Through the screen: TLG 2.0

In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived is now merely represented in the distance. [...] The spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by image.

Guy Debord[1]

Is it real? It is a legitimate question in front of the images running on our screens, whether television screens or computer monitors. Barthes could write that "Every photograph is a certificate of presence[2]", but the advent of the digital era has completely changed this perspective, both for photographs and for moving images, thanks to a potentially infinite manipulation that is able to confer them the status of creators of reality. And they open to a first essential question: what do we mean by reality?

«Our life is increasingly depending on the objects and news that are seemingly distant. We are watching the "witnessed" events if they were purely true, forgetting that indeed they are only spectacles created by the media. Since the boundaries among news, dramas and games are blurring, the reality is becoming one of the images that influence us. In order to attract attentions, different images are competing with one other, in the same world of meaning. Images are truer than reality: they are so vivid and sensitive. However, the distinction between images and things they represent is dissolving[3].»

After the Giordano Bruno's "infinite worlds", we can imagine the "infinite realities", which are beyond our understanding and live in a world of images. Created, manipulated, sometimes faked, they build alternative and all equally plausible scenarios, where it is difficult to find one's own way.

Images are no longer an expression of the events, but events themselves.

The time of narration – once the Aristotelian unities, the very basis of the Western tradition, have been finally shattered - is converted into an eternal present, repeatable and endlessly changeable. The history disappears and with it the critical analysis of events: everything happens synchronously, but in its constant repetition nothing can be certain anymore.

In the absence of points of reference, of an explanation that may help us to interpret the images, they are incomprehensible. The speed with which they spread around the world opens endless possibilities for interpretation and misunderstanding, and it puts this way a huge power in the hands of the person who creates and suggests a reading of them: the "fourth estate" is now global.

Public opinion can be influenced and manipulated wherever there is a broadband connection. This is accompanied and often contrasted with the enormity of Web 2.0, with its social network: as it has been demonstrated and as the most recent events continue to demonstrate (the Arab Spring in the first place, but also the most recent events in Taksim Square in Istanbul) the internet community is always ready to call meetings and demonstrations with a tweet, to inform the rest of the world through videos that contradict the convenient versions of facts given by the authorities about such bloody events, and even in an extreme case as Wikileaks, (whose legal or not consequences and are still highly visible[4]) to reveal the secret reports of national intelligence and the backstory of its domestic and foreign policy.

The real risk, beyond an incisive and deliberated manipulation, is that the large amount of images and the continuous information flow will serve to anesthetize viewers and internet users[5] and makes not only

---

[1] Guy Debord, *The society of Spectacle*, Treason Press, Canberra 2002, p. 6

[2] R. Barthes, *La Camera chiara*, Einaudi, Torino 2010, p.87

[3] Gao Shiming, *Quale realtà? / What is the reality you refer to?* In *Moving Image China*, curated by He Juxing, Guo Xiaoyan, Zhou Tiehai e Marco Bazzini, Silvana editoriale, Cinisello Balsamo 2012, p. 64

[4] Wikileaks founder, Julian Assange, at the time of writing, is still confined into the Ecuadorian embassy in London to escape the rape and evasion allegations for which he is being investigated respectively in Sweden and in the United Kingdom; Bradley Manning, the U.S. military accused of having released dozens of confidential documents to the organization (the so-called Iraq War Logs) was arrested and, despite the disapproval of international public opinion and the appeal of Amnesty International for compliance with the international Covenant on civil and political Rights, is imprisoned in conditions on the edge of torture. Edward Snowden, a former consultant for the CIA who would have revealed to the Guardian the "Prism project", namely the creation of an IT infrastructure that can spy on and intercept millions of people around the world behind their back and United States' programs to spy on several embassies (sparking that way the international scandal called Datagate): on him overhang the charge for treason and the extradition request from the United States is stuck in the transit area of the Moscow airport.

[5] This could be explained with Susan Sontag words about the upheaval caused by photographs: "*Photographs shock insofar as they show something novel. Unfortunately, the ante keeps getting raised, partly through the very proliferation of such images of horror. One's first encounter with the photographic inventory of ultimate horror is a kind of revelation, the prototypically modern revelation: a negative epiphany. [...] To suffer is one thing, another thing is living with the photographed images of suffering, which does not*

impossible, but unnecessary, to try to distinguish between fiction and reality.

Considering the question from an artistic point of view, the technology, which in the last twenty years has evolved in a very fast and maybe disordered way, has exceeded by far the phase of "mechanical reproduction[6]" of the work of art to become a veritable protagonist creating space for new disciplines, such as video art and, more generally, new media art. They can coexist on the same level with the more traditional painting and sculpture, but with their own peculiarities, both in terms of production and diffusion, confirming the prophetic McLuhan's "the medium is the message".

The ambiguity of the images, the multiple realities, the features of video and of digital video in particular in the age of global communication are the basis on which TLG 2.0 - Through the looking glass 2.0 stands. Starting from the provocation in the title, that is inspired by "Through the looking glass and what Alice found there" the novel by Lewis Carroll in which Alice goes through the mirror in her house and finds a world that looks like her own, but it is very different.

This could be comparable to our experience with the screen or the monitor: we see something that looks like familiar, but -be it a film, or web news or photos- it can be very different.

We all are Alice, sometimes scared of the images, sometimes fascinated, but never neutral.

We do confront the images on the screen, but sometimes -especially when images come from a reality far away from our ordinary world- we can understand them only partially. Actually, the East and the West could find a relation between their realities, but they will never understand the images in the same way.

The abbreviation TLG concerns to the web habit to put everything in acronym, that is a brand new way to communicate, but sometimes it makes us loose the real sense, the essence or the meaning of the word as well as it contributed to an impoverishment of the language that often runs into ridiculousness.

TLG looks like the name of a program release or a patch, replicating through the sign the disturbing ambiguity of the images or the appearance without being familiar.

At the same time 2.0 is the conventional way to describe a particular web evolution, based on the sharing of everything, from information to images and so on[7], and it refers to the approaches to the digital images requested to the beholder. Nothing really happens (or gains likelihood) if it is not shared across the web and social networks, creating this way infinite worlds and apparent realities.

The subtitle "Through the Looking-Glass" has the task of clarify or reveal the joke and makes us meditate upon the ambiguity of the language and the images we watch on the screen.

The artists' works are based on these reflections, but they also deal with the main theme focusing on different aspects. Time – as the eternal present created by the web and the video and the consequent lack of history- and space -understood both as a geographic entity and as a relative dimension for the consciousness and perception- are the themes of Bruno Di Lecce's work called *Ninety billion steps*.

The present and the past merge through old photographs of overlapping views of the town to the same sites in the present time: the ancient gesture of preparing fresh pasta bears a homely and familiar dimension, building a visible and tangible space, while a little girl voiceover -that suggests a spatial dimension hidden to the viewer- lists distances concerning the house and its surroundings. A space within the space, that brings the sites and the distances to an individual based dimension, on his/her perceptions and his/her story (ninety billion steps is the maximum distance that she can conceive).

A more direct approach to globalization and its meaning in terms of power connections, the cultural encounter and clash between the Western and the Eastern blocs, it is instead the theme of *Est Isst*, in which the word East, built with small metal blocks on an aerial photo of East Berlin when the wall was still standing, is "broken" and then "eaten" by a hand holding chopsticks.

---

necessarily strengthen conscience and ability to be compassionate. It can also corrupt them. Once one has seen such images, one has started down the road of seeing more – and more. Images transfix. Images anesthetize." S. Sontag, On photography, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 1977, p. 20

[6] According to Walter Benjamin's definition in L'opera d'arte nell'epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica, Einaudi, Torino 2000

[7] The expression was created in 2004 during the first conference upon the evolution of the web and entitled, in fact, Web 2.0 summit: the purpose was underlining the difference between the previous use of the web (therefore defined 1.0) in which the information were published on static pages and the user viewed them without any interaction. For any details please refer to http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0.

As a matter of fact, it is now developing the idea of web 3.0 (that first appeared back in 2006), as an evolution of the previous one, that is bound to transform the web in an enormous database, to develop the inquiries on the artificial intelligence and to the creation of 3D areas and the development of the so called semantic web logic based. Please refer to http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_3.0
On semantic web cf.: http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_semantico

The relationship between East and West has always been influenced by aspects of their cultures, but, especially in the last decades, the globalization of the economy started to have influence too. Although it has created a link between the two blocs, the East and the West remain somehow distant, unable to understand each other: in the video, the composition and decomposition of the word itself symbolizes the distance and suggests the need for a new definition and an overcoming of the East and West concepts and somehow it recommends the urgent need to think about new models of exchange.

Time intended mainly as perception is the issue of Giulia Giannola's video installation: the two videos *OT Runners* and *Schwimmbahn (swimming lane)* attract and deceive the viewers by putting them in front of a heavily manipulated representation of life and time.

The lanes in the pool and the athletic tracks are placed side by side to show the different temporal planes: the swimmers and runners move in different speeds and perspectives turning the video into a kaleidoscope in which the watcher loses the meaning of the actions themselves creating an absurd and chaotic situation that is a metaphor for the collective time, that is lived from each one according to his/her perception and "speed." With the globalization, at the end of the "Grand Narratives"[8] we find even that of time, that is no longer marked by local habits and traditions but it results globalized and fragmented. Unless it is recomposed in collective mass actions often linked to consumerism (as in the case of big concerts or sporting events) or in social rituals of passage, may they be youth ones or merely mediatic ones.[9]

The ambiguity of perception is the issue of Mauro Rescigno's work too: in his *Denaturalize* the viewer attend the born and growth of a Japanese peach tree trapped in a balloon and the explosion of the latter. This is a metaphor for nature as completely enslaved to human intervention, but most of all for the opposition between reality and fake as symbolized by the comparison between the growth of a peach tree and its constriction inside the balloon.

The images in this case point to a sense of estrangement through the contrast between natural and artificial, reality and falseness, to suggest that the familiar image of the flowering tree is rendered uncanny by its being trapped in an artificial element, and thus revealing its nature as a mental projection aimed to deceive the senses of the viewer.

Vito Pace's and Angelo Ricciardi's works are focused more on the ability of the word to guide us into the images and the power of culture to reveal their true nature to stimulate a critical reading, and the conceptual element remains the backbone of the video image.

In Pace's work we find a single term, the word "Silence" that gives the title to the video (*Schweigen, oder die Stockholm syndrome*). The embroidering of this word opens the video leading us not only to its construction through the gestures of the embroiderer, but also to its translation into reality, as it is materialized in the action of the artist as he gags himself with the embroidered headband. The word becomes action creating the silence. The lack of a particular cultural or environmental connotation gives gestures an universal value: through art, the viewer is led to reflect on the creative power of the word.

In Ricciardi's work *(the) Ninenteenth Century Words*[10] known and familiar words become symbols of the last century, and communicate a sense of alienation as they scroll on a background noise of a washing machine.

Language is the means through which the Western and Eastern civilizations can open a debate or a fight. East and West are not intended solely as a geographical entity, but geopolitical, economic, social and cultural (and it is not a coincidence that the vast majority of terms are in English).

Everyone can choose his/her own mental journey: the word evokes concepts that only an individual path can define. In this sense, it becomes an image and a vehicle of something else and it goes through the mirror of the human being. In this sense, the passage is reversed compared to the Pace's work: the word does not generate reality in the physical space, but a series of images in the mind of the viewer.

The influence of the western imagination on the rest of the world (primarily focused on the United States) and the cultural globalization that becomes cultural hybridization are represented by the works of Roxy in the

---

[8] J.F. Lyotard, *La condizione postmoderna,* Feltrinelli, Milano 1996

[9] Consider, for example, the Pope Giovanni Paolo II's death, transformed -through the exposure of his remains- in a giant collective manifestation: on the one hand, it attracted thousands of pilgrims who paid their last respects to the body, and on the other it sparked a media event that included, in addition to a constant transmission of images, the interaction of the "spectators" with various media, including television, on whose screens superimposed sms sent to individual networks with messages of peace, greeting and condolence were broadcasted.

[10] The video was presented at the end of 2012 in Dusseldorf Kunstfilmtag 12. It and is a part of the project "L'origine è la meta" (The origin is the goal) that -borrowing its title from a famous aphorism by Karl Kraus - collects some researches on the idea that the origin of the whole can be also its own development and its own realization: "[...] the goal is the realization of another beginning, a beginning that is never started, while remaining, as it were, very real in its virtuality". in "L'origine è la meta", curated by Vincenzo Cuomo, Morgana Edizioni, Firenze 2006, p. 11

box and Nello Teodori.

In Roxy's work, the American gangster movies of the forties and fifties aesthetics is clearly recognizable and it is supported and opposed to the Mediterranean sound of the Neapolitan singer Raiz. These two different realities are able to coexist on the same time line, creating a multiracial and multicultural hybrid.

The action takes place on a cover, the contemporary virtual place par excellence, where - as on a web page - you can have the illusion to say and understand everything at a time, without ever having to go beyond the surface, but only take a look to a single image and a glittered title.

On the same guideline it can be placed Nello Teodori's *White Code*, which creates a connection between the futuristic images of classic American films, such as Metropolis, with one of his scripture and some drawings of his inspired by futuristic architecture and Russian Constructivism.

The dialectic between the projection and the reality structured through the video installation builds a kind of mental landscape, a critical path through the different disciplines and branches of culture.

The western imagination, technology, the word – as creator and destroyer – build such a landscape, reaching the status of abstract elements and at the same time tangible (becoming thus "Code") in the white, a color that is not a color[11], which for this reason it is able to return the ideal dimension of life in which everyone has his place, freed from any chromatic characterization that - as it belongs to the real and natural world – may become a metaphor or a desire for discovery.

If culture can become a code for the creation or discovery of reality, art, being a creating discipline par excellence, is not immune to the seduction of the ambiguity of the image. But what does it remain in the collective memory of the artistic production? Can it avoid the manipulation of thought and memory? There is of course no single answer, but Giuseppe Manigrasso's video entitled *With the hand where my heart is* develops the theme of the persistence of the images in the collective memory, inviting us to reflect on how somehow easily this can be confused or altered.

In the first part, the artist reproduces an old work of his (*Hair*) that consists of a brush that acts as a separation and a mirror and the word "hair" written in the proper direction and in reverse.

The reproduction of his old work (whose picture stands on the workbench) is difficult and it takes him several minutes, but just a simple rewind of the movie deletes it altogether, or a manipulation of images makes the central object of the work appear and disappear, making the viewing ambiguous. In the second part of the video, the work (a small sculpture obtained with a readymade) becomes a cast of itself and a superposition of visual fragments that reveals itself as the ghost of a reality that no one can really be sure of.

The interpretation of the images in the absence of information and therefore the mechanism by which the viewer interprets visual data unrelated to one another is the theme of the multichannel video installation by Giuseppina Esposito *And what then*.

The work consists of three films screened at the same time - a solitary figure moving at the boundary between land and sea, an empty room, a forest landscape - in which the desire for connection between the individual elements is faced with the frustration of the lack of an explicit plot.

The three different levels seem to suggest a story to the viewer, but since the conceptual element that binds them together remains unknown, one experiences a sense of alienation, while the images that seem familiar somehow remain ambiguous and illegible. In this sense, the work urges us to reflect on how a given set of information / pictures emptied of a common code can be misleading as informing, and it paves the way for the reflection of Angelo Volpe on the manipulation of information and the dramatization of war[12]. In *Apocalypse show*, in fact, the artist combines frames of real conflicts with those of a toy war, to remind us that what we see is not only images but the lives of other people, men, women and children, civilians, soldiers, that kill and die.

While the images build a media circus and the war on TV (or on the web) only seems a frames succession, life and death lose their dignity. The tribal music, composed exclusively for the video, emphasizes a fierce and primitive aspect of the conflict in contrast to the images of extermination and a struggle conducted with destructive high-tech tools.

---

[11] More precisely, white is a color with high brightness, but without stain; it contains all the colors of the electromagnetic spectrum and is also called achromatic color. Cf. http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bianco

[12] The first to be dramatized was the Vietnam war, through photographs taken by photojournalists that still remains in the collective imagination as Horst Faas and Huynh Cong "Nick" Ut of the Associated Press, or Robert Capa (who died on a mine in Vietnam) of the Magnum. More recently, and to which the video refers to the First Gulf War turned the images of the conflict and bombings into video games images like, giving the illusion of a "clean" bloodless war

The reflection on images and global communication cannot be consumed in an art exhibition, but each element occupies its own place in the world and has its own function. So, if art exists only through the viewer[13] the deep meaning of the exhibition – and of any single work of art - can only be revealed by its fruition. Only the viewer has the key to understand and rework what he/she sees.

TLG builds for him/her a story, a journey, a meta-world: the images want to conquer, fascinate, seduce him/her. It can be a Nirvana[14] to believe in, to bask in or to reject, but also the starting point for critical thinking, for a look back on the "real" world, beyond the images.

In the viewer hands stands the power that no discipline will ever hold, that makes him/her the absolute judge and arbiter, the one that may decide when and whether you can get out of the Alice role: only the viewer has the power to "break the mirror".

---

[13] In other words, it exists only if it is "proposed" for and is candidate for appreciation. Cf. Arthur C. Danto and George Dickie in Mario Perniola, L'estetica contemporanea, Il Mulino, Bologna 2001, pp.233-234

[14] The reference is deliberately ambiguous, linking both to the religious notion of Buddhist Nirvana and eponymous Italian-French film produced and directed by Gabriele Salvatores in 1997, in which the protagonist of a video game suddenly takes consciousness of his condition.

Technical Files:

Artist: Bruno di Lecce
Title: Est Isst (East eats)
Production year: 2010
Duration (min): 8'30"
With: Asako Iwama

Title: 90 miliardi di passi (Ninety billion steps)
Production year: 2010
Duration (min): 4'30"
Camera Operators: Gerardo Marmo, Salvatore Laurenzana, Bruno Di Lecce
Editor: Valeria Sapienza
Live recording sound engineer: Mattia Colombo
Production: Comunità Montana Alto Sinni – GEPA s.p.a. - Noeltan Film studio

Artist: Giuseppina Esposito
Title: And what thenLeft screen: HD PAL video 16:9
Production year: 2013
Duration (min): 1'03"

Center screen: HD PAL video 4:3
Production year: 2013
Duration (min): 1'58"

Right screen: HD PAL video 16:9
Production year: 2013
Duration (min): 1'56"

Artist: Giulia Giannola
Title: Schwimmbahn (swimming lane)
Title: O.T.(Runners)
Production year: 2013
Duration (min): 1'21"

Artist: Giuseppe Manigrasso
Title: Con la mano del cuore (...with the hand where my heart is)
Production year: 2013
Duration (min): 7'
Direction: Bruno Aymone

Artist: Vito Pace
Title: Schweigen, oder die Stockholm syndromeProduction year: 2007
Duration (min): 5'
Production: project produced by Konstfack University College of Arts, Stockholm (Sweden), museum of New Arts (Mona), Detroit (USA)

Artist: Mauro Rescigno
Title: Denaturalize

video DVD-Pal
3D graphic animation
Production year: 2012
Duration (min): 2'

Artist: Angelo Ricciardi
Title: (le) Parole del Novecento – (the) Nineteenth Century wordsDVD video
Production year: 2007
Duration (min): 2'36"

Artist: Roxy in-the-box
Title: The Secret of Love
Production year: 2011
Duration (min): 3' 45"
Original language: neapolitan dialect (Italy)
Costume designer: Alessandra Gaudioso
Production: NFI

Actors:
Police inspector: Raiz
Policeman: Antonio Maiorino
Her: Roxy in the box

Song:
title: 'A Rosa e int' 'o ciardino mio
Authors: G. Della Volpe (RAIZ) – A. Medina
Singer: Raiz
Ed. Bustin' Loose ltd-Imagem Music
From Raiz's Album "YA"
Universal Music Italia 2011

Song's Lyrics – Neapolitan version
'A Rosa e int' 'o ciardino mio
By G. Della Volpe (RAIZ) – A. Medina
Singer: Raiz

E' primmavera e come ajere io me arricordo 'e te / Chiù te vuleve e chiù nun sapevo sta luntane 'a te / Tu stive tute 'e juorne inte 'a l'uocchie mij pecchè.../ tu me parive un angelo mannato ccà pe' me / Io te avesse spusate ma tu chesto nun 'o saje / pecchè ce sta 'na cosa ca nun te aggio ditto maje / Ca te vulevo bene, troppo bene, ammore mio / E mo è fernute, è tardi pe' parlà, nun si' da mia!
Si' tutte cose, tutte cose si' pe' me / Io notte e juorne, juorne e notte sonno a te / Tu stai int 'o sanghe, int all'anema, int o core mio / Tu si' ancora 'a chiù doce rosa e int o ciardino mio!

'E juorne mij so' troppo luonghi a quanne nun ce staje / io me vulesse scurdà e nuje pe nun ce pensà chiù! / 'O munno è addiventato nu deserto senza 'e te / e o core mio nu viulino ca' nisciuno po' sunà!

Si' tutte cose, tutte cose si' pe' me / Io notte e juorne, juorne e notte penso a te / Tu stai int 'o sanghe, int all'anema, int o core mio / Tu si' ancora 'a chiù doce rosa e int o ciardino mio!

Si' tutte cose, tutte cose si' pe' me / Io notte e juorne, juorne e notte penso a te / Tu stai int 'o sanghe, int all'anema, int o core mio / Tu si' ancora 'a chiù doce rosa e int o ciardino mio! / Tu si' ancora 'a chiù doce rosa e int o ciardino mio! / e int o ciardino mio!

Song's Lyrics – English version

It is spring, and like yesterday / I remember you / I more wanted you / and more couldn't stay away from you / Night and day you were in my eyes, / because you seemed to me an angel / sent here for me

I would marry you / but you do not know this / because there is a thing that I never said to you / that I loved you so much so much my love / and now it's over and / it is late to talk, you're not mine!

you are everything and everything for me / night and day, day and night I dream of you / You are in my blood, in my soul, in my heart / You are the sweetest smell, / "the rose of my garden"

since you're gone my days are too long / I would forget about us, forget about it / the world has become a desert without you, / and my heart is a violin / that no one can play / you are everything and everything for me / night and day day and night I dream of you / You are in my blood, in my soul, in my heart / You are the sweetest smell, / "the rose of my garden"

you are everything and everything for me / night and day day and night I dream of you / You are in my blood, in my soul, in my heart / You are the sweetest smell, / "the rose of my garden" / You are the sweetest smell, / "the rose of my garden" / of my garden!

Production year: 2010
Duration (min): 4'42"
Sources:
Charlie Chaplin, Modern Times – 1936
Richard Donner, Superman – 1978
Fritz Lang, Metropolis – 1927 (Music by Franco Pisciotta)
Fritz Lang, Woman in the moon – 1929
Carmelo Bene, All'Amato Me Stesso (Poetry by Vladimir Majakovskij) In: Bene! Quattro diversi modi di morire in versi, 1974 .
You Tube, Natural hallucinogen with circles
Nello Teodori, Drawings – 1980, 1981, 2009, 2010
Nello Teodori, Texts – 2009, 2010

Editing: Mauro Piergentili
Production office coordinator: Maria Grazia Fiorucci
Edited by: Teodori Associati, Gubbio, 2010

Artist: Angelo Volpe
Title: Apocalypse show
Production year: 2013
Duration (min): 3' 18"
Music: Volcania by Ilario Pastore