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The last chapter of the essay

The effort, which was of the avant-garde, to bring poetry out from the page, drives it through the new media sea, taking it back to the oral and theatrical forms of the origins, of which could be possible to record in digital every visual, sound, kinetic aspect, and, otherwise, condenses the oral in the writing which is actuated by SMS, e-mail, mailing lists, chat lines; but the total liberation of the words risks to become a new captivity because of hyper technologies, able to produce an ambient-page in which texts, objects and experiences could be closed again. But neither the peculiarities of the electronic work as "in progress" object, nor the detachment originated by the interactivity as selection of the route, intrinsic to the hypertext, are able, as instead optimistically someone thinks, to make the user/reader protagonist, because an hedonistic fruition is accentuated by the spectacular nature of the hypermedia, of the total art-work, and by the awareness to act in the virtual worlds within the limits of a narrative pact without risks, or disseminated of false incidents like in the graphic of a videogame. In my lecture "Writing/Virtual realities", in November 2000,^[1] based on many of the contents proposed again in this essay, I asked to me, as already at the beginning of the 90s, if, optimistically certain that the new medium is just a new message, we would frequent the virtual worlds with the same "revolutionary" disposition of people who telephone to answer a television quiz or to choose the favorite song, considered that, if it is certainly true that the medium is the message, is worth the effort to become even certain that it is not a reactionary message...

Many years after the first experimentation in Italy of virtual reality in the fine arts, use that declared the death of the "representation", caused by the hypertrophy of the electronic image itself, it seems that only few initiated have realized the different nature of forms and visions in circulation in the media world, and the experimental poets are called to enter the field again to defend the word from the restoration of the page - also if it is presented in the attractive and ambiguous possibilities made available by the hypermedia - from the transposition in digital of images, texts and even avant-garde and neo-avant-garde performances.

The present study, exploration of what is emerged or is appearing in the Italian and international landscape, contribution to the debate, under way also in the visual arts, is born with the aim to bring clearness in the experimentation area, generically defined for more than a decade "videopoetry", and in the more recent field of what is called "net-poetry" only because published in Internet, place in which are converging products derived from opposite art theories and processes, condensed in identical digital objects, which finally come into the same circuit of festivals, dense of contrasts and of apparent similarities. The myopia of curators and critics towards a world that changes too quickly to allow also a turnover in the top level of the culture, a world characterized not only by the use of technologies in the arts, but by a multiplicity of experiences and angulations from which is possible to watch them, has a reason: the not much sincere interest in the electronic poetry, as generally known, a non lucrative field, as every kind of art based on virtual actions, on e-mail exchange or files that everybody can clone and modify.

Some artists posed the problem and tried to protect their sites, to sell them to canonical institutions, as the museums, allowing the access by payment, missing the original spirit of an art that had as bases opening, participation, capability to go through and to be crossed from realities and experiences; there is who, on the opposite front, theorizes the end of the individuality of the author, takes up a position against the copy right, in favor of the anonymity, of the hacker action and, as provocation, of the plagiarism.

For what concerns specifically net poetry, paradoxically contributes to the distortion of its meaning the growing curiosity it arouses and its presence in festivals that deal with something other: in the field of literature, today as yesterday, with reading of "paper"-texts and with performances that see on stage the same performer of ever, in traditional shows on which multimedia are superimposed, very far from the pure gesture, from the vocal expression of the origins, from the nude and crude glottides movement of the sound poet, who, with the virtuosity of his own uvulas deal definitively a blow to a poetry made of symbolic language, to stretch the primary energy of the voice, as an extension of the body, toward the spectator, without going through the lexical and syntactical mind. If we go deeply into

the mechanisms that give life to that process, we are not very distant from the light (and "phatic") touch of the mouse button that allows to us to reach someone who lives in the opposite hemisphere of the planet and to do "poetry" without going through the reasons of literature.

I never deeply believed in the innovative capability of an egocentric scenic presence of the performer in the performance, no matter if surrounded or not by technologic sceneries, because I thought, since the beginning of the 90s, the idea of presence was put in discussion by the dematerialization and dislocation, to whom the virtual reality and the web force the body.[2] And, also as an artist, I routed a new notion of presence, based on "remote" poetry actions, realized in collaboration with groups and single artists.[3]

I think, in short, that the antidote to the false revolutions is to begin not from the enthusiasm for the future, but from a re-reading of a past which is still living in the present: the lucidly desecrating poetry that in the 60s faced the mass society, the advertisements, by assuming in an unexpected and polemic way their stereotypes, by actuating a continuous meta-linguistic somersault, breaking the poetic aura - of which, everyday more, digital works in high definition are surrounded -: the discourse became fragmented, the grimace was exasperated, deformed, contaminated with not verbal elements, producing the visual, sound, performative poetry, ambient/installation-poetry, created by artists, really so different from each other, as Mirella Bentivoglio, Julien Blaine, Tomaso Binga, Eugenio Miccini, Luca Patella, Lamberto Pignotti, and many international others, who have developed, in an original and differentiated way, experiences by Fluxus, conceptual art, concrete poetry and Lettrism.

What I tried to do, in Internet and out, was to create a bridge between the experimental poetry and the electronic art, that at the end of the 80s in Italy was still independent video, and in the 90s gradually became digital video, computer art, CD art, web art, net-art, with everything that the disloc/action of the body in the net brings in the notion of performance.

It is anyway in front of everybody that the "visual" have become the kingdom, if not of the ugly, at least of the worrying, of what appears not adapt to an hedonistic fruition, and arrives to a negation of the visual self, forcing us sometimes to the unpleasant - the aim is really other than the one to épater le bourgeois of the avant-gardes: are aware, the artists, to be not in front of a generic public of conformist burgers, but in front of shrewd experts not ready to be scandalized by something - the ugly and the unpleasant as disturb elements in the communication, able to produce communication following an internal logic proper of the process; this happens while the world of the advertising and of commerce, of which the visual and performative poets mimicked the low register and the rhymes, appropriated itself, with few exceptions, in a persuasive way, of an electronic esthetics devoted to the formal perfection, to the digital sharpness. From this fact we should really draw our own conclusions.

For not returning back to a re-codification of the "fine" is necessary to place a limit between the "concrete" electronic image, net-poetry, and what, on the contrary, are the archives of digitalized art, the magazines and reviews on line, the pointless animation games, the interactive machines which take possession of our monitor to surprise us with special effects, the run-up to the up-to-date graphic software.

The net-artists experiment with a very heavy substance, more heavy than marble and than bronze, the one of the communication flux, going into the heart of the digital language and in the grammar of the software, to force them towards distorted finalities compared to those one for which they were planned. The difference between "electronic image" and "concrete electronics" can be than observed contemporaneously at a level of formal choices, which we have examined, characterized by the accentuation of the relational and an-iconic aspect, and in the field of the contents, where the theoretical discourse has overwhelmed the production of visible forms and the critic seems to have won the match against art, theory merges itself with the esthetic element and substitutes it, but also celebrates the emancipation of the artist-writer from the criticism, and the achievement of an art based on the word.

The considered accentuation of the relational and an-iconic factor brings the work to be contaminated with the society, with politics, and, in the opposite field, to valorize the function of the language, that Jakobson defined "phatic", aimed to keep open and operative the channel between sender and receiver, to verify its functioning. The vocation to the hypertrophy of the communication and at the same time to its annulment can be perceived in many mailing lists, news letters, forums and news groups promoted

by artists and poets, above all in the use that of them is made, objectively devoted to realize the contact more than to transfer real information: apart from the emblematic example of the SMS, everyone can experiment how, by managing a great number of e-mail messages, the reading is generally conducted randomly and very often abandoned after few lines.

Finally, the knowledge of the rules of the "electronic" game can avoid the net to become a place of mere accumulation and conservation. The invoked participation of the viewer and opening of the work are generated effectively not only, as someone means, by intrinsic qualities of the electronic art, but through the collision with "anomalous" "unidentified" objects of poetry, constructed by web poets, of which this book presents a very rich and various catalogue; through the healthy jolt provoked by these wandering mine in the media sea, but also with all that, as history, art and criticism, there is behind, maybe it is possible to awake the viewer, our self, from the wonder, and to recompose the sense of the discourse in the disloc/actions in the virtual spaces, a meaning that starts again from the relationships between persons.

[1] In the meeting Scrittura/Realtà at the Spazio Guicciardini in Milan, November 18th and 19th 2000. My intervention has been later published in Doc(k)s web review and in Karenina.it.

[2] About body and new technologies have written D. J. Haraway, P. L. Capucci, A. Caronia, T. Macri and others. For references see the bibliography.

[3] Among this kind of net-performances: "Prigioniera della realtà (Prisoner Of Reality)" (virtual? real? Which difference?) at the Art Rock Café in Padova (I), in collaboration with Ivano Vitali (June 2001) and Copia dal vero (Paint From Nature, Florence, February the 4th 2002, and Ajaccio - F - June the 8th 2002) - nature as media landscape and telematic passage -, dedicated to the disaster of the Twin Towers. For more information see the Appendix.