first, we must be able to give."

These words of his brought me back to Joseph Beuys exhorting to "show your wounds." Also Lao Tzu about the search for the 'true self': "This nothingness is like a well / Always giving, never taking / And all claims to origin / Neither wanting or forsaking / You know it's ever-present / *You find it where you have no face* / It is a wondrous blessing / Original amazing grace" (transl. by Jim Clatfelter).

I close the book. I try to capture its essence, which lesson it taught me.

In our cultures, it is an easy habit to find someone to blame when things are not going right. *Because of Love* reminded me that when I notice something lacking outside of me, it might actually be what is lacking in me: my capacity for love, forgiveness, at last. I cannot expect society to fill spaces and gaps I have in my heart and my soul. This is something that I have to take responsibility for myself. So I'm not to expect others to provide that for me. Love is not down to other people. It is down to each one of us as individuals.

Because of Love confirmed me that I don't need to be holding on everything I'm attached to and that to be seriously determined about whatsoever path to choose, I will require courage, taking risk and at the same time experience a sense of freedom giving myself permission to be free enough to do that and learn.

Art and life are unceasing work in progress, processes of learning to let go rather than learning to acquire. There is no other way around that. There are no short cuts. You are in it as long as you are still breathing. There is no such thing as a result, to express what does mean to be alive. This is so essential to our experience of being a human being, but we live in a result-orientated society. We are so caught up with what we imagine to be surviving / living well / living better and so entangled by economic mores that we have allowed to wrap themselves around us almost irredeemably. *Because of Love* led me to reflect once more on the importance of venturing into unknown territories, avoid to stagnate in my comfort zones, refuse, renounce, hazard and be divergent. All this to let my inner child feeling uncluttered innocent joy by doing so and not make him bleeding alone too often, that is to be able to "love even in times of pain."

Reading *Because of Love* I could not do without recalling Franko's art. Not only his groundbreaking performances, where beyond the ideas of the artist as a scapegoat and sacrificial ritual they aim to subvert, re-imagine and re-define the social agreement that establishes explicit and implicit moral rules, norms and

behavioural policies between individuals in our society. I also think to those artworks where death and romance are deeply entwined to challenge the fundamental values of the culture of capitalism and its hypocrisy. The installation of embalmed blacked animals; the *lost boys* ceramic series; metal swings, see-saws and rides; the stitched drawing on canvas portraying Aylan Kurdi, the child found dead on the beach to escape from the Syrian holocaust, again sculpted as defenceless “sleeping beauty” into a block of granite so mercilessly white.

If the reality is an absurd theatre of cruelty, Franko makes it visible. He put our human vulnerability on display, as he did in a series of circular paintings: anonymous humanity carrying the same red mark, the same wound. In doing so, Franko liberates the esthetic from the ethical end of justifying suffering and sacrifice in the attempt to find new forms of the sacred and the political. Also, from my personal point of view (most probably because I am an Italian born like him), his art, *because of love*, also reclaims the pure essence of the spiritual. It frees it from the camouflaged parasitical clutches of the oppressive Catholic church tradition, which rules people’s will infecting their mind with the sense of guilt and concept of sin, this way legitimising its political authority, coercion and subjugations of classes and persons since centuries. Franko’s art invites you instead to journey inward to listen to your ‘spiritual self’ in-depth while remaining grounded and reflect, trust in change and move on.

The part of the book dedicated to his childhood, made me think of the countless children who still heavily suffer abuses of all kinds and of which we adults are all responsible, in one way or another. Fact is, that, especially in our Western societies, we often tend to run away from ourselves and when we design our lives we are too busy to look just at ourselves. Taking a stand, spending heartfelt words on issues such as child abuse is more than doing nothing, but they will never be enough to this painful problem if they are not transformed into concrete, necessary actions. I mean, even small steps, each of us in his/her own way, for what we can. Yet, so used to spending and consuming to fill our basic needs, we also risk becoming consumers of love, emptying it of its true meaning. Thus not understanding what love is in essence anymore and not operating

through love, we often choose the other way round. We fill our lives with distractions to compensate for our inability to give and receive love. Some of them are rather beautiful distractions, but some of them are just pure noise. *Because of Love* brings the reader to consider that when a person has not any of those rewards or excuses to call upon anymore and is left with nothing, ultimately him/herself in its most real state, there is no way to hide but face it. Therefore, taking that process means that the person actually has to meet some of the things that he/she would really instead prefer to remain buried, and some of the things that almost subconsciously he/she keeps buried because actually does not want to go there. But if the person is to grow, become, develop, then he/she has to look at those areas, eventually to emerge from having spent that time in those areas as stronger and more open from the person that started that process.

I think this also the kind of wisdom that permeates Franko's book: acts of surrender, acceptance, acknowledgement, confrontation, meditated radical reactions to a multiplicity of situations, all in one, which make of *Because of Love* "a complicated tale of redemption through art" (Adrian Heathfield), an art that "finds a balance, dramatically undermining the status quo" (Becky Haghpanah-Shirwan).

We all share the same yearning, the same longing and the same difficult questioning: what it is to be a human being. But there are also life experiences that teach us to value our human existence. In that manner, they break us open so that we are able to recognize who we are and what we have, what informs our social identity, what we likely can pass over and what we should honour instead, like duly respect the other's life and dignity, and keep our own integrity, *because of love*.

We people are in a community of life, and we are all members of that community rather than in charge in some weird kind of way of it. But looking at today political currents, it seems almost undeniable that they are increasingly exerting leverage on our seeming inability to understand that, fomenting widespread division and separation among people. The result is that we position and cage ourselves in all those toxic and dreadful boxes that label us and measure our

lives mistakenly. We are fleecing and deceit each other and that actually is even encouraged by a large part of the media culture. What we are actually missing is a more in-depth consciousness and awareness to begin to love again each other unconditionally, praising differences and diversities we all have because they are precisely what make us unique to each other. *Because of Love* led me back to considering that the real alternative lies in our capacity to embody love and act from there unpretentiously to celebrate to equal extent both darkness and light, such stuff we are made on, and let love reigns supreme in our hearts as a multidimensional energy, not something static but utterly fluid, beneficial.

When I look at art, if I don't see a sparkle of love, romance and tolerance, then I think that there are some very crucial questions to answer those issues. It is the same with life when I feel more fear than love, then I know that I am in the wrong direction.

The first time I met with Franko, he was installing his exhibition at Palazzo Lucarini in Trevi (Italy). His spontaneity, kindness and generosity touched me unquestionably. His human and political concerns echoing in his works so neatly: our human fragility, to re-imagine life in the absence of all the weight and ropes that hold down its beauty. His poetics, at times fiercely ferocious, at times exquisitely delicate to speak about the human condition right now and of love as a need and duty, and all that unfolds from love in terms of authenticity, justice and ultimately grace.

Now, through his autobiography, I met a more intimate, personal Franko: a troubled young boy who has always sought the antidote to the adversities of his life by embodying life itself with all its joys and sorrows, before becoming one of the most innovative radical artists of our times.

As bad as we had it, there is always someone who had it worse. *Because of Love* threw me back to re-consider that to nurture the vision of life I have, my poetic utopia, I need wonderment not just bravery, staying thankful for what life gave and gives me, good and hard times, while continuing to take action against what my heart dislikes.

After reading *Because of Love*

Open letter to Franko B

By Andrea Pagnes (VestAndPage)

After reading *Because of Love*, I wanted to interview Franko. But what can still be asked to an artist like him, who has already been interviewed a hundred times with the risk that the interviewer becomes repetitive and trivial? So I thought of writing an open letter to him, friend to friend. Franko, kind as he always is, responded by including his considerations below my own.

Scheuerberg (DE), April 9, 2014

Dear Franko,

Because of Love is still on my writing desk. I'm thinking of you, of how you wrote about your life with honesty and open heart. Here in my studio, on the walls, few artworks by artists, writers and friends that I met during my life journey: the phrase by Beuys "Mach Den Mund Weit Auf" (Open your mouth wide) and that (in Italian) by David Grossmann "Col Corpo Capisco" (My Body Knows); the poem "Imagine Peace" by Yoko. A "Lost Boy" ceramic and two stitching drawings by you: a small cross spilling drops of blood from inside a heart and the one with a tiny red house. These works of yours remind me of: *What is "Home"? Where is "Home"?* Same as your autobiography recalled me of the too many people who have no shelter, vagrant spirits sleeping in a damp street corner and nowhere else to go. I think of the multitude of refugees forced to exodus against their will, left with little hope in environments that often result hostile: our Western countries, whose weapons raze to the ground their homelands and whose corrupted economic policies strangle their right to survive. We are good to fill our mouth with big words like "integrity." Yet we are unable to integrate the other, as it should be.

Franko: I said this also to Gary Mansfield (Mizog Art Podcast interview November 11, 2018): When we come out of the womb of our mothers, we are all refugee into this planet. What we have to do is to try to learn. It doesn't matter from which social, political, religious, geographical kind of contest you come or you come in. You have to abide, learn how to operate. I spend seven years in an orphanage, so I didn't have much education. I was really like a caged animal, inhibited. My natural father is like he never existed. My mother came to get me when I was seven years old in the orphanage. I stay with her and my stepfather for three years. During this time, from age seven to ten, I had to look after my three sisters of which two were born in November 1968. Sometimes she also sent me out to beg, and after this three years (from 1967 to 1970) I was put in the care of the Red Cross for other four years, from September 1970 to the end of June / early July 1974. What is home? Where is home? Is it home where we temporary are or belong, or it is somewhere else when we feel free and don't belong?

You lived a suffered childhood, abused, left alone. A few years ago, Verena and I worked with a group of young street girls in Mexico City, who are often sold by their impoverished families to children traders that use them as sex slaves and that they abandon to bite the dust on the streets when they are not any more useful. Wounds that time won't heal, and a problem that seems to have no end.

Franko: I don't know why child abuse is still going on...

Living as a homeless yourself, the issue of poverty you have it at heart. You paid homage to the lives of the destitutes in your *Still Life* series, portraying them from a distance with your photo camera, "their faces never seen and for this left with a rare sense of dignity" as Becky Haghpanah-Shirwan sensibly observed. Our indolent society prefers to ignore and turns its back as if pretending not to see the many people who survive at the margins. In the end, we are all the same, only that someone is luckier (much luckier) than another. Controversial writer, philosopher and political radical Dwight MacDonald some decades ago already stated that the war on poverty has been a failure, he wrote: "The injustices

suffered by the poor perhaps accounts for the lack of interest the rest of society shows in them.”

Franko: Poverty is something truly extreme. I frankly doubt that one day it will be solved.

You have always been a defender of civil and human rights against the arrogance of consolidated power and the exercise of coercive authority in all its forms. Now we are living in a time where political consulting firms, media outlets, Internet corporations peddle various conspiracy theories by shutting out dissenting voices, countervailing facts, mining data for obscure use. Propaganda, falsehoods, deceit and lies, fake neocon intrigues promoted by glittery TV news anchors and the scale of their malfeasance are sadly astounding, a crime contravening the principles of deontological ethics on which the art of journalism founds. In the recent years, politicians and the media have done too much to damage and divide people with fake hate crimes, race baiting, identity politics, confusing, dividing, instigating resentment and separation, to the point of boldly declaring and with impunity that their job is to control people thought. Of course, some people respond with brave scepticism and protest against these self-interested, cynical frauds conceived on purpose to deceive the public for profit and political gain. Nevertheless, all that has also led to a dangerous strengthening of right-wing thinking and widespread intolerance for the seemingly “different and diverse.” It seems like nothing has been learned from history, but I believe that art still remains a vital tool for expressing dissent.

Franko: To resist is the only way. There is nothing radical or visionary about what I do. My “insisting” makes me want to resist and express myself freely. And not just me: WE all have too. To resist means that we do not have to forget that each of us has the right to oppose any attack or threat to the fundamental human rights by the established power or anyone else that seeks to undermine these same inviolable rights.

Memories fade, they die and resurface at times. To remember is likewise dancing between truth, life making and forgetfulness. It is a hard task. It is also art and craft, in a certain way. One has to delve deep into his/her psyche and dust off distant memories to give them new light. This process can be exhausting and painful, for there will be no reward at all in the end. I believe that the drive of an artist, a poet or a writer to share his/her story and insights is also to make sense of the world, the transience of our precarious human existence always at risk, to find new meaning to the ephemeral, the tragic, and the joyful: all that which is inside and around us. By doing so, the artist, the poet, the writer shape also the stories of others, ultimately inspire, helping them. Strangely and opposed to that, there are those who say that to write about yourself it is somehow narcissistic, self-referential, self-serving or self-indulgent, while to write about others it is somehow voyeuristic, even cringe-worthy. Here I stick to what Allen Ginsberg said, and that is that if one has the urge to write, rather than writing about who or what one does not know, it is always and certainly better to write about oneself, one's friends and the things at hand, no matter if sweet or hard.

Franko: I'm not a hero. If you look at the first page of "Because of Love" book, my opening short statement to the book will answer this [sic]: We all are survivors in one way or another. Surviving is a must and not some kind of sport. This is what we do because there is no other option. There are no heroics or bravado here, there are no medals to receive or to dish out for being 'here'. There are no winners or losers, just other lives. As I say in my foreword, I wrote this book to try to tell my story, or more like trying to make sense of what my story was, or what I thought was.

Around 2011, I started dictating my story to Nina, an artist friend of mine, digging in my memory bank with no filters. For some reason that I explain in the foreword, I did not publish it. A few years later, sometimes in 2016, I showed the manuscript to my friend Maurizio Coccia who told me to get it printed. So after five years, I re-took my life story again in my hands. I made a work of reviewing, of course updating it, while stripping the text off the unnecessary. There were sentences and adjectives that I don't any longer recognise as mine, so I re-wrote them and also edited where I thought it was necessary to avoid embarrassing the people that I care about. Also, there were cases of things and details that I don't recall the first

time or that got mixed-up and needed re-addressing. To cut the story short, I decided to keep a way of telling my story essentially simple, honest, without falling in gratuitous comments because of feelings caused by rancour or desire of vengeance towards who misbehaved towards me.

There is great spontaneity in your book as if the book itself arose spontaneously. I wonder on your idea to write your mémoires at this point of your artistic career, parallel to the docufilm “Franko B: Because of Love” (written and directed by Nathaniel Walters). Then I learnt directly from you that it arose because you were going through a difficult time. Tom, your partner, had entered a state of coma and that is a miracle that he has managed to overcome his serious health complication. So you decided to write your book for him. Miracles supposedly happen *because of love*, sometimes, as well as many other things that may occur when we are truly capable of loving, but also we often forget its power. We too easily abuse the use of this beautiful term, impoverishing it of its most profound meaning.

Franko: We suffer because of love. Because we have it or don't have it sometime, everything is because of this thing we call LOVE.

Because of Love seems structured purposefully to let the reader dipping into it with certain immediacy. It's also entertaining somehow, blending tears with laughter, maybe for the chosen way of writing, so close to the way you talk. Life intimacies are entwined to real people that populated your life path with no turns of phrase, evasions and rhetorical curlicues of someone with something to hide. You wrote accurately of your personal dramas without glorifying them: experiences that winded you off acquisition of what is life, writing them down as if honouring all that was. Memory functions as a catalyst and when is activated intensely somehow it becomes a selective device in the process of recalling real facts and people. I wonder how much truth should we tell when we write of ourselves. I believe that behind your words there is still so much: “that which” a reader can hardly imagine.

Franko: "That which" I would call them secrets... I wrote what I could write without compromising too much the people involved or me via a point of view of legal issue. There were many things I could not write about, also stupid things and... accidents. A good lawyer advised me not to publish them.

When we live with little, we are more keen to share as much as what we have with others and to give as much stuff away as we can. In my opinion, to change radically and help each other properly, we need to step back entirely from the idea of ownership, that is one of the top routes with which we are destroying our planet and ourselves. In the end, we possess nothing. So I think that we need to change perspective because perspective is everything. Notwithstanding — pardon me this rant — systems continue to want us to believe that everything is set out for us there: all that kind of materialistic bullshit that they produce so they can control us and fuck our head up to drag us down to a level of social, spiritual and intellectual inoffensive mediocrity. They invent spurious convoluted logic to try to absorb and change especially those who are not aligned, whose behaviour is outside the mainstream. They force people to compete with each other all the time, and not just in relation to the working life, but worse in matter of human rights, which are fundamental to our human civilization and its evolution, in this way reinforcing the whole idea of ownership, which is not a reality but an illusive belief. But as we are witnessing today, old societal models are crumbling, if not quite clearly collapsing. Life continues to be shocking, but many young people understand that we cannot carry on in the same box that we have currently put ourselves in it.

Paradoxically, the actual global crisis, which is also due to an inevitable crisis of the reason, creates space for the imagination. Therefore, if we can imagine, we can too love. Although mostly we remain alone, we can reach out to each other. With your art, "projecting the confluence of love and pain, you have been able to demonstrate that humanity, as a condition, can be reformed" (Becky Haghpanah-Shirwan, 2015). Of course, we cannot foresee what might be the future, but I like to imagine a future inhabited by people of hope, people of vision, all accepting aspects of one another. I don't know if it is something possible to happen or just a dream, a beautiful utopia I have.

Franko: We need dreams and utopias as an example of hope, and to help us get out of the bed every day. It is fine if dreams and utopia can do this. Then of course sometimes the edreams that wrealised don't necessary to solve anything.

Regarding the system and power: FUCK THEM!!!

Labels are becoming less and less useful, in politics, societies, and also in art. Several times you have firmly declared that you are not a performance artist but, if anything, a *failed painter*. Failure and freedom are two concepts that I genuinely care about. I think they are a kind of fuel to intensify the imagination and thus art and creativity.

Franko: When I was a student at the Chelsea College of Arts, one day I decided to change from the painting department (because of a professor who wanted me to reproduce a dozen of times a painting I did that he liked) and I went to the new media department, just appositely founded for "failed painters." Failure and Freedom are two concepts that I have often analysed and work with. Freedom is a choice, and if we could overcome our failures, we could be free. Freedom is when you permit yourself to be who you are and show it, but you have to do it responsibly. You must be responsible for yourself, but also to others for the consequences of what you do.

Perhaps we are already living in a simulated reality, and our universe could be just a digital illusion. Fact is that our societies stigmatise failure versus success even though the idea of success has surpassed. Looking at how we cage our lives, for example by make them depend on the keyboard of a computer, a PDA, or a mobile phone — our lives reduced to an amount of digital data — I think the real problem is: wanting to be free or not wanting to be. In 2016, in Venice, you told me that: *The real failure of today is to accept mediocrity.*

Franko: Yes. Correct. And you must accept who you are and don't make others pay for your insecurities.

In the early eighties, in Brixton, you attended a pottery course. After twelve months your teacher said to you that you should go to a proper art school. The way you managed to study at university made me think a lot, then becoming the artist that you are, and also a professor/facilitator in the academy (now the one in Turin) rightly stating that teaching is not a one-way system. Free education of a certain level consistently lacks in many countries. What students experienced today is that they are constrained by highly expensive educational systems, which often create illusion and leave them with debts.

Franko: Although I had only elementary and no secondary school education, the Chelsea College of the Arts took me because they said I have a kind of energy. Sometimes they needed more mature student (I was 27 years old) and in a way un-constructed like I was. They need in a way a bit spark otherwise is just kind of dead end. But then the college system put pressure on you. Professors wanted to direct you, promising that if you had let them do so, you could have achieved this and that. I was at the right time and maybe at the right moment. There was a more inclusive and philanthropic attitude in England. Unfortunately, Margaret Thatcher and the conservative party, with the help of the so fucking called liberal democrat, changed all this.

After your *Lectio magistralis* in Rome (Macro Museum, January 27), you released an interview where you said: “performance is a moment of desperation.” The wounds are there to be revealed. They have no words, but they are there. They remain tangible, interfacing with reality. They are the direct testimony of our emotive truths, which affect one’s existence. With the time, your personal traumas that informed your first performances became metaphors for talking about universal traumas. I think that for an artist the beauty of his/her work is when he/she is able to use what he/she has lived and knows and transforms it into something new, where the personal is woven into the political and the poetic. Indeed, your autobiography refreshed me to this thought. Thank you, Franko.

Franko: But I also think that an artist does not necessarily have "suffered or struggled" to do works that can bring empathy and talk about what is like to be a life.