

The unlimited surface of things

Francesca Franco

During last decade the video has been a powerful catalyst for creative energy, able to merge the most interesting and conflicting forms of contemporary culture and translating them in new aesthetic experiences. The digital video put on the market on 1994 has greatly simplified and unified the procedures for filming, acquisition, handling, editing and dump, making video an “immediate” and cheap mean of great expressive resources and widely usable. An extraordinary experience of freedom allowing to show, out of the control of the movie industry and of the big TV productions, the “I” of a “present continuous” time through the distinctive feature of the moving image. The interest about video language increases with the diffusion of portable camera first and the introduction of digital video later which allow free access to media. We have an exponential increase of it after the “XLVI Biennale di Venezia” on 1995 where Bill Viola’s installations (*Burried Secrets*) are presented, and Gary Hill win the Jury’s award. And also after the 1999 edition directed from Harald Szeemann which confers awards to big celebrities as Eija-Luisa Athila, Doug Aitken and Shirin Neshat as well as after the 2001 edition where we can find two installations (*Flex and Monkey Drummer*, 2000) and a videoclip (*All is full of love with music of Björk*) of the British Chris Cunningham: bright visionary poet able to entertain, to rise curiosity, to surprise taking a look into contemporary unconscious. Born from the merging between performance, theater, dance, happening, music and film the video art today is enriching itself with languages and expressions borrowed from TV, video clips and cartoons or from home-made shots, documentary films and archive materials. Within a mutual and unavoidable contamination, so that a great part of artistic vocabulary is used for advertisement and vice versa. The difference is lying in the fact that advertisement, also the most ordinary one, has always a content or a message although false or narrow-minded. Can we say the same thing of the young video art production of today? As a matter of fact it often weighs on this the apathy of the culture of richness which together with the ideology has lost the courage of a theory on human reality and society; having no valuable and original ideas it hooks up to sophisticate technologies or simply repeats old thoughts in a passive way. So may the problem of the present time where we have a general freedom from an economic, political, intellectual, sexual and ethical point of view be a lack of identity intended as the capacity to distinguish and reject or the insane courage of a different way of thinking? Young video makers are using camera as a transversal and wondering medium. Unlimited as the movement of the transmission waves which is the structure itself of that electromagnetic flux translated into software algorithms which constitutes the video image: an ephemeral aggregation of picture elements (pixel) wandering behind the glass of a screen, which creates a three-D representation with no substance and vanishing points. It is this wandering characteristics which makes the video the ideal partner for flâneur adventures – Walter Benjamin² would say- which we can experience walking around either in the big cities streets than in the global village of internet. These adventures are not requiring a motion to a defined place but the research for something not easy to define as the memory of a dream in which the undefined and vanishing images give anyway the certainty of the existence of something else than the present. Greeks created the verb “to know” (οἶδα) from the past participle of the verb “to see” (ὁράω-ἰδ-εἶδον), this is to say that it is possible to know the reality only through a direct vision of things. This is a statement which is at the basis of all western science, but which with Christianity before, the Positivism and Materialism later, has resulted in denying or cancel all the other not

rational experiences of the world, made not of celestial spheres but of intuitions, deductions, sensitiveness and ability to imagine the invisible reality of things too. In the hands of authors as Alberto Grifi (one of the biggest representatives of the Italian, -and not only-, Art Cinema) video tape imposed itself during sixties/seventies as an instrument of experimentation, accusation and counter-information able to set the fresh reality of the facts against the abstract transfers of the power as a premise to a political transformation of the society. In a different way today, almost half a century later, the electronic language of the video seems to be the favourite means to stimulate the thought boundaries for those who think that reality is only what they can see, freezing in this way every new proposal of research on human reality into an objectivity without fantasy. The post-production operations which represent the biggest advantage of the digital technology, have in fact cancelled the direct relationship between the reality and the image created by the reproduction means. The optical view gave way to the virtual vision where the image is a computer model and so it is already a mathematical interpretation of reality. In other words there is now a new practice of representation which shows a false “no-place” not linked to the physical space but solely to time where nothing is moving, but everything is transforming itself. This is valid starting from the time itself which the author can expand, repeat, slow down and stop how he likes. A “conceptual space” more alive than the life itself and similar, somehow, to the mental dimension of the dream. When the speechless body leaves behind the relationship with the world and loses the reason, the consciousness and the behaviour and creates by himself images which are thought. Those same ideas made of images which the artists are able to create when they are awake, falling asleep without sleeping. Already ten/eleven thousand years ago, Omero wrote in the Odissea that there are two kinds of dreams: those who come from the door of ivory and those who come from the door of horn. The first ones are false, the second ones tell and discover the truth. Perhaps the visual power of the artistic representation lies here; a representation which is neither the pure replication of what you can see nor the projection of laying fantasies, but the maximum expression of a freedom of thought. A thought which is a continuous creation and transformation of the reality through fantasy, starting from the feeling of an (human)body which understands without looking and knows without rationally understand. Accurate as the algebra and unstable as a dream the wandering image of the video art seems to have the aspiration, as Charles Baudelaire at the beginning of the modern age expressed, to be «a poetic prose, musical without rhythm and without rhyme, supple enough and rugged enough to adapt itself to the lyrical impulses of the soul, the undulations of reverie, the jibes of conscience»³. It is up to the artists of today to find the courage to catch, through it, not only the meaning but the inner sense of the things, moving themselves with confidence in the intermediate space between two different worlds: day and night, reality and imagination, what it is and what it could be.

Cf. ¹**M. Fineman**, *When Advisers Freely Borrow Images*, Artists Turn Vigilant, in “The New York Times”, July 21, 2008, p. VIII. ²W. Benjamin, ‘*I passages*’ of Paris (1927– 1940). For the concept of wandering linked to the contemporary practice of video art refer to the essays of Luca Quattrocchi and Orsola Mileti in the volume “Erranti nella videoarte contemporanea”, Silvana editions, Cinisello Balsamo 2008. Exhibition by L. Quattrocchi – O. Mileti, Siena, Palazzo Pubblico, Magazzini del Sale, 17 February – 30 March 2008.

³**C. Baudelaire**, *Petits poèmes en prose (Le spleen de Paris)* (1855-69), in Bibliothèque numérique de la Bibliothèque National de France, on-line on site <http://gallica.bnf.fr/> ark:/12148/bpt6k101428d. The work is quoted also in **L. Quattrocchi**, *Percorsi erratici: dallo Sturm und Drang alla videoarte*, in quoted work., p. 17.