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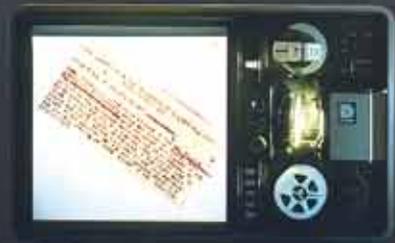
(ADVANCE FOR PMS OF FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 29)

(EDITORS: THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BY LIFE.
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GERTRUDE STEIN AND FRENCH MAYOR

GERTRUDE STEIN (LEFT), NOTED WRITER, SITS WITH

OCT 1 1944
RECEIVED EXAMINER
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CREDITS

Andrea Cortellessa

Elisabetta Benassi tells me that the earliest origin of *All I Remember* lies in an object which, characteristically, *doesn't figure* in her latest work-exhibition. Among its underwhelming charms, the restaurant "Pommidoro" in Rome's once-working-class San Lorenzo neighborhood features a check, undated but known to be from the evening of November 1, 1975. The eleven-thousand-lira check was never cashed, and shortly thereafter ended up in a frame on the wall, where it remains on display today. Because on the morning of November 2, 1975, the front pages of the newspapers spoke of nothing but the tragic events of the previous night involving its signer. He was someone who'd put his signature on a lot of things in his too-short life, and the one he left at "Pommidoro" was the last. The signature, on the bottom left as is customary, is not very clear, but then, the man paying for dinner that night certainly didn't need to identify himself – after all, he was an *habitué* at "Pommidoro," and then again, he was Pier Paolo Pasolini.

For those who know her work, Elisabetta's fascination with this singular memento comes as no surprise. The icon of Pasolini and his earthly attributes has captured her imagination at least since her 2000 video diptych *You'll Never Walk Alone* and *Timecode* (in both videos, the artist, in her regulation BETTAGOL uniform, interacts with a Pasolini lookalike clad in the poet's iconographic leather jacket, jeans and dark sunglasses; in the first video she plays football with him in a deserted stadium, and in the second rides on a motorbike with him in a series of excursions in the suburbs of Rome), and up to *Alfa Romeo GT Veloce 1975-2007* – a perfect copy of the car Pasolini was driving on that last evening in Rome – installed three years ago in the hypogeum of Palazzo Farnese.

Among the things that *don't figure*, now, in *All I Remember*, is the photo of that car. What is "displayed," rather, is the *reverse side* of the original photo taken on November 2, 1975 by the Associated Press, on which we read, in typewritten print:

1975 XI 2 17:54

(APPHO 51) Roma, 2 nov. (AP) La macchina di Pier Paolo Pasolini sulla quale è stato fermato Giuseppe Pelosi. Un sott'ufficiale dell'Arma osserva il giubbotto di Pasolini che era all'interno. (AP TELEFOTO) (It stf broglio) 1975.

[Rome, 2 Nov. (AP) The car owned by Pier Paolo Pasolini, in which Giuseppe Pelosi was stopped. A non-commissioned officer examines Pasolini's jacket, which was found inside the car.]

But these words are not the only *marks* borne by this image (or rather, this *retro-image*). There are the rubber stamps of La Stampa newspaper, which purchased the image that day, published it in its pages and then archived it; there is a sticker, probably applied much later, with the label HISTORIC ARCHIVE;

there are notes written by different hands and at different times that number, classify and codify it by subject (in today's computer jargon one might say it was "tagged"): PASOLINI PIER PAOLO. The names Pasolini and Pelosi are also circled in felt-tip pen – this was probably done just after the incident, to immediately identify the actors in the drama to which the image referred, but without framing them.

While the origin of *All I Remember* lies in the Pasolini check-reliquary, Elisabetta's idea came to her as her ideas usually do – while working on machines. Or rather, wrecks/relics (the two works that brought the artist to my attention were both linked to that spectral post-contemporary space, the auto demolition yard: the "motomen" of the 2004 video *Tutti morimmo a stento*, melancholic wrecks of human-motorcycle cyborgs amid piles of scrap metal; and the magnificent post-material *Suoli*, large photos shot from above, more or less in the same period, of land around demolition yards throughout Italy: the microfilm machines for reading archived newspapers at the New York Public Library, charmingly, antiquatedly, squeakily analogical (the ones at the National Library in Rome, with which students of my generation tussled for years, are now nearly all out of use...). Around the same time, Elisabetta came across the archive of the large daily paper, the San Francisco Chronicle, which included notes on the *reverse sides* of archived images in its digital versions.

And it is these *reverse sides* – some of which were collected in Italian archives covering the period from the 1920s to the early 1990s – that are "displayed," that is, randomly visualized, by the microfilm machine Benassi restored and set up at Magazzino in Via dei Prefetti (under the Derrida-esque title *Memorie di un cieco* [*Memoirs of a blind man*]). The artist then chose a certain number of these reverse-side-images (symptomatically, nearly all those on the front of which cars are pictured), reproduced them in watercolors and hung them on the walls. Meanwhile, another machine, a Morse lamp, transmits a coded message from the back of the exhibition space: deciphered, it reads ALL I REMEMBER.

Elisabetta's use of words is fairly recent. Her last work, *Telegram from Buckminster Fuller to Isamo Noguchi, Explaining Einstein's Theory of Relativity*, shown in Basel last year, is a vast carpet bearing the reproduced text of an interminable telegram the famous architect sent in 1936 to an artist friend of his in Mexico – an image that clearly recalls the 1975 Pasolini check. But the works that particularly stand out in my mind are *THEY LIVE WE SLEEP*, shown at the 2008 Rome Quadrennial (the phrase in question is repeated by numerous different, unsynchronized voices emanating from one-hundred and fifty megaphones arranged on the wall so as to compose the text of the recorded phrase), and the exhibition *I Have a Date with Outer Space* (a radio antenna approximately 12 meters tall installed last year at the Fondazione Merz in Turin, which receives

and broadcasts a signal that is amplified and made audible through connections to megaphones. The signal is a simple-yet-topical question: *Che fare? [What is to be done?]*). In short, Elisabetta Benassi's words are always *messages*. A rather outdated approach, one might say, at a time like our present when the ideology of the end-of-ideologies reigns unchallenged. But Elisabetta's "messages" are never prescriptive or regulatory; rather, they are programmatically *impracticable*, impossible to "translate" into actions.

Except in one very particular sense: in all of these cases, what interests the artist is the process – the "action" – that transforms writing into sound, or writing into image, or image into writing. The *reverse-side-images* of *All I Remember* are in this sense perfectly bi-univocal. On one hand, the writings on the *reverse sides* of the archive photographs "translate" – albeit in an elementary way – the images on the other side into verbal language, as if in a "zero degree," a bewildering, purely utilitarian lowering of the ancient and noble tradition of *ekphrasis*. They are functional writings, skeletally brachilogic (barring some amusing exceptions that read like random micro-stories), often lacking punctuation; sometimes they bear dialectical marks, or equally negligent, improvised and incongruous lexical *pointes*. They are, in short, *authorless* (just as the name of the photographer who shot the image on the other side is almost always missing): writings that come *directly from reality*, one might say. On the other hand, however, these same writings – especially in virtue of the stratified layout of handwritten parts, multicolored stamps and typewritten labels – in turn take on the clear status of images: and in fact, manually re-codified by the watercolorist-calligrapher, they are displayed as images.

In short, what Elisabetta Benassi continues and makes more specific with *All I Remember* is an image-archeology work. Not only in the sense that the things she "digs up" are materially *archival images* (a check from '75, a telegram from '36, stock photos from the "analogical age" ... photos taken today are no longer stored in paper form, and even the billions of images present in archives will gradually all be transformed into digital formats, and not always taking care to reproduce the *reverse side* of the original in the new medium. The most recent image of those in *All I Remember* is a telephotograph of the first attack on the World Trade Center in New York, from 1993...) – but above all because, by showing their temporal indexes, Elisabetta exposes the anachronistic status of *every image*.

The image, as we ought to know by now, has a dialectical relationship with History. On the one hand it can document History, to the point of rising – under certain circumstances and using certain precautions – to the status of proof. In dealing with the most delicate and controversial case of all, that of images testifying to the Shoah, Clément Chéroux once used the metaphor (stemming,

however, from the literal meaning) of the *reverse side* of a photo, to underline how important it is, in the face of a photo intended as a documentary "source," to reconstruct the context in which it was originally taken. Such information is usually found on the *reverse side* of the photo, in the form of markings (captions, censor's authorizations, archive stamps, watermarks).

But images have the power to *make history* in another sense as well, since our memory of determined events is based on a few specific images to the exclusion of others. *Making history* in this case means having a real effect on memory, and thus on collective mentality. That is, *producing real historical effects*. The degree to which this process can be distorted (but also to which it can be associated with a sort of second-degree authenticity) was demonstrated most recently by Clint Eastwood's film *Flags of Our Fathers*, which told the story of one of the most celebrated (and artificial) war images of all time: the photo by Joe Rosenthal of US Marines raising the stars and stripes on Mount Suribachi during the bloody battle of Iwo Jima, on the Pacific front of the Second World War.

It is obviously not by chance that contemporary art has offered profound reflections in recent decades on the *use of historical images*. In the early 1970s, Gerhard Richter collected photographs, prints and old family albums as *objets trouvés*, and over time, with these materials, created one of the absolute masterpieces of the late 20th Century, *Atlas*, which "documents" (amid numerous and necessary quotation marks) key episodes of German collective memory, from Nazism to the terrorism of the 1970s. But in comparison with this sort of *frontal* – albeit sensitive and astute – use, Elisabetta Benassi's *All I Remember* carries out exactly the inverse operation.

Materially showing us the temporal index, she restores physicality and corporality to the image, thus contradicting (or at least complicating) the post-modernist Vulgate of Sontag and Baudrillard, according to which the pervasiveness and progressive instantaneousness of the circulation of images has had the effect of spectrally replacing their actual, real reference points. In short, Elisabetta is saying: if images are really phantasms – and there is no doubt that they are – , then they are material, three-dimensional ones (their thickness is minimal but effective).

But at the same time, she also shows us that the *temporal index* of the images is by no means univocal; their path is never linear. On the contrary, it is stratified, dialectical, multi-perspective. The series of overlaid rubber stamp marks (used by daily newspaper iconographic archives to indicate successive publications of the same image in the same newspaper) create a material, figurative visualization of the photo's *anachronistic* status, as Georges Didi-Huberman would say. In short, every historical image is revealed to be a *dialectical image*, one that superimposes various temporal perspectives – that of

its moment of realization and its later re-readings - , which often make sparks fly when they meet.

Thus, beginning with an archive of machines (after all, every photograph can be read as the residue of the working of the *machine* that took it), Elisabetta has ended up creating what has always been the most desired and most feared of machines: a *time machine*. That is, a machine that shows us how time functions, often – as *All I Remember* shows, anachronistically (that is, phantasmatically) *retro-acting*. The title Elisabetta has chosen for this work-exhibition is symptomatic: she drew it from a work announced by Gertrude Stein during a public talk documented by one of the photos (and in fact cited in the caption on the back of it), but never actually published by the American writer. Similarly, here we have only the *reverse sides* of images from History – some famous, others less-seen if not in fact “hidden”. But in this way, we believe we know much more about those images than if we were to see them reproduced once again.

One of the most disturbing aspects of this *functioning of images in time* is its link with money. (Perhaps this is why Elisabetta has identified the initial conceptual and material “seed” of *All I Remember* as Pasolini’s check, an object that brings together elements of writing and image, as well as time and money. That is, life and death. And we may also recall a work of hers from 2006 with a title that overturns and concretizes a famous one of Céline’s: *La vie à crédit*.) Running through the *reverse sides* lined up in her microfilm machine, one in fact notes the recurrence of a standard phrase, WATCH YOUR CREDIT. The phrase is intended to remind whoever may utilize the image to cite the photographer or agency to which it belongs, and above all to pay the established amount of compensation for each use. (In other cases, there are synonymous expressions such as COURTESY or the © symbol.)

The word CREDIT thus acquires a multifaceted and revelatory value. On the one hand, it attributes an origin, the code of belonging into which the *historical index* is translated: that photo *belongs* to X in that X took it, or in that the entity X claims rights to it. On the other hand, it reminds us of the *value* of that image: its historical value (marked and repeatedly validated by the *historical index* of writings on its *reverse side*) and, consequently, its market value. But in the end, retracing the etymology, the word CREDIT refers back to our word *credere* – believe – , our belief in that image, the credit we have come to attribute to it. What *All I Remember* implacably shows us is that we “believe” in an image precisely because of its historicity, its being bound to events in a dialectical relationship; but also because of its utilization value, its market value, which leads to said image being reproduced an indefinite number of times.

In the plural, for an Italian, the expression *credits* has yet another meaning as well. Just when we are at our weakest, that is, at the moment when we believe in or *give credit* to a certain image, it invites us to believe in ourselves. Advertising, as we know, is the soul of commerce. If by chance we should find ourselves doubting this final, fundamental *credit*, we would be forced – “with a drunk’s terror” – to do what no time machine yet allows us to do: look at the *reverse side* of ourselves.



Assegno Pomodoro (Pier Paolo Pasolini), 2009, watercolor on paper, 7,5 x 18,5 cm

TOWARDS A NEW STATUS OF THE ART OBJECT?

Roberto Cavasola

In the course of his teachings, Jacques Lacan gave us several different ways of understanding the object: the imaginary object, or rather simply the image thereof, focalized by the image of the body and some of its parts; the object of the question, which, when dealing with the question of love, becomes a particular object, the object *nothing*; the metonymic object of desire, which slips and slides beneath the words in discourse. And finally, he coined the object a , the status of which is essentially logical¹, to explain that behind the image of the object, behind the object that questions itself, behind the object that chases after itself, there must be another that we cannot see, that is difficult to grasp. We see it, for example, in the end of a love: the object is all the more present when it no longer exists. But we will not enter into the merits of the various facets of the object a , although they should be specified, and will instead speak of them in a rather imprecise way.

As Jacques-Alain Miller said in his brief address *Seven considerations on creation*², “art should be placed in the category of production in psychoanalysis, that is, first and foremost as an object” and “this obliges us to raise the question of the possibility of knowing whether every art is interpretable.” Art’s status as an object would be paradoxical: “if, as an object, it is not interpretable, that notwithstanding, there is no reason not to place it in relation to coordinates of discourse, and no reason not to localize it based on terms of meaning.”

It is a different thing to give meanings to an object, interpreting it, and finding meaningful coordinates around it.

Miller then asks himself: “what becomes of the art object if we ourselves inscribe it as object a ?” Our point of view will be different if we consider creation as beginning with the artist, like Miller, or if, like Marie-Hélène Brousse, we take the art object into consideration as such³.

Miller proposes two different statuses of creation: creation “against a background of castration” and creation “against a background of preclusion.” In the end, he notes that the latter is the more paradigmatic of the two, as it presupposes that there is nothing Other than the Other.

Let’s simplify these rather difficult-to-grasp citations: if we take the artist’s point of view, in terms of his creating based on his own desires, the object will then have a phantasmatic status. The art object as ex-nihilo creation⁴, from nothing, will be motivated by a *lack-of-being*, by that particular void that constitutes the place of desire in the subject, and the object itself will be “the embodied equivalent of the subject ... who is the creator of the object in which he wraps himself.”⁵ The artist’s phantasm, the way in which desire consists of its own lack-of-being, resonates with the viewer’s gaze, and with his or her own phantasm. The work of art will be an interpretation of the phantasm, that is, of the way in which each of us responds to the question of desire. What do I desire? Who desires me? What does one desire? In radical contrast, art against a background of preclusion sets the object beyond the

phantasm, and rests on the status of lack that represents another side of the object, which in jargon we call object a . The object, then, will no longer be an interpretation of desire, but something beyond it that simply underlines the absolute dimension of the object as such. However, this means that the object moves ever closer to the lack. The object then corresponds perhaps even more to Lacan’s definition of sublimation, which “elevates the object to the dignity of the Thing.”⁶ The object presents itself to us as it is set forth by the artist, almost as a challenge, beyond the boundary of interpretability. In this sense we can perhaps compare it to an insult that seeks to grasp something intimate about us without making any attempt to obtain our consensus or our participation. Rather than working from his own subjective division, the artist would place himself in a sort of state of petrification, in a “perverse” effort that aims to disaffect the viewer, throwing the object in his face.

Think of that sublime passage in *Jude the Obscure*, in which an unknown girl throws “a piece of flesh” in Jude’s face, “the characteristic part of the barrow pig which the countrymen used for greasing their boots, as it was useless for any other purpose.” This happens at a moment when he is engrossed in thoughts of his plans for the future, oblivious to his surroundings, daydreaming that “he might become even a bishop.”⁷ All Jude can do at that point is try to guess which of the three girls intent on their humble work threw that object in his face, with no other pretext than his interpretation, or rather his choice, completely speculative as he did not see who it was. The girls themselves certainly have no intention of telling him, having maliciously taken advantage of his distracted state to strike him, and it is a choice that will decide his destiny. This is one way of explaining the strange expression “there is no Other of the Other”: nothing guarantees Jude’s decision, his act of choosing one of the three girls as guilty of the gesture; no one is going to tell him “It was her.” For a moment, “the father-figure that is involved in every perception ... that is included in visual surplus *jouissance* and impedes enjoyment”⁸ falls short. A woman appears while Jude is absorbed by his vision of becoming a bishop, and he suddenly becomes aware of a gaze that may relate to him⁹... the gaze of a girl who throws a piece of flesh in his face.

We might compare the viewer of a contemporary work of art to Jude: the artist, like that girl, throws a piece of flesh in his face and then retreats...

Thus, two very different statuses of the art object are delineated, although the art object is always and in any case a *dompte-regard*¹⁰: that of the phantasmatic object that speaks to our imagination, by working on the image as an image of beauty elaborated with meanings, and that of object a as a remainder that targets something intimate without passing through imagination or a possible deciphering.

The promotion of the object as such, *pret-à-porter more-enjoyment*, is part of contemporary civilization, and the contemporary subject, distressed and disoriented (*déboussolé*) in the “hypermodern discourse,” finds himself with this object that engages his body, without a good compass to guide him¹¹.

But this reference to *Jude the Obscure* suggests another possible interpretation: could

we perhaps say that every work of art is a rival of the woman's place? A woman, in that, as Lacan says, women are real¹². This is what Marina Abramovic seems to suggest in her *The art must be beautiful, the artist must be beautiful*, the video in which she shows herself to us – looking at us as if we were her mirror – in the act of brushing her hair; the effort, the suffering of a woman who must meet the obligation to be beautiful, further burdened by the imperative to make beautiful art. She looks at us while being looked at, and it is as if she were winking at the viewer: “what are you doing, are you looking at my work of art or do you just like beautiful women? Do you want my artwork, or do you want my body? What gets you off in this vision? *I*, in any case, am unique!” We might say that she thus rivets us to her gaze, and numerous female artists probably don't mind doing the same thing, given that they actually put their own bodies at stake in their works¹³.

We have done our utmost to delineate various possible statuses of the art object, but in seeing Elisabetta Benassi's works, we find ourselves a bit hampered: they do not seem to fit into any of the categories we had at our disposal when we crossed the threshold of Mauro Nicoletti's Magazzino gallery in Via dei Prefetti.

What are these wrong-way-round images of which we can see only some names, or a phrase that describes the subject? They fit neither the status of object as remainder, nor that of object as phantasm. So what can we say about these works?

First of all we see words – which in jargon we call signifiers – written on the reverse sides of the images. Words that offer themselves to be seen. The artist explains that they are images reproduced using the technique of watercolor, thus they are not *true images*, but *perfect copies*, *faithful copies*. Might this have something to do with Kiarostami's film¹⁴? We inevitably recall the term Lacan made a key word in his teaching, one which – coincidentally – can also be found on the first page of Bataille's *Eroticism*¹⁵: *semblance*. In his Seminar XVIII, Lacan asserts: the signifier is a semblance¹⁶. But given that the phallus is also a signifier, women and men must make do with the semblance. It is a very simple thing to explain, if we consider that an officer's rank, for example, is indicated by markings sewn onto his uniform jacket – which do not tell us whether or not he is a good general. The press and television accentuate the semblance-nature of signifiers, and, as a journalist whose name I don't recall told me when I was a boy, journalists have been known to pay a commander to move his troops and thus create a “scoop.” Even a proper name can become a semblance, as in Balzac's story *Colonel Chabert*, in which a wife treats her husband – who has returned from a campaign with Napoleon after several years during which time he was presumed dead – as an imposter. In these works, words or signifiers are presented as semblances; their semblance aspect is underlined by the fact that they are faithful copies. So many works of art in various forms exploit the function of deception, of pretending, of play-acting, in fascination and in love: from Mozart's *Così fan tutte* to Renoir's *La règle du jeu*, from Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* to Marivaux's *Les jeux de l'amour et du hasard*, from Fellini's

Le notti di Cabiria to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In Kiarostami's film, on the contrary, we see a woman, splendidly portrayed by Juliette Binoche, pleading with a man, “Come on, let yourself go a little, get into the pretending of love,” and a rather strange old fellow telling the man, “all you have to do is put your hand on her shoulder, just that little gesture – do it!”; and the woman trying to convince the man that a *faithful copy* can be just as beautiful, or perhaps even more beautiful than the original.

Elisabetta Benassi seems to treat semblances badly, quite badly, in fact! She shows us the backs of photos, photos we cannot see; we can only see the titles and descriptions, but even these are not authentic, they are only copies. And as if that weren't enough, these images are projected at random in a microfilm machine, by a mechanism of truly infernal sophistry: it is pure chance, Elisabetta Benassi tells us, if you see that image at that moment; randomness is guaranteed by the mechanism, which chooses images in a totally senseless way. Three-thousand backwards photos are shown, for an instant, and then pass by.

These semblances were chosen deliberately from a perspective that seems quite specific and that we might sum up in this way: as we observe the apotheosis of the semblance, it reveals itself to be a demise of the semblance.

The film Fellini never made, Freud's sad arrival at Victoria Station in flight from Nazi-controlled Vienna, the announcement of Fidel Castro's resignation forty years ago (obviously, he never did resign), Brigitte Bardot, Cossiga witnessing the finding of Moro's body in a red Renault, Martin Luther King in his new house with his wife, the nuclear tests on Bikini Island... this marvelous power of the semblance, amplified by the photos and by newspapers all over the world, in the service of the death instinct. The man worthy of an ideal despicably murdered. The puppet dictator, etc., etc. Here we have a vision of our era and the way our era treats the semblance.

Andy Warhol and Jasper Johns played with the concepts of consumer object and art object, collective myth and icon. The irony lies in the fact that even if it reproduces an everyday object, the art object is a unique object¹⁷, just as in the film, a unique moment or scene is evoked: only that couple was in that room number 9 in that hotel in Lucignano, fifteen years earlier.

But Elisabetta Benassi makes us confront the coincidence between the power, the apotheosis of semblance, and its collapse. The exhibition's purest object, its quintessence, is a Morse lamp for ship-to-ship transmission. It emits rapid flashes of light in a dark room, and only a telegrapher could decipher the message if the artist had not revealed it to us: *all I remember* - “dot-dash, dot-dash-dot-dot, dot-dash-dot-dot” etc., - which is also the title of a never-published Gertrude Stein work.

In this sense we find ourselves faced with a new status of the art object, which no longer deals just with the object as such, nor with semblance as such, but reverberates the effects of the treatment of semblance in that strange present-day world into which we are all plunged.

This context was evoked in a course taught by Jacques-Alain Miller and Eric Laurent, *L'Autre qui n'existe pas et ses comités d'éthique*¹⁸, the follow-up to which was in a certain sense delineated in the theme of the next convention of our school of psychoanalysis, to be held in Buenos Aires in two years: *Il simbolico nel XXI secolo*. It deals with the consequences of a collapse of the ideal onto the symbolic, and perhaps a certain dissolution of the symbolic order. And it is perhaps precisely this that Elisabetta Benassi speaks to us of, this dissolution of the symbolic. The most powerful semblances are toppled in the revelation of their collapse.

- 1 cfr. Jacques-Alain Miller, *L'extimité*, Corso al Dipartimento di psicoanalisi dell'Università di Parigi VIII, courses on 12/03/86 and 16/4/86, (unpublished).
- 2 La psicoanalisi, n°9, Astrolabio, Rome, 1991, p. 147.
- 3 Marie-Hélène Brousse, *L'objet d'art à l'époque de la fin du beau, La cause freudienne*, Nouvelle revue de psychanalyse, n°71, Navarin, Paris, 2009.
- 4 Jacques Lacan, *Il Seminario*, Libro VII, *L'etica della psicoanalisi*, see below.
- 5 Miller, op.cit.
- 6 Jacques Lacan, *Il Seminario*, Libro VII, chpt. VIII p. 142-144, chpt. IX p. 152, chpt. XXII p. 372, Einaudi, 1st ed. (revision and notes by Roberto Cavasola) 1994, 2nd ed. (ed. Antonio Di Ciaccia), 2009. The numbering refers to the first edition.
- 7 Thomas Hardy, *Jude l'oscuro*, Garzanti Editore, p. 45.
- 8 Jacques-Alain Miller, *Dall'immagine allo sguardo*, La psicoanalisi, n° 40, Astrolabio, Roma, 2006, pag. 27.
- 9 cfr. Lacan's play on words between *regarde*, look, and *regarde*, regard, in *Omaggio a Marguerite Duras*, La Psicoanalisi, n°8, Astrolabio, Rome, 1990, p.13.
- 10 Jacques Lacan, *Il Seminario*, Libro XI, I quattro concetti fondamentali della psicoanalisi, Einaudi, 2003, pp. 91 and 108.
- 11 cfr. Jacques-Alain Miller, *Une fantaisie*, Mental, n°15, New Lacanian School, 2005.
- 12 Lacan, *L'etica della psicoanalisi*, op. cit. p. 272-273.
- 13 *Elles*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2009.
- 14 Abbas Kiarostami, *Copia conforme*, film.
- 15 Georges Bataille, *L'érotisme*, Gallimard, Paris.
- 16 *Il Seminario*, Libro XVIII, Di un discorso che non sarebbe del sembiante, chpt. II, Einaudi, 2010. As Jacques-Alain Miller explained in his course *Della natura dei sembianti*, "we cannot reduce semblance to the imaginary ... the symbolic is of the order of semblance." And "asserting that the signifier is semblance means introducing the equivalence of the symbolic and imaginary, modifying the famous trio (real, symbolic, imaginary) in favor of a different perspective that considers the symbolic and the imaginary to be equivalent with respect to the real." (La psicoanalisi, n. 11, Astrolabio, 1992, p. 118-119). Elisabetta Benassi works on the juxtaposition between symbol and image.
- 17 cfr. Marie-Hélène Brousse, op. cit.
- 18 Course in the Department of Psychoanalysis of the University of Paris VIII, 1996-1996, (unpublished).

ALL I REMEMBER

Interview by Cloe Piccoli

Cloe Piccoli: This exhibition *All I Remember* takes its title from a never-published (or perhaps published under another title) novel by Gertrude Stein, which you learned of because it's mentioned on the back of a photographic portrait of the writer. Paradoxically, *All I Remember* refers to something that doesn't exist, and yet it evokes a story. Your exhibition at Magazzino Gallery in Rome also tells a story, the one sounded by newspaper archive photos, but it tells it by subtraction, through writings and markings found on the backs of photos, in the absence of images, like a Stein novel without words.

Elisabetta Benassi: The image is "hidden," it's never shown, but only evoked through captions and notes, almost as if these texts were in turn the residues of images, the part that remains at the moment when they disappear. You hear the shot, but you don't see the killer.

CP: In this work, you tell the story of the Twentieth Century, or rather, your own vision of the story of the Twentieth Century. Telling the story through notes on the backs of photos leaves more possibilities of interpretation open than doing it through images would. What is it that interests you about this opening?

EB: What you ask yourself in the end, after having seen these myriad "hidden" images flash past, is what really happened? What exactly do we remember about History? Like the announcement of Stein's book, there are a lot of incongruous things that don't add up. Images always impose something, they seem to want to tell us the truth, but then it's the viewer who interprets, finds and attributes a meaning to what he sees, and naturally assumes a great power in doing so.

CP: In your way of telling the story, there's space for many suggestions, imagination, shifting. You begin with newspaper archive photographs – the most "authentically" documentary source there is – and yet you evoke a story made up of fragments and interpretations, personal visions that overlie political and objective events. What comes out of it is a really interesting narration that shifts over various levels, public and private, intimate and political, literary and historical. It's a narration that makes me think of Don De Lillo's contemporary epic *Underworld* in which, from the moment when jumps the turnstiles at the New York Polo Grounds to watch the game between the San Francisco Giants and the Los Angeles Dodgers, a plot unwinds of thoughts, events, interferences, accidents, incidents and reflections that interweave and overlay one another through the entire novel, telling a story but leaving a lot of other ones open.

EB: Yes, it's exactly this background noise, this buzzing, this interference among events, the random associations between every *reverse side* that creates a multiplicity of possible stories. And maybe in addition to De Lillo, talking about stories that come about in leaping from one to the other, I could also cite the Georges Perec of *Je me souviens*.

CP: There are some notable works by artists in recent years that evoke images and develop narrations through words. For example, Rirkrit Tiravanija's solo show at Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam, (*A Retrospective. Tomorrow is Another Fine Day*), in which the artist left the entire museum space empty. Visitors were accompanied by three characters, who told a story in each room. One of these characters was a ghost, who told our and his story, the story of the last twenty years since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The text, *Yesterday Will Be Another Day*, written by Bruce Sterling, a science-fiction writer who has worked a lot with artists from Philippe Parreno and Tiravanija, was an "open" narration, but with numerous collisions with reality. If you think about it, it's fundamental to talk about narrations today. It's one of the most important themes in contemporary art.

EB: It's especially important in a country like Italy that's at risk of becoming a ghost country, of losing contact with reality, with the present, and being reduced to a representation, fiction. The narration of *All I Remember* is made up of clues and words, of post-its that indicate plans, ideas, ambitions, experiences, but that are stripped-down, rarefied; they have to be listened to and focused on. There isn't empty space in the gallery, but the exhibition is rarefied. After all, the void doesn't exist, it's still somehow an image. It's a density. The space circumscribes a meaning. It's like Cage's silence, deafening.

CP: How did you choose the images?

EB: I sort of met them, more than chose them. The most important thing was to respect the *chaos*, the immense variety of memorable events of grand history and banal everyday news items. The idea is to construct a messy, chaotic archive in which temporal events intersect and overlay one another and interweave, composing a new portrait of the Twentieth Century. For now I have about 70,000 images. It's a work in progress in which other microfilms will be created.

CP: Which photo archives did you look in?

EB: In the large photojournalism archives of a few newspapers or agencies, like La Stampa's historic archive in Turin, which has 6 million photographs, Corriere della Sera, Publifoto, the st foto libreria gallery in Rome, the archives of a few American daily newspapers. Places that are generally accessible only to insiders, because the images are covered by copyright: *Watch your credit!* It's been an extraordinary experience – in this past year I've seen hundreds of thousands of images; I didn't think I remembered so many things about Italy. It's been voyage through time, still human, in a country that in the end doesn't exist anymore.

CP: How did this work come about?

EB: The work originated from a stay in New York in 2008, at the time of the crisis on Wall Street and the election of Obama. During those months I went to the exit of the stock exchange on Wall Street every day at five in the afternoon

and photographed the faces of the brokers and employees coming out of the offices, exhausted. I walked all over the city, and often went to the Public Library to look at microfilm of American newspapers and magazines from the 1960s and '70s. Much of what I was seeing in the streets I was also perceiving with the eyes of other photographers; it looked like suggestions that are deposited in our memories. Then I thought, you'd have to blind yourself to see beyond them. That's when I conceived a work with microfilm readers.

CP: What is it that you like about these microfilm reading machines?

EB: Watching the pages of a newspaper stream past like the frames of a film, every one different from the others. I'm crazy about these now-obsolete machines that we can still find in libraries all over the world.

CP: So you decided to procure one for yourself.

EB: I contacted an American firm that sold used machines, and after a lot of negotiating I acquired one and made some modifications to it myself.

CP: How?

EB: I augmented the functions the machine already had – forward, stop, rewind, slow forward, fast-forward. Then I applied an electronic memory that behaves as if a multi-sided die were cast, with every side corresponding to a pre-set action, but the combinations of sides of the die are myriad. I tried to give it a life of its own, bring it to life as if it were a character. The film moves very, very slowly, it advances, it goes backward, it stops, it accelerates and backs up continually, as if it were mining its memory, like an old blind man retracing the Twentieth Century with his thoughts exteriorized, or as if we were inside his head. The title is *Memorie di un cieco* [*Memories of a blind man*].

CP: Obsolete, out-of-date, almost forgotten, out of use, this machine today shows reality in a different light – it marks it off with a very different tempo and definition than the ones we're used to; it evokes a sort of melancholy.

EB: Reality for me is always a sum total of visible things and other things that remain hidden; it's the "imperfect" layering of times, actions and thoughts; it has a false bottom; it's like entering into the slow stream of thoughts. The film winds and re-winds like time – it's a bachelor machine, it's melancholic.

CP: The installation in the exhibition underlines this sense of circular time, of courses and recourses, of possibilities of narration. It makes me think of an archive, a place for thinking, Salinger's study.

EB: The entire space is dimly lit by a suspended light bulb. The room is gray – gray ceiling, floor and walls – but you can still perceive the perimeter. The microfilm reader stands on a 1960s Olivetti office table from the Arco series, designed by the B.B.P.R. studio. The whole space seems to have been recently emptied out, as if everything around the machine had suddenly disappeared. While we, and the film, are the only elements in color.

CP: What is that light you can see from the outside entering into the courtyard? You hear an irregular noise, like the noise of a typewriter.

EB: It's the intermittent flash of a Morse lamp, of the type once used on war ships signaling, and all that's left of it is the action, which transmits a signal in code from the depths of space (*All I Remember*), a signal that's become abstract, no longer accessible or comprehensible.

CP: In the watercolors you go back to the image. That is, you've had a banknote designer paint some of the reverse sides of the photos. So you introduce a further level of mediation, of interpretation, that increases the distance from the original image, but opens up to a new story. Or maybe not.

EB: Everything should be seen from the point of view of today: it's now that events become contradictory, that there's no more coincidence between what was announced in the past and what actually happened, or that events appear to be endowed with a prophetic value that they didn't originally possess. Especially in the case of failures, of missed appointments, as in the reverse side that announced the imminent, certain start of work on Fellini's mythical film *Il viaggio di Mastorna*. It was 1968, and obviously, the film was never shot.

May 2010

JUSTIN REY, MAYOR OF THE VILLAGE OF THIRAN
FRANCE WHERE HER CHATEAU IS SITUATED. MISS STEIN
REMAINED AT HER CHATEAU DURING THE FOUR YEARS OF
GERMAN OCCUPATION OF FRANCE. SHE HAS JUST
COMPLETED A NEW BOOK, DEALING WITH THE HUMAN RACE,
ENTITLED "ALL I REMEMBER."

(WATCH RELEASE: FOR PMS OF FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 29)

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