VISUAL CULTURE/ REPRESENTATION
TRAVEL NOTES

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The critical horizon of the paper is that which considers the 'imaginary question' as an essential premise for any reasoning on the culture of representation as it is declined in the cultural production of contemporaneity. In this context of reflection, the 'question of images' requires particular attention about the role of the viewer and the practices of fruition and consumption of visual texts; processes that include questions relating to the mechanisms of the gaze, to the different forms of visual effectiveness of a text, to the 'performative' value of images and that is, to the ability they have to induce us to do things, to suffer from them, to modify cognitive and tactical itineraries of behaviour. In the final analysis, the contribution intends first of all to ask questions about the meaning that today the delicate process that governs the transition from vision to representation and from this to the 'attribution of meaning' has, placing once again the topic of the reference link. That is to say the link between relevance signs and pragmatic factuality, as central for the culture of representation.

There's always an image at the beginning.
If there is no image I do not see the story.
G. Garcìa Màrquez

In my personal wanderings through the issues of representation, it always seems to me that I have to return to a core of central reflection in which, despite the diversification of approaches and themes, each thought seems to regain its meaning and at the same time the impetus for any subsequent speculation. It is like always writing the same book!

The same ideas chase each other and yet at every step it seems essential to question them, reconsider them in the light of new acquisitions, new contexts and new interpretative hypotheses in a wider space of meaning.

A question before any other: that of the visual dimension of representation, which is the real plot of my personal story. The need, that is, to always address the themes of representation starting from the assumption that it is essential to look in a problematic way at the "image question" as it is declined in the cultural production of our time. This means asking oneself questions about the meaning of the delicate process that today governs the passage from vision to representation and from this to the "attribution of meaning". Which, then, in the final analysis, means to question oneself, using the words of Anceschi, on the central topic of the "referential link or rather the link between relevance signs and pragmatic factuality".

In this critical horizon, the "question of images" requires particular attention about the role of the viewer and the practices of fruition and consumption of visual texts; processes that include questions about the mechanisms of the gaze, the different forms of visual effectiveness of a text, the "performative" value of images and that is, their ability to induce us to do things, to suffer from them, to modify cognitive and tactical ways of behaviour.

A way of understanding the imaginary question in which the dialectical relationship established between the observer and the modes of representation is, therefore, fundamen-

tal, terms that have undergone significant transformations of meaning following the widespread diffusion of virtual visual spaces that have progressively repositioned the vision in a separate plane from the human observer. "Most of the functions of the human eye have been progressively replaced by visual practices in which images no longer seem to have any reference to the position of an observer in a 'real' world according to the laws of optics". Understanding this change requires a historical look at the evolution of the perceptual visual processes and outcomes in terms of image production. Not surprisingly, the reflection on the imaginary question repeatedly stumbles upon the folds of the copious cultural legacy of that period of thought that first investigated the field of figuration, conceiving visual investigation as an operational category, and 'drawing', in the active sense of 'project', as an inventive and morphogenetic process. This is the season that, starting from the exercises of *Grundkurs*, the basic course of Bauhaus, passing through the extensive experience of Basic Design, comes to us today, including the kinetic, interactive, multimodal dimension that preludes that universe of 'digital forms' in which the principles of growth, evolution, reproduction, transformation, permutation, assembly, are combined with the development of information technologies, inaugurating new languages and new conceptual paradigms.

This critical horizon is crossed by the question of the "visual rhetoric" that presides over the definition of current figurative languages and inverts that art of showing, which today far surpasses the art of saying, clearly shifting the interest from the object of representation (understood in the broadest sense of the term) to the dynamics of its visual presentation, as if to emphasize that, in the end, every representation is "an act, a gesture that makes a communiqué of the object". But in this process, which therefore sees the terms of representation and communication dialoguing with interesting superimpositions of meaning, the advent of the second and third computer age -to which corresponds an unstoppable

process of diffusion of the new technologies and a substantial democratization of the processes through the Net- has produced a proliferation of forms of "cross-media" representations in which the new digital languages are interwoven with the new practices of participation, of documentation and with which today collective enterprises of representation of reality are staged on multiple and free platforms in which the contents of images crowd, add up, overlap, share, merge and force us to look for the first time at representation as a collective "open work".

A horizon of great innovation and interest for representation, whether we ask ourselves about the possibility of defining and describing the birth of "new representative strategies", which seem to be able to modify the very meaning of representation, questioning the very dimension of authorship and insinuating into it new and intriguing horizons of reflection, or whether we reflect on the birth of new users and users of images, able to interact directly, though not technically, with the process of production and exchange of new forms of representation. So the 'image question' will probably continue to represent the beginning and the end of any future investigation of mine.

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