

**Regards from the Biennial Museum
(Art in the era of its unreality)**

The discourse should begin by looking at the conclusions regarding the event of the Grand Tour in 2007, which I interpreted as a visual marathon indicating how, from Venice to Munster, the logic of the event had surpassed the logic of the experience, thus promoting the invisibility of art as a representation of the world and the visibility of the real as an artistic presentation of the world.

This reflection, which primarily concerned the relationship between the artwork and the spectator, intentionally failed to examine the genesis of the artwork in relation to the artist. What happens before an artwork is built? The research of an artist, I believe, is from the first a recovery of the art discourse wherever, from the artist's point of view, it was last interrupted. This thought does not mean that the research of the artist must be more or less close in temporal terms, as it could evolve from an artwork contemporary to the artist or from five centuries ago, but that the recovery of the artistic gesture follows in the same direction as what preceded it, with the intention towards creating the next transformation of the discussion which that gesture opened. Every artist looks at, and recreates at the same time, a tradition he needs without considering the logic of cause and effect (as opposed to the study of art history), but with the urgency that permits a close feeling, in a contemporaneous sense, to a gesture left in a point in time. By virtue of this construction looking towards a subjective tradition, based on a new enquiry, the artist may allow himself the necessary myopia to ignore what the world presents as fundamental, discovering sometimes what is necessary which others ignore or excavating further where the rest of the world sees already the bottom. The strength of the artist's gaze lies in the constant morphing of the artwork's significance, which is destined to remain obscure both to the public and to the artist himself, because the spectator's ability to look and the artist's ability to create are by no means a guarantee of the true life of an image. For this very reason, every interpretation of the artwork, every explanation may bring us closer, but will never replace its true presence, that which every gaze will read differently. One often revisits the same paintings or the same films, or listens repeatedly to the same piano concert, ignoring the apparent knowledge of them and looking rather at an unknown presence. Where does an artwork manifest its presence? How can we evaluate the nature of an artwork once we have discarded the context in which the artwork appears? In the Grand Tour text I promoted the experience of art as the particular relationship when the spectator can founder during the confrontation with the artwork; that particular moment in which the spectator is moved towards a greater consciousness of life. In the event of art, on the contrary, the spectator is called to judge the success or not of the artwork, following the logic of taste. But the experience of art as a confrontation between artwork and spectator can only arise when in the presence of the original artwork; its presence may never be replaced by the location that hosts it or by the chatter surrounding the artist's life. Let's take a step back and look at the relationship between the artist and the artwork before thinking about the conditions that are necessary to generate the art experience.

It is within this relationship that the vision as a time/space vertigo may arise, as an effect of the incomprehensible link between the artist's intention and its translation into language. These two moments, intention and language, are necessary to the birth of the artwork but are insufficient to determine the reality of the artwork, which remains in an imprecise space where the two meet. The premise of personal experience and the aesthetics of form are insufficient to generate a vision, because they cannot retain the presence of the unknown, the true significance of an artwork, which transcends any knowledge connected to man's history even if the artwork is part of that history. Just as every human life confronts the mystery of its future and unknown disappearance, the history of humanity confronts the mystery of an artwork like an external and necessary body inside a reality that has neither finality nor result, but only the consciousness of its traversing through time.

Last year, during a visit to the New Museum in New York, I took further notes on my reflections on the invisibility of art, following from those on the Grand Tour. On the second floor of the museum, the artist Jeremy Deller had created a sort of IKEA living room in which he invited university professors and other academics to confer on the Iraqi conflict. The museum public sat comfortably within the artwork, sometimes asking questions, sometimes simply listening, and after, they shook hands with the speakers and left satisfied following the visit. In the same hall there were other works by the artist: a flag saying *It is what it is* in Arab and in English, a car burned in a terrorist attempt, a wall painting of a map of the United States with Iraqi cities replacing the American ones, and a sequence of photos of Baghdad with the artist's captions that explained the images. I noted down a few considerations with the intention to develop them shortly after, but in the end I left it until after a visit to the Boros collection in Berlin, in December of that same year. The two experiences, both opposite and convergent, seemed like an embodiment of the radicalization of two visions inherited from Joseph Beuys and Andy Warhol. Both artists had shifted the discourse of art from the artwork to the author, the first in religious terms, by leaving the artwork as the symbolic trace of an exceptional life, and the second in publicity terms, leaving the artwork as the superficial trace of a normal life. Today it is probably by virtue of this inheritance, in the majority of exhibitions, that the artwork is either like a social commentary derived from personal experience, or it is like the physicality of the real with the hope of provoking collective amazement. Key words for this Beuysian derived art are: society, engagement, symbol, ecology, hope, rights, et cetera. Those connected to art descended from Warhol are: worldliness, quotidian, perception, banality, objectivity, product, et cetera. Also after this visit some months passed without writing, until I visited the last Berlin Biennial and the retrospective of Bruce Nauman at the Hamburger Bahnhof in the same city. The invisible art of the event, in its religious and superficial manifestations of the post-Beuys and post-Warhol, began to mutate in my imagination towards an unreal art, unconsciously assuming Nauman as its father. A few months after the end of the Biennial and just before the opening of my solo show in Reggio Emilia at the Maramotti Collection, which project I was starting during those days in New York and finishing during the last days of the Berlin Biennial, the time seemed right to develop those notes that I had accumulated for more than a year. The only purpose of the paragraphs that will follow is to newly direct my responsibilities as an artist, confronting continuously the feelings that, at the beginning of my research, prompted my choice to make art and confronting the modality with which art is manifested. In the end, the orientation is a way to focus that permits the artist a necessary indifference to world events, the understanding of which is possible only through a logic of absolute fidelity to one's own research, and a consciousness that forgetting the world can allow for either a greater restitution of the world or a total exit from the world. But there is no other game.

The title of the Berlin Biennial, "What is waiting out there," seemed to address a portion of reality separated from a present in crisis. "Technological developments as well as global economic, political and social crises of the present have caused cracks in our reality, widening the gap between the world we talk about and the world that is really there," read the official Berlin Biennial brochure. First question: how is it possible to distinguish these two levels of reality? And then, how is it possible to think about these two realities in reference with a seamless present? And also, isn't art perhaps the answer to a reality that is always inevitably cracked, the power of which reality is proportional to the decay of the whole of humanity? "The works presented in the show reject the tendency – increasingly observable in art – to turn away from the reality and toward art-immanent and formal problems. They counter this tendency by insisting on a stringent view of our present and its reality," continued the brief text. Which reality are we talking about? Which present? The issue of the real in relation to the reality of time seems to be pivotal in re-addressing a reflection on art and its function.

The discourse should be revisited, yet again, with Duchamp's readymades as the starting point, indicating the whole of reality as a potential artwork, and admitting this transformation in an exclusively linguistic context. The misunderstanding arises from reading this indication in the logic of the author and not in that of language, that is, that the transformation from reality to art

is the fruit of the will of the artist and not the result of the crisis of the mimetic process that generally distinguishes the model of the real from its representation. The superficial interpretation of Duchamp's thoughts, that is, the consideration of the origin of the artwork as an act linked with the system rather than with language, has allowed for a reduction of the idea of art to a strategy of co-existence between the author and the context of the artwork, reinforcing both of these to the exclusion of the real object of art, the artwork. This liminal challenge to language promoted by Duchamp, which he revisited in his last work *Etant donnés*, seemed to be rediscussed during the second avant-garde, to finally establish itself, with Warhol and Beuys, exactly in the two academies of the system and of the artist, that is, in these two terms that Duchamp used to play the game of the artwork with language. Fundamentally the discourse from Duchamp is generated recognising a precise crossroad between reality and representation, but now that the interchangeability of the two terms can be complete in the creation of the artwork, to understand the distinction between the two terms, one cannot rely on linguistic categories, like painting rather than video, nor on particular techniques; thus it is necessary perhaps to revert to the relationship that links the intention of the artist and the formal translation of the artwork, so that the artwork can speak for itself. For clarity, one must explain that the artwork is never the object we are seeing, but what this object opens up that lies beyond its materiality. In this very opening the art discourse exists as a life outside of the world, eliminating the context in which the artwork appears. Neither the intention, which risks being confused with the artist's biography or with the ideology of the time, nor the formal results, which risk becoming in time an aesthetic decoration or a cultural fashion, is enough. What remains is something that is neither this nor that, something that risks losing both the author and the object, leaving only the artwork as an interrogation of the view in the eyes of the spectator, reformulating the sense of living within the life of the spectator. In what way does the gesture that connects intention to form, before expelling both through the image it will trace, guarantee the authenticity of something that we can call the artwork? Is it not the inherent sense of an artwork to produce a reversal of time and space so that something that belongs close to us may at the same time appear extremely distant from us? Where is the rest of the world while we contemplate an artwork? If the perspective of the world is that of the here and now, the perspective of the artwork is, in my opinion, always that of the not yet and the already has been.

The works I have seen at the last Berlin Biennial seemed to abide by the logic of the present, in the here and now of the world, without being able to evoke anything more than the evidence of information. The logic was to look at known facts by presenting them as manifestos of dissent that found, through making the content aesthetic, a way to appeal to the sentiment of the public. It was a sort of politically correct bulletin able to explain the world through the instruments of mass communication, with the only difference being that these instruments were deployed within specifically an art context. It seemed to me that to reinforce this decontextualised use was no longer enough despite the fashion of the site-specific, that it required a new aid, a sort of meaning-specific, where the use of a content of actuality, represented within an art context, gave the artist permission to an approximate use of language. Why are Stanley Kubrick's war images any different to those transmitted by television news? Is it really necessary to go to an exhibition to understand that human life is a place of pain and violence, or starting from this inevitable reality can art give us a chance to stop the haemorrhage of the real that flows in every human existence? In the art of the quotidian promoted by the Berlin Biennial the life of the everyday seemed not to be questioning the splendour of its crude misery but rather the opacity of its rich disguise. A Flemish still life is no more or less than the evidence of a present that from that short time will no longer be, and the fact that this reality is every day at a few centimetres from us, and that in the end in the life of a human being there is not much else, or even that all the rest is enormous precisely because it has an end, which already lives inside things closer to us. The art of this Biennial seemed to rely more on the evidence of the obituary than on the ambiguity of the tombstones.

Representation no longer generated that ambiguity that maintains a suspension between reality and its double, rather it documented the evidence that allows reality and its information to coincide. The artwork was more or less visible depending on how clearly it explained itself, reducing its enigma to the evidence of a scientific illustration, and transforming the complexity of vision into the truth of communication. Shouldn't the artwork, at the same time as requesting a direct experience from the spectator, contemporaneously subtract from the understanding of the viewer? Shouldn't it always represent an opening of an ulterior reality into the reality we inhabit, like a continuous projection? Shouldn't it, also, represent the place where the rules of our existential game are destined to remain unknowable from the rules established by the artwork, so that we may continue to play with our lives through art? While I was moving throughout the various biennial sites the artworks appeared to me as investigations by socio-anthropologists in which their meaning was proportional to their clarity, through their use of socio-cultural captions and biographical/historical introductions. Characterised by fast access determined by lists of meanings that liberated the viewer from the weight of the unknown, the works of these artists seemed to offer demonstrations instead of questions, removing the possibility of a true communication, one that is always mute in the silence of the observer. It seems to me that many artists and members of the public are afraid to hold this silence, this emptiness that art presents as the ultimate reality of existence, this vertigo of loving life beginning with what is foreign yet incredibly familiar, and that belongs to us only as a feeling stronger than the evidence of biological life itself.

In my opinion art has always been about a process of knowledge and never about an aesthetic pleasure, although sometimes the two may be intertwined. But, at this point, it is on the process in which this knowledge originates that the life of art depends, when the power of art opens up a glimpse of immortality. And perhaps it is truly this ethical matrix from which the art gesture originates that gives birth to this immortal life, even if ethics are not a guarantee of the reality of the work of art. The substance is in the modality with which this gesture is inscribed in language, in the possibility that the artist may every time risk his own life, and die in life for a multi-faceted existence consumed in every attempt to reformulate a horizon of communal meaning. Every day the question of the meaning of existence, the question that lies between the not having chosen to be born and the inevitable wait for death, leads life towards an intimate participation in the world, in the awareness that there will never be an answer to the ultimate meaning of life. It is exactly in the impossibility of this answer that the singular voice of art takes shape, in opposition to the noise of the facts of the world. Every human existence is the temporal trace of its own uniqueness but also the potential to question the shape that this trace takes, rendering many lives from the existence of one man. This plurality is not given from the various occasions that the world offers to a life in waiting for death but from the temporal perspective that every human being takes from living before dying. The world, even if particularly advanced in technical terms, from medicine to optics to biotechnology, cannot determine any development in regards to the identity of the individuals who inhabit the planet, for the simple reason that the development of the world is not aligned with the consciousness of the individual. Art is not a tool to transform the world but it is always a tool to define its identity. In art neither evolution nor progress nor history exists, and the history of man and the history of art are not one part of the other, nor are art and history of art. The existence of Galileo and Napoleon transformed the world as much as Proust changed the lives of a few people. And Chaplin or Bach are not revolutionaries in as much as the representation of the world does not have a direct influence over its material transformation. In this sense art, different from actual science, has no direct function in the world, because it is simply evidence of being in the world. Hence if the world mutates constantly throughout history, art always seems to be in the same place, beginning its discourse exactly where the world lies silent.

At this point, going back to the question of the brochure for the Berlin Biennial, it is necessary to understand what is meant by reality. One level of reality is a transformation of the world, while on another level the individual is conscious of his own existence. If we align the historical

process with the first level and the artistic process with the second, we could collate between them that process which, moving constantly from one to the other, guarantees osmosis because it is really separate from both, the representation. It is the authenticity of the process of representation, the urgency with which the intention of the artist and the linguistic form connect, that determines the reality of an artwork. But how is this urgent connection expressed? And is it because this urgency will not let a man breathe until his dying day? One could argue that it is urgent because life is brief, but this is not sufficient. Everyone is aware of this, or at least those are who wish to give their lives value. But once one is conscious of this brevity, why speak about it? Why make one's own life the place that accommodates this question with the sole perspective of holding its weight? In the end one must reply that there is no reply, or if there is one it must be that this urgency is dictated from not having a choice, once we perceive that reality is not in substance what we see right in front of us. The other reality, which we do not see but which we constantly lean towards, is perhaps only the instinct to unravel what we see fuelled by a love of what we do not know, but that we perceive of beginning from an inexplicable love. But what is the way to love life from a perspective opposite to the objective reality of the world? The only way seems to exist within a perspective that does not flow from life towards death but in the opposite direction: the perspective of the dead. From death towards life then, thinking about oneself as already dead, and so having nothing to lose in that moment when one traces in art eternal life, that which is never calculated in the present. The perspective of the dead looks at reality as the chance to have a life that is more real, that in which the real is no longer perceived to begin from being "here and now", but from the feeling of "already no longer being here." The opposite perspective then seems unreal, because tautologically it witnesses its own time. Within this sentiment the artwork deposits itself in the world like an interruption of the real in time opened for the duration of a question without an answer, destined to an eternity of death lived within life itself. This opening up of the present of a life that has been and is still lived, consists in questioning a drama to which humans are, once again, incapable of providing an answer. To look at the unknown straight in the face, this is the mystery that all artworks protect, and it is in this looking, in this feeling that everything is there, finally to die, to die every time in the fullness of life, before the biological death which we will never see but now, while still in life, we see clearly the image of death, and to live the luminous abyss of our humanity.

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