

Debased assumptions

That which one sees is not necessarily the work of art

The most significant aspects are those which are invisible. Fortunately, and a long time ago, it was proven that invisibility does not exist. In fact, Invisibility is not that which does not exist, but rather that which one does not see. Before we exaggerate with definitions of phenomenology and what could almost be seen as the obvious, it would be better to describe what I will attempt to discuss. The spaces which we inhabit and in which we live and move, are permeated with gestures, signs, events and behavioural elements that are not (or only barely) visible. In one of the most common definitions of contemporary art - and as a further statement of the obvious - artists are those people who show, emphasise and reveal precisely that which is barely, or not visible at all. Naturally, they do this through their works, or, by inverting the terms, their works - the fruit of slight movements, minor subversions and the apparently insignificant alteration of objects and behavioural aspects, flawlessly represent the ways that significant gestures, signs and events conceal themselves in quotidian reality. In either sense, be it transparent and illustrative or enigmatic and allusive – a work of art is potentially an incomparable witness: it is able to mirror its era and raise issues inherent therein, (thereby supporting the intentions of the artist) while simultaneously being a child of its time and becoming a future testimony thereto.

However, saying this we remain trapped in the world of presuppositions, without really addressing the point. The point is in fact how much a work can in turn be *not completely visible*. One could easily object – saying that the residue of works that are *not completely visible* is endless – and that, essentially, cities host an immense archive of works, traces of works and their allusions (gestures, performances, embellishments, staged acts of *public art*, vandalism or graffiti) that, from the beginning of the Neo-Avant-garde onward, have left their mark on art.

To begin, even if only to draft a rough game plan – let us take Yuri Arcani's work *Made in Italy* as an example. Yuri is an artist who for years has explored the quotidian domain of that which is barely visible through his video works. *Made in Italy* could basically be defined as a video. A short video characterised by alternating film sequences of people walking down the beachfront in bathing suits, aerial views of long stretches of beach typical of the

● N.O.GALLERY

Italian Romagnola coastline, and portions of sky in which a small hobby aircraft appears – always from the right hand side – trailing a large red banner bearing an equally large inscription in Asiatic characters that one presumes to be Chinese. The aircraft and its banner are often filmed from another source - in flight from a close up angle. It remains to say that the sequences are at times slowed down, and that the opening sequence of the video – focused on the red banner – is filmed from the ground (probably while the aircraft is taking off), giving the indisputable sensation of the opening of the stage curtain that introduces and carries reverberating theatrical impressions throughout the video. Finally – the sound: wind, violent vibrations of the red banner in the air, near silence, a mysterious ticking sound. In conclusion, *Made in Italy* would appear to be the short story of an apparition: the almost miraculous apparition of a mysterious celestial sign. An unedited sign that is somehow not disquieting, probably because it is well known to those frequenting the Adriatic coast.

Here we come to another point: who sees what? The so-called population of the beaches witnesses the passing of an airborne message, which in itself, could be directed at a foreign linguistic community - for example - the Chinese. The public of the video witnesses a work that is both technically flawless and splendidly enigmatic, at least until they enter the subliminal realm of extra-contextual information: the title, the caption, the press release, the presentation text and so on. It is at this point that one discovers a mystery – the ancient “meaning”.

The problem however, is that a work of art is not a puzzle or cryptic game, and it certainly is not resolved when one believes to have revealed its secret using the information provided. As I have mentioned, a work of art bears testimony to aspects belonging to its own era, and fundamentally, aspects that have to do with the tradition of Art itself.

In this way, the video *Made in Italy* by Yuri Ancarani tells of the collective paranoia which manifests toward China and its presumed aggressive power in the era of Capitalism of the new millennium - in fact, it is during this period that China celebrates its symbolic entrance onto the global stage of the International community with the Olympics in Beijing: The mysterious inscription “written” in the sky is actually the phrase “Made in Italy” written in Chinese. The elements of this action bear witness to a great, but invisible collective performance, of which the signs and traces are *not completely visible*. The overall effect of this incomplete state of visibility is dual- faceted: on one hand, the spectator does not see what happened on the ground at the Riviera Romagnola on the 15th of August 2008, but equally, one does not see, nor can one know, what the experience left by this strange performance could have been like. We reach the last part of what we could term my “hint at

● N.O.GALLERY

reflection” – beginning with a secondary aspect – the sharing of the experiential notion of a performance art event which is, perhaps, its most interesting aspect, not to mention the least accessible. What of and how the performance remains imprinted in the memory of those who participated, how it interacts with the location and its imaginary future, how one represents this manifestation and how one can bear witness to it – in that precise moment – as a work of art: it is the intriguing subject of much contemplation. However, *Made in Italy* had another intrinsic aspect. That which one does not see, but perceives, is that assorted group of photographers, assistants, video film crews and free lance collaborators – all wearing red T-shirts embellished with the same Chinese characters as those on the banner drawn by the plane in the sky. That apparently boundless *flash mob*, that happening spread over kilometres of coastline, is the other great performance event of *Made in Italy*. This is why *Made in Italy* could simplistically be defined as a video, but in reality, the video is but one of its parts: the range of Yuri Ancarani’s work spreads between the space in which the performance unravels - during the course of a day and the projection of the video, and thus, as a consequence, *Made in Italy* becomes a work with a time-span that extends long beyond that which one could summarily deduce. Therefore, that which took place on the beach, was not only the practical phase and a part of the technical process required for the filming, but rather – this phase was the second aspect of the work itself. It is at this point that *Made in Italy* weaves itself into an emerging critical strain of the practice of contemporary art – that is the extension of the performance range of the work. The work is thus not restricted to the necessity of being simply articulated through the filming, realisation and presentation of (the event and its documentation), but rather extends through the space of a time-frame, hiding in it and proffering a seemingly inedited element for contemplation.

What does that bare-chested man really see as he lifts his gaze to the sky, staring at that intriguing, mysterious banner being dragged across the heavens? What do we see as we watch him? What do we see as we look at the photographs of the more disparate groups of participants wearing their red T-shirts?

The point, perhaps, is that we realise that one can never see everything, without ever – optimistically speaking - losing one’s faith in the invisible.

Andrea Lissoni