

**DEGENERATE ART, DEGENERATE RELIGION: LANGUAGE OF DISTORTION AND OPPRESSION** by  
Lanfranco Aceti

The Devil is not the Prince of Matter; the Devil is the arrogance of the spirit,  
faith without a smile, truth that is never seized by doubt.  
--Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*

After years of repetitive and unheard voices warning against the trappings of artistic censorship in name of “religious sensitivities,”<sup>2</sup> finally the first international example of the dangers of this new construct appears and it couldn’t have been more timely. As the argument for this article was being laid out, the need for an example that could explain precisely the role that religions are playing in the contemporary social arena revealed itself, plain for all to see, in the comments of the Cardinal Joachim Meisner, Archbishop of Cologne.<sup>3</sup> Even more interesting was the setting within which he was speaking—the inauguration of the church’s Kolumba art museum. A museum that should be, at least in its name, representing a dove: a symbol of peace and reconciliation.

The power of language, its political role and its dangerous usage as a tool of conquest of the secular space have re-emerged across Europe. These new constructions of oppressive language, such as religious sensitivity and degenerate art, reveal a particular new scenario of censorship, restriction and oppression in the field of literary and visual arts. In this new context, the imposition of a religious moral endorsement on literary and visual arts, imposed under the framework of respect for religious sensitivities, is allowed—as Huxley wrote—by a deference to religious sentiment.

Deference to religion becomes a tool to exercise, in the name of religious morality,<sup>4</sup> a cultural and political control. Control that is ominously reminiscent of the Nazi language of distortion and oppression. A language that could easily become not unidirectional but bidirectional, creating the equation *Degenerate Art = Degenerate Religion*.

WHEN CULTURE BECOMES DISCONNECTED FROM RELIGION, FROM THE WORSHIP OF  
GOD, RELIGION BECOMES RITUALISM AND THE CULTURE BECOMES DEGENERATE.<sup>5</sup>

Cardinal Meisner’s language could easily be reversed.

WHEN RELIGION BECOMES DISCONNECTED FROM CULTURE, FROM THE WORSHIP OF  
ART, CULTURE BECOMES RITUALISM AND THE RELIGION BECOMES DEGENERATE.

An argument, therefore, could be made that religions can decay and be decadent, that they can degenerate in perverse forms of fascist oppression and that as such should not receive forms of protection that are not equally granted to other segments of society and cultural activities.

Or, if the argument were to be proposed by a fanatic secularist who was to follow the reasoning of Cardinal Meisner, the opposite rationalization could be made from the declaration arguing for the existence of a degenerate religion. An argument could be constructed to imply violent and extremist consequences: that the immorality of religion justifies its censorship and/or violent eradication from society. The same “reasoning” that was rationalized by the Nazis as the basis of the *Entartete Art* or *Degenerate Art* exhibition of 1937, revived by Cardinal Meisner, could be transported in other areas of cultural expression which may include religion.



**Figure 1** *The Dangerous Game*, Lanfranco Aceti, 2007, digital print on paper and ink (40 cm x 50 cm).

The importance of refuting a language that endorses comments such as “degenerate” and “immoral” is based on the refusal of reintroducing a language of oppression such as that of Max Nordau. He wrote that “it is not necessary to measure the cranium of an author, or to see the lobe of a painter’s ear, in order to recognize the fact that he belongs to the class of degenerates” (17). This language is such that it can be used to construct, frame and lead to a society where racial, cultural, religious and gender diversities could be used to create, as it happened in Nazi Germany, classes of degenerates. What if it was not necessary to measure the cranium of Cardinal Meisner to decide that he was a degenerate?

The issues that are brought to the arena of academic analysis in this article are based on the intent of revealing the language of distortion and oppression in the contemporary engagements between art and religion. It is also an attempt to find a platform of peaceful dialogue beyond the confrontational framework of decent vs. degenerate and moral vs. immoral. Is it possible to peacefully engage with absolutist and fundamentalist religious languages by reversing their constructions and demonstrating their untenability? More importantly, have the literary and visual arts been attacked by religious censorship in Britain and Europe because of artists’ critical ability to reverse and ridicule messages of hatred and oppression?<sup>7</sup>

If one day—and no longer as plebeian exception, but as ascesis of the learned, devoted to the indestructible testimony of Scripture—the art of mockery were to be made acceptable, and to seem noble and liberal and no longer mechanical; if one day someone could say (and be heard), “I laugh at the Incarnation,” then we would have no weapons to combat that blasphemy, because it would summon the dark powers of corporal matter, those that are affirmed in the fart and the

belch, and the fart and the belch would claim the right that is only of the spirit, to breathe where they list! (Eco 477)

It is this visual and linguistic subversive ability of the arts that threatens both religion and political power, therefore inviting censorship.<sup>9</sup> Because of art's subversive qualities and ability to change and alter a message, to re-evaluate its basic assumptions and dogmatic paradigms, political and religious institutions appear to restrict freedom of artistic expression. Restriction of artistic freedom, first introduced as religious deference, extended its forms of control into censorship and moral validation through the argument that art that is not religiously inspired is degenerate and immoral.<sup>10</sup> Cardinal Meister is just one of a series of preachers from different creeds and times that attempt to restrict the secular space where the rules of engagement are not supposed to be dictated by religious and moral dogmas, but by ethical secular values.<sup>11</sup>

"Jorge defends his crimes by arguing that the opening of such a book to the learned would transvalue all the values of classical learning and of Christian civilization. It would unleash the spirit of levity. In addition, it would set going the process of destruction for the entire metaphysical architectonic upon which holy 'faith' has been erected as the capstone" (Raschke 671-72). It is this process of tranvaluation in a transmedia society, which allows the reconstruction and recontextualization of messages, media and content, that is most feared by a dogmatic religious structure that seeks to control and enforce the language/content of faith's dogmatic meta-architecture.

In order to enforce the religious control of the transvalue characteristics of contemporary artistic processes, as well as of the sciences, religion is obliged to require the deference and respect of its dogmatic tenets. The respect of religious dogmatic structures can only be achieved if religion is recognized as being entitled to play the powerful role within society of an attributor of morality, and therefore being able to declare artworks decent or degenerate.

It is the definition of moral and immoral artworks, built on the necessity to control the transformation of a new digitally transmediated society,<sup>13</sup> which reveals religions' contemporary attempts to impose new forms of moral validation for the literary and visual arts as well as the sciences. The forms of moral validation will not be restricted to the field of aesthetic and art representation, but will extend from the arts to religious endorsement of moral and immoral behaviors.<sup>14</sup>

Aldous Huxley, in *Ends and Means*, moves a series of charges against not religions but deviation of religions. Huxley implies in his analysis the necessity of a critical evaluation of religion. The core issue is the choice of criteria that should be applied to evaluate morally evil and degenerate religions. An answer could be offered by Cardinal Meisner's statement which offers the opportunity to scrutinize religion, with the same criteria, namely absence of deference, that are applied to the literary and visual arts. These criteria should be based not on uncertain canons of morality, but on universal ethical standards. Religions should be judged, as any other institutions, without deference and on the ground of universal ethics, and charges should be brought against violent and obscurantist dogmas that should be met, as Huxley writes, with an uncompromising hostility.<sup>15</sup>

Toward the kind of religion whose fruits are moral evil and a darkening of the mind the rational idealist can only show an uncompromising hostility. Such things as persecution and the suppression or distortion of truth are intrinsically wrong, and he can have nothing to do with religious organizations which countenance such iniquities. (Huxley 225)



Figure 2 *The Voice of the Absolute*, Lanfranco Aceti, 2007, digital print (40 cm x 50 cm).

The fundamentalist language, as a language of distortion and oppression, eliminates any possibility of dialogue and all comments and remarks are overpowered by the dogmatic and absolutistic structure of the phrase. In the visual construction in *The Voice of the Absolute* everything disappears from sight and the opposite arguments are overwhelmed by the entrenched position of each party, where the word “degenerate” defines and configures the landscape and all the arguments are lost. In this approach there is no space left for communication and exchange. Once the parties have staked on the ground their claims to moral superiority, a confrontational wall is raised for a conflict that, from the verbal and the visual, is transferred into the cultural and into the diverse cultural realities of contemporary society.

Aesthetic context was displaced by political, social or pathological categories: labels scrawled on the walls of the exhibition read: “. . . insolent mockery of the Divine . . .”, “Bolshevik”, “Jewish”, “. . . insult to German womanhood”, “. . . cretin and whore”, “Madness becomes method”, “Crazy at any price”, “sick minds. . .”. (Konsinski 346)<sup>17</sup>

These are the labels that underpinned artworks in the original exhibition “Degenerate Art” in 1937. The words define the artworks within a framework that leaves the brutality of the Nazi’s statements unchallenged. The artist is reduced to a “sick mind” or to “insolent mockery,” or to a sick mind that is producing nothing other than an insolent mockery of the divine.<sup>18</sup> But it is the linguistic label of madness that, based on moral judgement, debases the value of the artistic critique. “Finally, there was a group of works characterized as ‘total insanity’ that included examples of abstract art” (Goggin 89).

It is the role of insanity in the artistic journey that becomes the most poignant element, a *j'accuse*

of the social structures, where the confusion between the representation of the act of profanity and the profanations of society reveals a convenient strategy, that of silencing the artist in order to silence and obscure reality with its language of oppression. The artistic discourse, once accused of madness, reveals the madness of the world and of its powerful hierarchical structures, which need to distort reality in order to control and oppress.

Foucault in his writing reveals the relationship of art, madness and society by evidencing the culpability of society in creating an unreasonable world that the artist depicts in order to restore reason.

What is necessarily a profanation in the work of art return to that point, and in the time of that work swamped in madness, the world is made aware of its guilt. Henceforth, and through the mediation of madness, it is the world that becomes culpable (for the first time in the Western world) in relation to the work of art; it is now arraigned by the work of art, obliged to order itself by its language, compelled by it to a task of recognition, of reparation, to the task of restoring reason *from* that unreason and *to* that unreason. (Foucault 288)

The re-contextualization of the language of distortion in contemporary society plays the role of a safeguard by inviting through memory and critical knowledge to compare and re-examine old systems of violence and oppression. It is the process of re-contextualization that reminds the viewer/reader of the nature of the language of oppression and distortion that, through the accusation of madness and immorality, reduces the artist and the culture that is represented within the artwork to a sick insult to the divine. This is a process to undermine the revelatory function of the artwork and its message that is making apparent the fractures that are present within society.

It is the artwork's revelatory function of the real that obliges both political and religious powers to censor the artists in order to enforce a language of reality that conforms to the politics of control and oppression.

I HAVE NO DOUBT, THE ALMIGHTY WILL ELEVATE A FEW FROM THIS MULTITUDE OF DECENT CREATORS OF ART INTO THE STARRY REALM OF THE IMMORTAL, DIVINELY INSPIRED ARTISTS OF THE GREAT PAST.<sup>21</sup>

It is the danger of the apparently innocuous words above, which could be attributed to any cleric today, that reveal the wickedness of an argument in which the sharing of ideals within the community, in this particular case the German Nazi community and the light of its god, is the only possible way to artistic grandeur. The words create an exclusion within which the issue of belonging is one of utmost importance. Belonging and not-belonging, reason and unreason, moral and immoral, decent and degenerate: the consequences of this language are necessarily discriminatory. These are religious and political discriminations that in the cases of contemporary languages of distortion become a hidden but powerful underlining argument for authoritarian approaches to inclusion and exclusion within the morally endorsed community.

A contrasting statement has been made by the The Dalai Lama who has said that compassion and affection are human values independent of religion. He declared that: "We need these human values. I call these secular ethics, secular beliefs. There's no relationship with any particular religion. Even without religion, even as nonbelievers, we have the capacity to promote these things." The opposite nature of these two approaches, that of belonging to a religion in order to exist as ethical beings and the ability of recognizing the ethical nature of human beings independently from their religious background, reveals the difference between words of acceptance and inclusion and words of distortion and oppression.

The danger represented by fundamentalism, particularly religious fundamentalism, is the use of language to distort reality and enforce dogmatic oppression. Language becomes the means and

weapon to create absolute truths which, because they are dogmatic and veiled by the cloak of “religious sensitivities,” cannot be questioned and challenged. At the same time the freedom of expressing concepts and the language used to express them has increasingly become an issue of greater concern. The political responses to the usage of violent religious language, particularly in Britain, have been confused and contradictory at best.

The societal changes in Britain have ranged from the assuaging of radical political religious groups,<sup>23</sup> at the detriment of the principles and ideals enshrined in a secular society that have offered the ideological platform for shared and peaceful social coexistence, to a final u-turn with a new policy for integration.<sup>24</sup> The confusion and pandering to religious extremism has led to the contradictory reality in Britain where the establishment recognized “the work of the community at large”<sup>25</sup> made by Iqbal Sacranie. “Mr Iqbal Sacranie, of the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs, said: ‘Death, perhaps, is a bit too easy for him.. [speaking of Salman Rushdie] his mind must be tormented for the rest of his life unless he asks for forgiveness to Almighty Allah’” (Murtagh). The same declaration could not be directed to Sacranie without incurring legal entanglements, community uproar and possibly religious violent retaliations.

The recent Racial and Religious Hatred Bill in Britain while enforcing the idea of religious hatred and religious sensitivities has at the same time increased limitations to freedom of speech both in the artistic field as well as in the religious camp. This happens within a cultural landscape where multiculturalism has become synonymous of acrimonious division between communities that are pitted one against the other, not in order to claim their lawful existence within society, but to stake claims and carve out religious spaces from what once was the public secular space.

The language of distortion manifests itself through the imposition of a moral religious behavior and thereby creates frameworks of oppression. The arts employ a language of distortion to reverse behavioral imposition by creating frameworks of liberation and pluralistic languages. The notorious usage of language by religious leaders and communities, some of which are quoted in this article, have been used to distort the social framework and create the basis for a language of oppression that is translated within society in acts of discrimination, oppression and aggression. The artist’s role is to clearly demonstrate how the linguistic reversal of slogans can easily highlight an hypocritical approach to human rights, morality, civil rights and multicultural values, which while invoked in the name of freedom of religious worship, are at the same time negated to every other party.

This process of language reversal offers the possibility of moving beyond the frameworks of power struggle and conflict by revealing the possibility of alterations to the moral vs. immoral relationship. There is also the suspicion that the contemporary censorship and policing of verbal conflict by institutional organizations is an attempt to hide the fear of revealing a fractured European society, within which multiculturalism has generated ghettos of incommunicability and segregation.

The author’s intention is to visually demonstrate the damaging role that new religious fundamentalism is playing in imposing a moralizing censorship. To this censorship and moralizing language of “insiders” and “outsiders” that constructs the basis for social conflicts, it is necessary to oppose forms of language that reflect and deconstruct linguistic expressions and throw back into the social arena visual and linguistic reconstructions that are able to reflect pluralistic critical engagements based on acceptance and mutual respect. David Martin offers an example of religious language that is both inclusive and exclusive:

Christian language, more especially as embedded in liturgy, carries forward close organic kinds of human relationship rooted in the idea of incorporation, all being one in the body of Christ and in receiving that body. The idea of incorporation brings organic relationship into the present and the future by aspiring to a more perfect union, human and divine. [...] All this has implications for Christian political recommendations because there is a vigorous tension between

incorporation “I in you and you in me”. At the heart of liturgy is obedience to the heavenly vision and sustained commitment rather than open-ended negotiation and renegotiation, as circumstances require. (346)

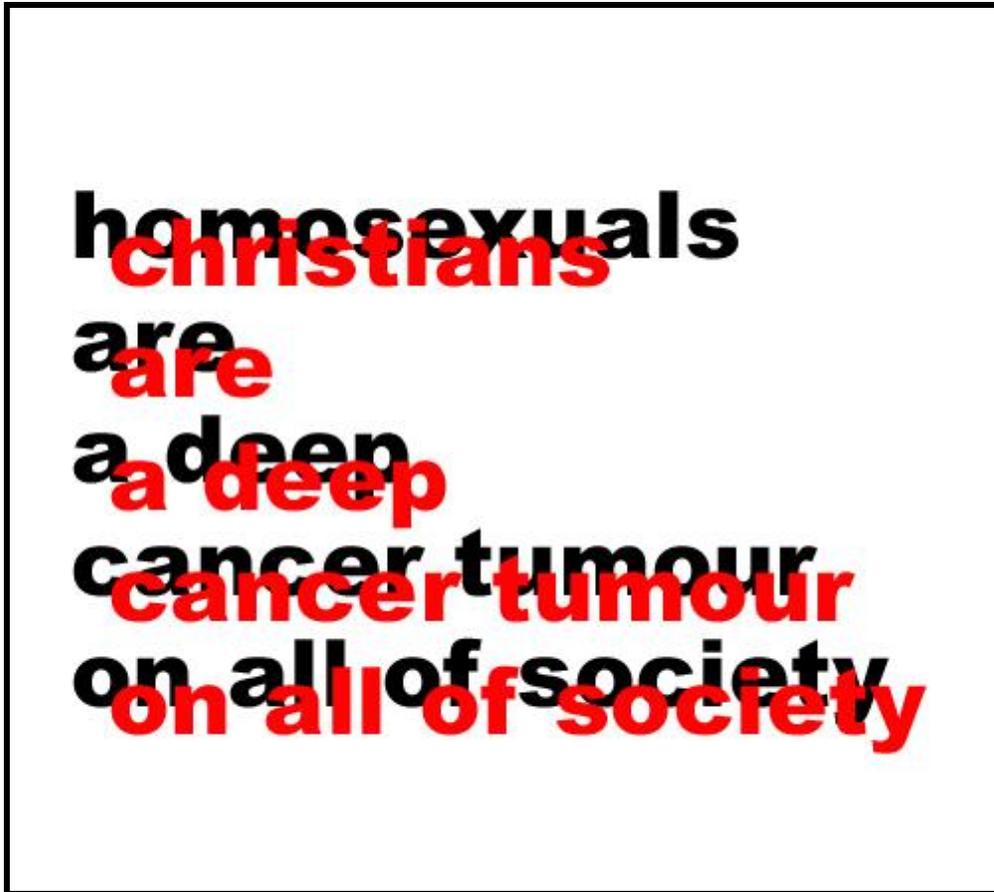
The analysis of religious language usage can offer an understanding of how realities of conflict are shaped and constructed within society by creating exclusive communities.<sup>28</sup> Language is, therefore, a tool that once deconstructed in artistic formats can offer an in depth understanding of forms of perception and cultural changes. The artistic reconstruction of language, as a newly reconstructed and challenging linguistic framework, can provide the readers and users of that particular language with a mirror that lets them appreciate the value and impact of their linguistic usages and constructs. It is language and its visual expression that can be fundamental in determining the modality of communication and consequentially the frameworks for social interactions or oppression.



**Figure 3** *The New Ghosts*, Lanfranco Aceti, 2007, digital print (20 cm x 40 cm).

The ontological role played by language is complex, particularly when, following the certainty of divine revelation and moral inspirations, it divides and condemns sections of society into the immoral existence of unbelievers. These unbelievers, who for this very reason are morally debased, need necessarily to discover the truth of an imposed and illiberal vision of god or behave within the limits imposed by that vision. Artists, according to the words of Cardinal Meisner, are degenerate because the product of their activity is degenerate not being inspired by the Cardinal's god. The artist's artworks, not being inspired by the true religion are immoral. From this it can also be inferred that a degenerate artwork identifies a degenerate artist. What then? Should the degenerate artists be silenced and ostracized? Is it necessary to have a moral endorsement for the production of artwork? Or should the artist be holy in order to create artworks? To which *true* religion should the artist belong? And more importantly who is going to provide this moral judgment?<sup>29</sup>

In the speech of the Pentecostal Swedish Pastor Ake Green, the clarity of the message is that homosexuals are “a deep cancer tumour on all of society” (“Swedish”). The issue is not to censor the freedom of expression of Ake Green, but that of ensuring that an equal and reverse right to criticism is afforded to all other parties and cultural groups.



**Figure 4** *The Speech of Hatred?* Lanfranco Aceti, 2007, digital print (40 cm x 50 cm).

A social framework that would allow artists to subvert the language of oppression may also act as a form of revelation by providing a different and alternative perspective on the construction and finalities of language. An example is Herzfelde who saw “the madman as the model artist. The German expressionists saw, in the image of the insane, the reification of their own definition of the artist in conscious opposition to the structures of society” (Gilman 587). The aim is not to create a language of opposition and factions but rather, through the language’s opposition and contrasts, reveal the dangers of an absolutist statement which condemns and excludes.

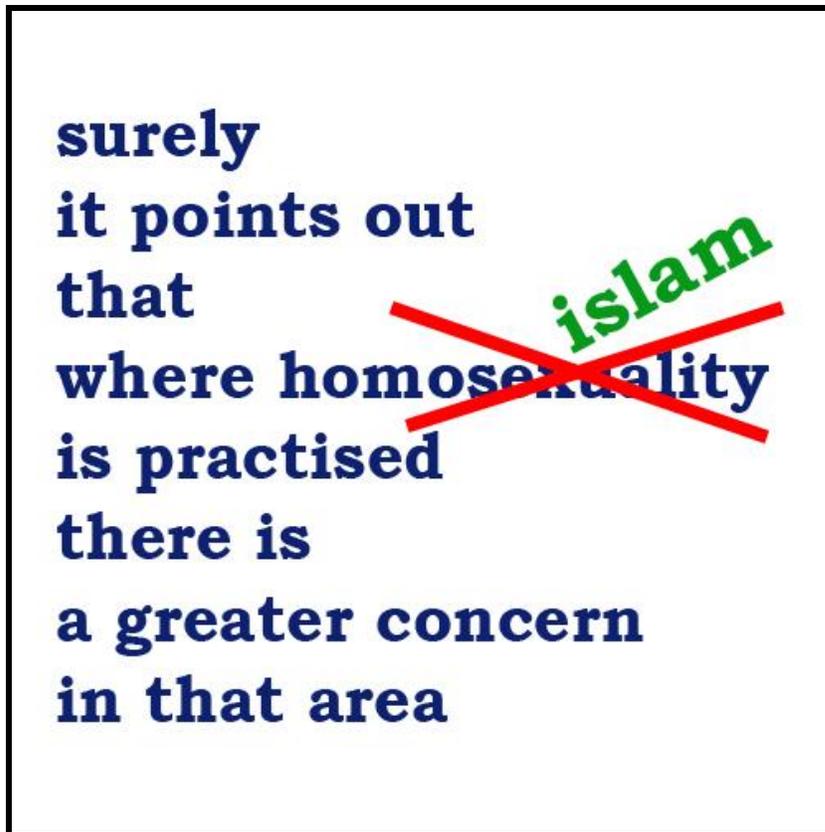
The contemporary institutional frameworks, by endorsing censorship under the parameters of religious sensitivities, have instead allowed the reintroduction in the social context of a language of distortion, aggression and ultimately oppression that is directed to particular sections of society and minority groups. But what is the reason for such return to the fustigation of moral customs? Why are the literary and visual arts together with the gay community the receivers of the attacks from very diverse religious clerics that preach against the corruption of contemporary times? Is there a pattern or conditions that have favored the development of religious intolerant approaches towards particular segments of European society?

The major issue is the level of protection and tolerance that clerics, particularly if belonging to minority groups, receive for their words and statements. The attempts to engage with this particular language of religious hatred become difficult and thorny. In particular this area of inquiry and analysis has to reconcile diverse and contrasting necessities represented by freedom of speech and the right not to be made object of hatred. The literary and visual artists have to contend with the multicultural dogmatic orthodox approach, the fraught legal implications and

fears of censorship that have developed in the arts in forms of artistic self-censorship and with the implications of facing up to morally endorsed language of hatred and oppression.

Despite these dangers, there is a necessity for more socially based aesthetic approaches to deconstruct the languages of distortion, in order to reveal that the frameworks of what is moral and immoral, decent and degenerate cannot be applied so easily to the arts and cultural products. Certainly criteria of morality cannot be applied when the principles for judgement are derived not from ethics, but from religious morals. The risk is that by using morality to structure the aesthetic discourse and define the outsider as degenerate, the same criteria could, one day, be extended beyond the realms of art.

The Nazis, however, reduced all of the avant-garde to *Bildnerer*, demoting it from art. Their answer to the question of the creativity of the insane was to deny it, and thus to reduce the insane to a subhuman level, to deny them the status of members of a “cultural entity”, and eventually to murder them. Jews too were seen in this light, as the degenerates whose pathology was evident in the madness of their *Bildnerer*. (Gilman 594-95)



**Figure 5** *If You Only Thought Before Speaking*, Lanfranco Aceti, 2007, digital print (40 cm x 50 cm).

The words of Iqbal Secranie,<sup>33</sup> a controversial Islamic leader in the United Kingdom, that form the artwork *If You Only Thought Before Speaking* easily demonstrate the controversial nature of his statements. The image, *If You Only Thought Before Speaking*, also reveals another problem: that of the generalization process, whereby the spoken words, by creating a generalized category of immoral individuals discriminate an entire section of society, carving it out from the public space. The affirmation of superiority on moral grounds based on religious beliefs that are not commonly shared, is highly factional and fractural. Once the language is reversed, or as in the image,

superimposed with the religious denomination of Iqbal Secranie, it is possible to see the wide implication of his statement. The implications are revealed in their fully range and are not limited to the arena of oppression and discrimination, but extend in the monstrous fascist ideology that underlines this type of language.

Is then censorship, as now enshrined in the new legislative forms of control of speeches of hatred a suitable tool to diffuse and eliminate these dogmatic and hateful statements? The reality is that the law may only alter the superficial perception of a cultural conflict that, pushed beneath the surface, will generate simmering forms of hatred. The open artistic, ironic and controversial confrontation, the aesthetic ridicule of language of distortion and oppression through an artist's interaction are perhaps a more appropriate course of action. Facing up to the contradiction of society in an artwork may offer an alternative and a possibility to understand and perhaps peacefully engage and reconcile with pluralistic cultural discourses.

In the proposition for an extended freedom of speech and artistic expression, an argument could also be made for the functional necessity of such languages of distortion and oppression in order to reawaken a sleepy democracy or to reorganize and evolve societal ideological and cultural interactions through topical discussions and debates. A language of distortion and oppression may function as a challenge that offers a comparative framework. It offers the opportunity for analyses as well as the possibility to renew the understanding of the important role of ethical achievements in society.

In this sense it could be argued that the language of hatred plays a social function: that of reinforcing, by revealing its own structural deficiencies, peaceful and democratic interactions. Or it could be seen to act as a reminder to the whole of society of the dangers of complacency. It is also possible that the role of the language of distortion and oppression is to create an arena for a debate that reinforces, in a healthy democratic and ethical society, the development of higher ethical standards.

The limitation of the language of distortion is in its natural consequence, the language of oppression. Therefore, the distortion of artistic discourses into a framework of moral or immoral<sup>34</sup> reveals the limitation of an oppressive language and its final aim: that of censorship in the name of religion.

But it also reveals a danger. The decent versus degenerate discourse could be stirred away from the arts and culture and extended to religions. It then could be argued that there are decent and degenerate religions. That the immoral passages in the sacred texts should be scrutinized and censored as speeches of hatred because they do not conform to the ethical standards of contemporary political society and actually incite to acts of aggression and discrimination.

One day the censorship of speeches of hatred could be extended and applied to the real source, the "holy" texts and their written words: because no one in the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs gods of oppression, violence and revenge. No wonder if the future step for religious leaders may be the defence of freedom of speech and artistic expression; the defence of the same rights that they asked to be denied to artists in the name of religious sensitivities.



**Figure 6** *The Work Undone*, Lanfranco Aceti, 2007, scratched digital print (40 cm x 50 cm).

This concept was succinctly written in a chat-room at the time the controversy was developing.

Clearly Sacranie should be able to say whatever he thinks, however as he is so willing to reduce the freedom of expression of others through his support of the incitement to religious hatred bill, I can't help feeling a small degree of satisfaction as he is hoist by his own petard.

The path that the actions and declarations of religious leaders have created, of which examples were analyzed in this article, is a very dangerous one. It is a path that arts and religions could be obliged to walk together. The idea of submitting contemporary religious texts to a morality check and a scrutiny for political correctness may not be that distant, now that the moral standards of speeches of hatred, so much wished by the religious communities upon the arts, could be legally extended and applied to the words that men attribute to god.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "In the early autumn of 1936 the London *Times* recorded the fact that, **in deference to religious sentiment**," (the stress is mine) "flying-boats were henceforward not to be allowed to come down on the Sea of Galilee. This is a characteristic instance of the way in which preoccupation with sacred objects as a fetter holding men back, not only from personal enlightenment, but even from a rational consideration of the facts of contemporary reality" (Huxley 230).

<sup>3</sup> See "Cardinal in 'Nazi Art Term' Row."

<sup>4</sup> For an introduction on the conceptual differences between morals, morality and ethics see Harold N. Lee, "Morals, Morality, and Ethics: Suggested Terminology," *International Journal of Ethics* 38 (1928): 456. Also Julia Annas states "Recently the issue has been sharpened by Bernard Williams. The ancients did indeed, Williams claims, lack our notion of morality and were better off without it, since it is confused and in many ways objectionable" (119).

<sup>5</sup> For a series of reportages on the impact of cardinal Meisner's declaration and the comparison between his statement on art with the Nazi terminology used for describing degenerate art see: David Crossland, "Cardinal Under Fire for Using Nazi Term." *Spiegel Online International* 17 Sept. 2007. 28 Sept. 2007. <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,506104,00.html>>. Also "German Cleric Criticized for Nazi Phrase," *The Guardian* 15 Sept. 2007. 28 Sept. 2007. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/latest/story/0,-6924298,00.html>>.

<sup>7</sup> A famous response to Nordau was given by Oscar Wilde: "I quite agree with Dr Nordau's assertion that all men of genius are insane, but Dr Nordau forgets that all sane men are idiots" (517). In Richard Ellman, *Oscar Wilde*. London: Penguin Books, 1988. Also: George Bernard Shaw, *The Sanity of Art: An Exposure of the Current Nonsense about Artists being Degenerate*. London: The New Age Press, 1908.

<sup>9</sup> "The best route to revolution is to blow men's minds to reveal the absurdity of what we unnecessarily take for granted by using the arts as subversive instruments" (64). Bernice Martin, "The Arts as Languages: A

Sociological Comment.” Homerton College Aesthetic Education Conference 1982. Spec. issue of *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 18.1 (Spring, 1984): 59-81.

<sup>10</sup> “In the past several years, however, artists have been accused of encouraging teenage suicide, urban rage, violence against women, and poisoning American culture. Museum directors have been indicted on obscenity charges, and artists and organizations receiving federal grants have been required to sign pledges that they will not promote, disseminate, or produce materials that may be considered obscene. Today in America, as in other times and places, artists face demands for their art to conform to religious and moral criteria” (207). Mary Devereaux, “Protected Space: Politics, Censorship, and the Arts.” *Aesthetics: Past and Present, a Commemorative Issue Celebrating 50 Years of The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism and the American Society for Aesthetics* Spec. issue of *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51.(1993): 207-15.

<sup>11</sup> “Ethics is the systematic (or scientific) attempt to understand rationally the evaluation of conduct. This is the consideration of first importance. Ethics is the attempt to formulate the theoretic principles lying in or behind the evaluation of conduct. It attempts to find a rational basis for such evaluation” (456). Harold N. Lee, “Morals, Morality, and Ethics: Suggested Terminology,” *International Journal of Ethics* 38 (1928): 450-466. Also: “A man is moral if he conforms to the established practices and customs of the group in which he is. He is ethical if he voluntarily obligates himself to live in the light of an ideal good” (381). Paul Weiss, “Morality and Ethics,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 39 (1942): 381-385.

<sup>13</sup> For a definition of transmedia see Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001: 47.

<sup>14</sup> Contemporary religious fundamentalism offers an insight in to the attempts to enforce and create a society where religious morality shapes behaviors. An example could be the threats from Al-Qaeda’s sympathizers to David Beckham, Thierry Henry and Wayne Rooney as reported by the tabloid News of the World. “Al Qaeda Target Footballers?” *The News of the World* 19 Aug. 2007. 12 Oct. 2007. <<http://www.bootroom.org/smf/index.php?topic=13253.msg143539>>. An historical example is Savonarola’s fustigation of Florentines’ moral customs. “Within a decade he would be the leading force of public opinion in Florence. He would call on the Florentines to put aside their sumptuous vanities, to burn pictures, books, and clothes that were not chaste. Botticelli would respond and consign many of his paintings to the flames, Lorenzo de Medici would fear Savonarola as a rival, and yet, according to legend, be so moved by him that Savonarola was called alone to his deathbed. Savonarola would help establish a Republic in Florence, would defy the Pope. And then this career would end as abruptly as it began, in a theatrical trial by fire to see whether Savonarola had ‘grace’ and thus the right to preach to the Florentine crowd” (171). Richard Sennett, “Charismatic De-Legitimation: A Case Study.” *Theory and Society* 2.2. (Summer 1975): 171-81.

<sup>15</sup> The author believes that hostility does not imply or justify violent responses, but signifies a firm rational rejection or ridiculing of languages and hermeneutical interpretations that, masked with judgments rooted in morality, are portrayed as fundamental ethical principles and dogmatic revelations.

<sup>18</sup> “‘If wild beasts can be broken to the yoke, it must not to be despaired of correcting the man who has strayed.’ For the Catholic Church, as in the Protestant countries, confinement represents, in the form of an authoritarian model, the myth of social happiness... There is, in these institutions, an attempt of a kind to demonstrate that order may be adequate to virtue” (Foucault 63).

<sup>21</sup> These words that could be attributed to any cleric today were pronounced by Adolf Hitler commenting on the German values represented in the “Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung” (great German art exhibition) in 1937 (qtd. in Goggin 85).

<sup>23</sup> Examples are the Salman Rushdie case in 1989 and the play *Behzti* (Dishonour) by Sikh playwright Gurpreet Bhatti in 2004 both of which have generated, although with a different scale, violent religious responses. The most recent example of censorship to avoid conflict with religious communities is the censorship of John Latham’s *God is Great* by Tate Modern for fear of violent religious retaliations.

<sup>24</sup> See “Conform to Our Society, Says PM,” *BBC News* 8 Dec. 2006. 10 Oct. 2007. <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/6219626.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6219626.stm)>..

<sup>25</sup> See “Knighted Muslim vows to speak out,” *BBC News* 12 June 2005, 12 Oct. 2007. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4085322.stm>>. “There were, shamefully, no expressions of outrage when the contemptible Mr Sacranie was made ‘Sir Iqbal’” qtd. in Dominic Lawson, “Compared to Robert Mugabe’s Knighthood, Salman Rushdie’s Looks Positively Virtuous,” *The Independent*. 22 June 2007. 12

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Oct. 2007. <[http://comment.independent.co.uk/commentators/dominic\\_lawson/article2692368.ece.](http://comment.independent.co.uk/commentators/dominic_lawson/article2692368.ece.)>. Outrage and controversy was widespread in the UK and international press for the knighthood to Salman Rushdie.

<sup>28</sup> “Where did Prester John’s letter come from? [...] The geographical fantasy gradually generated a political project. In other words, the phantom called up by some scribe with a knack for counterfeiting documents [...] served as an alibi for the expansion of the Christian world toward Africa and Asia, a welcome argument favoring the white man’s burden” (12-13). Umberto Eco, *Serendipities: Language & Lunacy*, trans. William Weaver. London: Phoenix, 2000...

<sup>29</sup> On the topic of moral endorsement a reference is offered by the 1968 film *Witchfinder General*.

<sup>33</sup> “Muslim Head Says Gays ‘Harmful,’” *BBC News* 3 Jan. 2006. 10 Sept. 2007. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4579146.stm>>.

<sup>34</sup> “It ceased to lend itself to the display of religious facts, and then and thereafter, as Ruskin says, ‘religious facts were employed for the display of Art,’ and by a gradual process Art degenerated, through the sensuousness of realistic flesh color, until it came to revel at last in the clever realism of technique displayed by the still life and domesticity of the Dutch School. ‘Ye have made the Virgin,’ says Savonarola to the painters of Florence, ‘Ye have made the Virgin to appear like a prostitute’” (65). James Laing, “Art and Morality.” *International Journal of Ethics* 14,1 (October 1903): 55-66.

<sup>35</sup> Both Ake Green and Iqbal Sacranie have been respectively legally prosecuted and investigated because of their declarations. “Muslim Head’s Gay Remarks Checked,” *BBC News* 11 Jan. 2006. 10 Sept. 2007. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4603474.stm>>. Ake Green was ultimately cleared of all charges and Iqbal Sacranie’s investigation did not lead to charges.