

# A cannibalistic collective memory.

by Tiziano Pizzamiglio

A collective memory is like a ruthlessly selective **carniverous animal** that focuses **solely** on the things that it wishes to see. Having the same precision as a CAT scan, it only recalls, because it cannot do anything else, the **insidious** highlights of our celebrity culture. The tragedy that is asbestosis is that it makes people see things through a prism and consequently **warps** their future perceptions (**by 180 degrees.**)

**(The author's first paragraph (3 paras in the original Italian) is a complete nightmare, containing the cannibal analogy which sounds bizarre to the English reader and probably to the Italian one as well. The comparison between the data produced by a CAT scan (which, after all, is useful) and the dross of our celebrity culture (which is largely useless) is shaky to say the least. Finally, the colouring of perceptions by 180 degrees is an appalling mixed metaphor. You can warp light by an angle of degrees but you can only colour it by shades or intensity. In any case, surely if light was bent by 180 degrees, wouldn't it be a straight line?)**

In a pedestrian square of Monfalcone's working class district, Panzano, there is a monument to **the** victims of asbestos. On it, Massimo Carlotto writes: "They built the stars of **the** seas (**isn't the monument inscription referring here to the ships they built which is why I've put a "the" in**) but dust **killed them** and profit betrayed them." It is **a** unique **monument**, the first ever in the world, because it is dedicated to those who have died and more importantly those who will **do so**, as we know that people will continue to die decades after breathing in the dust. Hence the need to ask the visitor, who has probably toiled to find the monument, to reflect upon future generations and the fact that if in Italy alone, the last Italian to die of the disease will be in 2030; who knows how many will die in Third World Countries by this **obnoxious** material still **being** commercially extracted and worked, to be **then** sold by cynical rich countries at great profit.

Panzano was built behind the shipyard by its owners and consequently, unless you are a local Monfalconese, the monument is difficult to find. Directions are a necessity although the small square is within spitting distance from where **(to)** the road to the dock from the town centre ends. It would have been better to **have erected** the monument in an accessible and, more importantly, visible place, but the ritual collective memory, that **carniverous** beast played up. When Monfalcone's Asbestosis Association branch asked permission to place the monument alongside the **old** dockyard entrance and adjacent to another that commemorates the fallen dockyard Resistance fighters, the reply was that it was not possible because the

location was reserved for the memory of the partisans, who by fighting, had paid with their blood. (This was) As if other workers had not also paid in blood by having asbestos dust in their lungs. (and) Thus the Association wanted the monument erected in front of the shipyard to act as a pointing finger to where thousands had been stricken down with this deadly disease. .

As for the monument's site, it's useless, simply useless to (the) hide it behind a face of hypocrisy because there is a tragic correlation between asbestos deaths and the dockyard site. In courtrooms throughout the months of 2010, judges, ministers and lawyers are conferring to establish if all these deaths could have been prevented if only the mineral had been immediately withdrawn once official scientific warnings were published. Deliberations centre on what and how much was known; judges preoccupy themselves with recovering details of those who held senior positions and were tasked with managing the dockyard site when the dust was being inhaled. And this is man's justice: rights tempered by laws and their legal sanctions. No one denies their importance, but there is another dimension. ( I'm not keen on the phrase "I'm opting out"). For those who believe, there is God's justice. Here it would end if it wasn't for morals. Morality is complicated and has little to do with the commercialised moralising{pontificating} (what does this mean?) transmitted by TV programmes such as *Striscia la notizia*, *Le iene* or *Mi manda Rai tre*.

The word *morals* substantially derive from the Latin noun *moralia* and mean more or less, the same as *ethics*. Morals govern people's behaviour, what is universally deemed as acceptable or not. If someone allowed asbestos to be used with such catastrophic results, surely it is no longer just an issue of law, but of morality? We may consider that culpability rests solely with the company for, if we didn't, many individuals would have to be implicated. For example, those who knew but did not legislate or at least sound the alarm to the people they represented. And if they didn't do it, how could they so cynically (I have presumed the author's meaning here) return home to be elected by us time and again to the lower house, or more tellingly, to the Senate. Are they also not guilty? As always happens, these accounts – often from deathbeds, dozens from widows and orphans – resound with man's injustice, but only reflect the experiences of those who are dying, have died, but not those who will die of asbestosis in years to come. Is this slaughter down to those actually prosecuted, to those who have left the scene over decades, or to those who we can accuse of separating law from morality.

The fifteen autobiographies cover a wide range of, at times, overlapping and concurrent accounts that reach no written conclusion. To provide one would not do justice to the events and or the emotions felt by the reader. Apart from typing corrections, they are the unedited recollections of our contributors : Giacomo; Giovanni and his wife; Valeriano; Rita N.; Vanda; Lucio; Rita S.; Fiorenzo; Daniele; Paolo; Alvaro; Carmelo; Isaia. Always lucid, they are devoid of hyperbole and self pity(ing) but at the same time are: full of anger, traces of despair and more often exasperation; words that point the finger at those who permitted asbestos exposure and those who participated in the cover-up; harsh words allowing no escape from the accusations but trace the growing collective and explosive awareness of what had befallen them. They are words that accuse and have their origins in the notion "it could have been avoided if only he had known." There are many "ifs."

Pictures from the former Monfalconese, now Milanese photographer, Isabella Balena

complete the document, along with other photographs and contributions from a dozen other writers who want to document what is, was and will be happening. The photographs capture for posterity those tragic moments, giving the viewer a chance, if he has the strength of will, to see what he **(the victim?)** was and will become. With asbestosis there is no escape **(route)** from its **pervasiveness** - everyone has lost a relative, friend or acquaintance - yet it is this that nearly nullifies its impact as people cope with the loss they see all around them or fear they too may be stricken down. Our contributors have generously decided to write about it so people will not put it down to the “will of God.”

Moreover, after years of silence and omission we have a whole community that takes asbestosis deaths for granted, for want of a cure and accept with resignation that following the inevitable diagnosis, death follows after a period of prolonged and excruciating suffering. What is unacceptable is the fatalism of the medical community in viewing this cancer as incurable, **almost** as if it is irresponsibly and **negligently** renouncing the possibility of striving to discover a cure. If man had always had this attitude then we would still be hunter-gatherers. Moreover we do not have to be doctors to initiate research towards a cure, as there is already reliable data out there. **(Not sure what the author is getting at here. I presume he means that that politicians or health officials ought to push the researchers harder to find a cure.)** Some examples are: we know that there is a time lapse of decades – 40 to 50 years – between exposure and the disease’s eventual manifestation; not everyone falls ill and dies from exposure; **and** only some die from **the** same amount of exposure. What factors protect some and not others? If we can discover the gene that makes a person a chocoholic, surely we can discover the thing that will prolong life by keeping the disease dormant?