

## PERSPECTIVE AS CATCHING DEVICE

Linear perspective is no innocent technique. There is something that fascinates and seduces the painter who lingers in it. One *surrenders* to its projective mechanism as one would surrender to a temptation that should instead be resisted. I am deliberately using an almost religious language. Any art history apprentice would tell you that right from the beginning, in order to generate truly great *painting*, it was necessary to deviate away from the laws of perspective. Heresy was the rule in the great Renaissance art whereas orthodoxy represented the exception. Vasari, would in fact, show very little appreciation for Paolo Uccello's "special effects", far too loyal to an overly rigid projective principle. The strict observance to perspectival laws represents then a transgression that diverts the painter from achieving great art, jeopardizing him both on an artistic level and, maybe just less obvious, a moral one too. His integrity is therefore undermined by being excessively loyal to what the machine dictates. If the machine is a game, it is nevertheless a dangerous game.

In Vasari's opinion what perspectival orthodoxy really meant was a dangerous relapse into pure technique, into that purely "mechanic" dimension of the making, that was so dominant in Medieval time, when little, if in fact any of what "art" in its modern and romantic meaning, was known and from which he wanted to rescue the art of painting, giving it thus the dignity of liberal art. Painting had to aspire to become like poetry. In order to reach such a poetic transvaluation, the perspective technique, with all its baggage of practical skills and empiric knowledge, represented more an obstacle than a resource. On a moral and religious level, such an exasperated technicality carried with it almost a sense of an antichristian and antipaulinian revaluation of the mere "letter" in respect to the power of the "spirit", and even though not openly stated it implied an attitude in which one could perceive a perversely voyeuristic quality. The possibility to "see through" (*perspicere*), that linear perspective was promising to those who would embrace it, was immediately perceived as a profane way to see, as a vision that desecrated nature. This is the reason why it would very soon move to Northern Europe where probably the best result were achieved. There, the possibility to join the emerging new bourgeois sensibility, which in turn, intermingled with the Protestant critique of Catholic idolatry, would finally free the subject of painting from any reference to the transcendent. It is said, with reason, that such profane naturalism had something to do with a radical humanism. In reality, along with the satisfied bourgeois decency of *Arnolfinis*, the perspective technique puts into play, as we will see, inhuman evil forces if not clearly anti-human.

During the 20th Century the critique of the perspectival procedure gave this old-outstanding hostility its proper theoretical frame. It is enough to read the ending pages of Erwin Panofsky's renowned 1927 essay to see how real this is. Written in the clear style of an art philosophy inspired by Cassirer's Neo-Kantianism, it introduces the thesis according to which «perspective seals off religious art from the realm of the magical»<sup>1</sup>. Turning the surface into a figurative plane onto which a unitary space is projected *as* seen through it and containing all things, the substance (*ousia*), according to Panofsky, is transformed with no residues into appearance (*phainomenon*) and the world becomes integrally *image*. The distance between human and divine then would be permanently reduced, if not completely cancelled, and we would move onto a level where man is at

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<sup>1</sup> E. Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, New York, Zone Books, 1997, p. 72 (*Die Perspektive als 'symbolische Form'*, Leipzig&Berlin 1927).

the centre. The divine, phenomenologically “reduced” by the perspective becomes, according to Panofsky, just matter for human consciousness, the *cogitatum* of its endless *cogitare*. And yet such anthropocentrism induced by the use of linear perspective is only superficial, given that the cancellation of any transcendence would eventually end up in the cancellation of human transcendence itself. The perspective technique has already reduced the subject to a *point*, a simple vanishing point inscribed in the plane of absolute immanence of the painting.

As such it was presented by Brunelleschi with his famous device, so well described by Antonio di Tuccio Manetti in his book *The Life of Brunelleschi* (approx. 1475). Here the subject is represented in a “bastard” way (I am using this expression in its platonic sense as a synonym of *indirect*) by a tiny hole that opens to a point at infinity where all the vanishing lines, perpendicular to the plane of the painting, converge. It is from this non-place that one must look in order to see, in the mirror placed in front of the image, the effect produced by the perspectival construction. Indeed a quite awkward effect will then be produced! By looking through this strange keyhole – we are in fact behind the panel – we will witness a vision void of subject, an anonymous gaze that does not reflect in itself and does not have the form of *videre videor*, that it is not thus reflexive cogito. Hubert Damisch observed that, somehow, the Brunelleschi device gave a solution to the paradox represented by an eye placed in front of a mirror and wishing to see without seeing itself<sup>2</sup>. No better words could have been used! It is in fact, as if through the keyhole of the Brunelleschi device we would peek at an *outside* with no relation to the living subjectivity, an absolute outside, and thus, an outside that exists beyond any intentionality and that the perspective technique allows us to find again. It lets us find it, in fact, as *image*, as pure desubjectified image.

As well as Panofsky, also Pavel Florenskij sees in perspective *that* evil technique that disposes of the sacred from the dimension of man’s living experience and, along with it, also disposes of man, who is created in God’s image and is his lieutenant on earth<sup>3</sup>. In the new infinite, homogeneous, and isotropic space created by perspective, there is in fact, literally no *space* for God’s transcendence as well as for human *difference*, for its absolute “value”. *Places*, such as those existing in the old Aristotelian and academic conception of space, no longer exist in the *systematic space* created by the perspective technique: the only differences are those of positions or scale but not of value. Axiology has been replaced by geometry forever. Well known is the critique that the abovementioned authors have expressed with regard to the alienating and thus dehumanizing effects of perspective – since it has been widely developed by the phenomenology of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Such criticism pairs with the phenomenological critique of scientific objectivism. In both cases and for the same reasons the living experience of the vision is being replaced by its daring conceptual-symbolic transcription. The following question summarizes what the phenomenological critique is about: can we still call man, conscious, living and incarnated subjectivity that eye reduced to the (non) dimension of a geometric point, a point the perspective technique must assume as foundation of the “legitimate construction” (*costruzione legittima*)? Is that motionless and solitary eye, void of any life and history, still the organ of a living human being?

During the 20th Century several philosophers who drew on the objections to perspective – objections that had already been raised right from its beginning (as a matter of fact Vasari was skeptical of perspectival “excesses” and Leonardo would correct it through the “atmospheric

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<sup>2</sup> H. Damisch, *L'origine de la perspective*, Paris, Flammarion, 1987, p. 147.

<sup>3</sup> See P. Florenskij, *La prospettiva rovesciata e altri scritti*, Rome, Cangelmi Editore, 1990 and, by the same author, *Lo spazio e il tempo nell'arte*, Milan, Adelphi, 1993 (original writings from the 1920s).

perspective”) – wondered if this unsubstantial geometric point (in fact points do not have dimensions, they are pure limit abstractions) from where we supposedly watch the world was truly “similar to the eye” (as asserted by Filarete in his *Treatise on Architecture*, about 1460-1464) – if it was still a human, that is, or if it introduced another eye instead, this time no longer human but one that only shared a *homonymy* with the human eye. To be related by homonymy, I must point out, does not mean to be related by likeness, but by a difference of nature in the apparent analogy. Thus Aristotle would call the chopped hand of the cadaver only “homonymous” as opposed to the hand of the living being or the cadaver to the living. And the answer, more or less unanimous, that was given in the 20th Century, from Panofsky to Florenskij and Merleau-Ponty among others, is in fact that the geometric point is not “similar” to the human eye at all. The relation is based on homonymy. The point-eye just *looks* like the eye of a man, it is presented as such by the apologists of the method, *but it is not*. If anything, it might be the eye of a Cyclops, but in reality it is not even that, because then we would have to imagine that monster as absolutely still and disincarnated, with neither time nor memory, a pure right eye open on a spectacle it does not understand (in fact it has no memory and thus it cannot recognize anything) – and, maybe, not even a pure eye, since the eye is after all spheroid, whereas the visual pyramid only needs a point from which lines are drawn....

If we want to try to imagine what kind of an eye it is we are then forced to resort to some anachronisms. We must backdate to the perspective technique what the technique has produced afterwards. That eye, as Florenskij would say, is rather the glass lens of a dark room, or else the eye of a camera lens. That eye is, in short, already cinema. Playing with words: its *video* is already the *video* of the *video*, long before the coming of video-art and its astonishing installations which may represent the truest inheritance of the great Renaissance revolution (concerning this I cannot avoid mentioning the especially noteworthy essay by Bill Viola, a great video artist, on the origin of the perspective)<sup>4</sup>. In short, and anticipating the end of my discourse, I would say that that eye-point acts as an automatic recording device, completely independent of the gaze. The factual act of seeing acts as the triggering device of a process, or maybe as a feeding source of the mechanism. So *what does* the device “triggered” by the gaze do? The device mechanically takes a superficial film called “image” from the world around. Here, too, the relationship between this image and the psychological image is purely based on homonymy. Unlike the images that crowd my eyes which are always images that presuppose me as their subject – namely, they are *my* images *of something* that has been given *to me* –, the image caught by the device is literally the image of nobody, it is an anonymous image, a strictly impersonal one (with no *ego* and thus with no world). If we again refer to our hypothesis concerning Brunelleschi’s device, then we might say that the hole has been drilled on the back of the panel so that, thanks to the mirror, a visual contact could be restored with what the camera recorded – a contact, however, void of any intentionality directed toward visual synthesis.

If this is the nature of the perspective device, then it was absolutely natural that, right from its start, one would perceive its non anthropomorphic quality, its indifference to the human dimension, and finally its evilness and ability to pervert good nature. Moreover, from its very beginning it was impossible not to perceive the *anti-artistic* quality of such a procedure. To the extent that such a procedure can be coded and is factually coded, the technique indeed divests the demiurge of

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<sup>4</sup> B. Viola, *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House. Writings 1973-1994*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The Mit Press, 1995, pp. 200 ff.

authority and diminishes the prestige of the hand. Great humanistic mythologies of the work of art do not have to wait for technical reproducibility in order to be put into question. Perspective device had already shown the possibility of images automatically created with that “factual democracy” that so much horrified Baudelaire when he witnessed the coming of photography in total dismay (my God! Now anyone can make and have images! Let us not forget however that it was Baudelaire himself who identified the specificity of modernity in the “loss of halo,” maybe because he was concurrent to photography). We can now rephrase our initial question. We were asking ourselves, where that particular heresy, perspectival orthodoxy, is taking us? Or, if one may say, since artificial perspective turns the painting into a window, what does this window open onto? Onto the “world” would be the common answer, but is it really “world” what we, as spectators, see through perspective?

In order to answer otherwise, let us take as an example a borderline perspective case. I am talking about the so-called “Urbino perspectives”. They are in fact some of the strictest and most disquieting examples of perspectival laws. Their background is a mystery and they resist all deciphering attempts. History of Art comes to a deadlock when faced with them. What do they represent? What is their subject, their function, their meaning? These are all questions doomed to remain unanswered. Even the simplest one, who created them? There is much to reflect on this stubborn silence. It seems as if the world we have access to through the perspective technique is no longer a human world, it does not belong to history, which is clearly a teleology of the meaning. History, which is after all only man’s history, is nothing else but a long and unfinished matter and its players are just conversational turns. In spite of the light that shines over them and that outlines the corners of the buildings with such precision, the Urbino perspectives are instead opaque, they do not mean anything. If they have no “author” then, might it be because on top of having lost all memory of it, they themselves deny with their own existence the principle of “authorship”? The author is in fact a loving father who cares about his work by explaining, illustrating and completing it with words. Authors are never tired of talking. Their wordiness is proverbial. The Urbino perspectives, on the contrary, are orphan by birth, exactly as the unconscious is orphan according to the *Anti-Oedipus* by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari<sup>5</sup>. They have no father-author, their birth is spontaneous as those divine (not man-made) icons haunting mystical souls. I am sure that if the author were to be found somewhere and with a time machine it would be possible to ask him about them, he would have very little to say about what he so amazingly produced. Not even he could give historians the answers they are looking for. Even he would just stare at those creatures that come from another world or, maybe, from a non-world. It has been rightly noted that such stubborn silence is consubstantial to Urbino perspectives. It is in fact boldly shown in *The ideal city* in the Marche National Gallery, where the inscriptions on the gables of the buildings on the right and left are written in nonexistent scripts as if to make fun in advance of any pretext to decode them. The hermeneutic willingness of the reader is challenged by a writing which says nothing. It is as if the scene has been freed from the tyranny of the text: it is the opposite of the humanistic principle *ut pictura poesis*.

Talking about the effect produced by the Urbinian perspectives, Jean Cocteau, who found an echo of them in De Chirico’s work, used the French verb “*méduser*”, normally translated as to

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<sup>5</sup> G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Anti-Edipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983, p. 49 (*L’Anti-Edipe. Capitalisme et schizophrénie I*, Paris, Minuit, 1972).

astonish, to amaze, but also means to “catch” someone, petrifying him in one’s own enchantment. Cocteau meant that in those ideal cities, as in the Medusa mirror, a paralyzing wonder effect was at work, a fatal attraction in an abstract space where both viewer and the so-called author would have inevitably got lost. They would indeed have got lost but not without a specific “enjoyment” beyond the principle of pleasure, beyond the domain of the Law (that is of God and Man). In his remarkable book on the origin of perspective, Hubert Damisch, whom I deeply respect without sharing his thesis, explained this effect of enchantment and pleasure by drawing a very successful comparison. As it often happens in learned texts about linear perspective, which are almost always to denounce its artificiality, Damisch, too, who instead praises it, brings photography into play, or more precisely its “lens”: «A lens, however, that does not need an eye behind it. As he adds, a computer could easily replace it, let’s just think of the pictures of the planets that NASA space probes send and that open, at every step of their journey, new perspectives of the unmanned universe. *Médusées, ces sondes, et nous avec elles*»<sup>6</sup>. The nature of that implied pleasure becomes clear. Once more it is that looking through the keyhole to find, thanks to the device, the world *before man or after it*; «it is the pure vision of a non-human eye, an eye which would be in things», as Deleuze wrote<sup>7</sup>. There is nothing astonishing, Gilles Deleuze added, in the fact that this eye is an artifice – perspective is in fact construction – because the world before man «is given only to the eye which we do not have»<sup>8</sup>. We would have to invent the third eye.

In this passage by the French critic our attention should be drawn to two specific theses: 1) behind the perspective device taken in its ideal-typical purity there is no human eye, or if there is, it is only by accident. The perspective technique divests the gaze of authority. Its utopia is the camera that sees, or better, the camera that records, writes and leaves traces without a ghost with hidden eyes in charge. And we mean utopia in the literal meaning of the word, since utopia means a “non place”, it is a field of absolute immanence that does not bend on a subject that sees it. It is rather the field that is an absolute vision in each of its points, and that can only be referred to our human vision by homonymy. «In other words, the eye is in things»<sup>9</sup> and if there is photography, it is «snapped and taken in the interior of things and for all the points of space»<sup>10</sup>. 2) The world onto which our window opens is no longer our world. Even that world is such only on the ground of homonymy. In fact what “we see through” is an unmanned world, a world void of the human sense of the world even when, materially speaking, and as it happens in the Urbino perspectives, such world is made up of buildings, churches, squares and factories we come across daily.

It is impossible not to be struck by the empty scene that perspectives always show. Those cities are always empty. Walter Benjamin, speaking about Atget’s photography in his book, *A Short History of Photography*, stated that the new ultra-modern fashions of clairvoyance – photography and cinema – after having diminished the hand and practically cancelled «great views and the so-called revealing symbols», struck a secular alliance with unmanned cities.

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<sup>6</sup> H. Damisch, *L’origine de la perspective*, p. 284.

<sup>7</sup> G. Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The movement-image*, University of Minnesota Press 2009, p. 81 (*L’image-mouvement. Cinema I*, Paris, Minuit, 1983).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> H. Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 1896, quoted in G. Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The movement-image*, p. 85.

Remarkably however, almost all these pictures are empty, empty the Porte d'Arcueil by the fortifications, empty the triumphal steps, empty the courtyards, empty, as it should be, the Place du Tertre. They are not lonely, merely without mood: the city in these pictures looks cleared out, like a lodging that has not yet found a new tenant. It is in these achievements that surrealist photography sets the scene for a salutary estrangement between man and his surroundings: it gives free play for the politically educated eye, under whose gaze all intimacies are sacrificed to the illumination of detail<sup>11</sup>.

Thirty year later Michelangelo Antonioni would supply amazing evidence of Benjamin's intuition of the non-human nature of photography in *The Eclipse's* final sequence which in fact reminds today's viewer of the work of photographer Luigi Ghirri, born in the same part of Italy where Antonioni was born.

Am I here supporting the idea that the perspective device is at the origin of the cine-photographic lens, especially when it ceases to serve narrative needs, literature, theatre and history and become the promoter of a pure optical-sound image? Yes, provided that such legitimacy is not intended empirically, but only related to the ontology of the image<sup>12</sup>. Here what is at stake it is not the origin of the camera lens, as the medium used in dark rooms, but the new statute of the image made possible by the perspective device. The continuity between the two devices is given by that non-world they force us to "uninhabit". It is the non-world ceaselessly pursued by our contemporary clairvoyants, who are "artists" only for the sake of being conveniently classified and necessarily institutionally placed. They are, instead, machines that reproduce the 'real', extra sensitive probes able to withdraw a little 'of the real' in its purest state, isolating it from the world-environment, alienating it and making it finally visible. *Médusées, ces sondes, et nous avec elles*. We have been authorized to adopt the anachronism of the perspective device as a photographic lens by the scholars who have criticized the artificiality of the perspectival construction. It would be enough to read once more Pavel Florensky's admirable *Reverse Perspective*. What is the great Russian priest telling us? That perspective was born like an exorcism against the natural conception of the world. It is an abstraction that thanks to hard training is surreptitiously superimposed on the real perception, that mutilates it and even blinds it. It builds up a fictitious portrait of the world that «we must see, but no matter how hard we try, the human eye cannot see at all»<sup>13</sup>. Evidence of this are the contrivances so magnificently depicted by Dürer in the xylographs of his *Unterweisung der Messung*.

«For as beautiful as those xylographs are with their constricted space, concluded in itself – Florenskij commented – the meaning they carry is equally anti-artistic»<sup>14</sup>. The main aim of those drawings is in fact to illustrate a semi-mechanical procedure that can help even the worst craftsman to become a learned painter of perspectives. They are real machines guiding the hand without being predetermined to an act of visual synthesis and one of them, the fourth to be exact (*Man drawing a Lute*), does not even resort to the eye. Were we looking for the creator of the Urbino perspectives? Here it is! It is a machine made "to see." The quotation marks are mandatory. Here seeing is not

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<sup>11</sup>W. Benjamin, *A Short History of Photography*, in W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2008, pp. 285-286 (*L'œuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproduction mécanisée*, in «Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung» 1936).

<sup>12</sup> Here the expression "ontology of the image" is used in the meaning given by André Bazin, in its fundamental essay from 1945 (*The Ontology of the Photographic Image*), in *What is Cinema? Volume 1*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1967, pp. 9-16.

<sup>13</sup> P. Florenskij, *La prospettiva rovesciata e altri scritti*, p. 111.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

consciousness, or intentionality, it is not an act but a trace, a writing – maybe we should say a *trauma*, meaning the event, almost always announced by the shock, of an *impression*. Benjamin, in his remarkable essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*, called with great precision “optical unconscious” this semi-automatic recording system of what our natural perception neither catches nor is interested in. The Freudian unconscious is a device, a recording system of traces that progresses by shocks, by traumas.

Faced with all of this, Florenskij could hardly withhold his indignation. In his opinion, to dismiss the gaze is blasphemous to both God and man, created in his image. His contempt for Dürer’s contrivances, let us be blunt, is similar to the reaction that prompted a famous academic French painter on August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1839 to leave the room at the Institut de France where François Arago had just publicly announced the invention of photography. Everyone from that moment on would have had the right to call himself a painter! And therefore nobody would have ever been one afterwards. Goodbye to the Academy. Goodbye to the loved hierarchies. The contempt felt by the Russian priest translates in extra-refined theoretical terms the more common estrangement felt by many who, for almost a century now, have wandered in the pavilions of contemporary “art” exhibitions to find only lifeless mechanical processes, well made and beautiful objects, everyday society’s refuse. Krauss’ studies, among the many I could quote, have shown once and for all that it is the photographic paradigm that has determined modernism in art<sup>15</sup>. The absolute lack of “art” is exactly what the many bewildered visitors feel in those rooms, in a similar fashion to what happened to Florenskij faced by the democratic effects produced by the perspective technique. In their petty bourgeois naivety they are right. In this lack they feel the catastrophe not only of a world but of the “world.” Such latency of art, such lack of works of art, presupposes in fact other absences, far more disquieting: the end of “man,” that of “history” and lastly that of God. They perceive Artaud’s “crowned anarchy” and Deleuze-Guattari *chaosmos* (the Common of Paris is burning down the Louvre! This is what the bourgeois newspapers used to write, lying of course, to dehumanize the revolutionaries and arouse a wholesale massacre). What they perceive only as a loss presupposes a much wider Great Outside that the petty bourgeois, so overwhelmed by their regret for a lost world, cannot even glimpse. They feel in fact that if they were to draw from it, they would lose even themselves.

Florenskij, who was undoubtedly a genius, could trace the origin of transcendence disappearance back to the perspective device inasmuch as it produces a paradoxical effect: the perspective technique transforms the function of the gaze into an accessory to the point of annulling it completely. At the most, you do not even need to suppose the existence of an eye behind the lens, as it was depicted in Dürer’s xylograph (*Man drawing a Lute*, 1525). In the 18th Century, Diderot in his *Lettres sur les aveugles à l’usage de ceux qui voient*, was already perfectly aware of the loss of authority by the gaze. He wrote that the perspective device needs no eyes that see. Someone who is blind at birth can effectively learn that. The world placed in perspective is not in fact a world *seen* by anyone; it is not rooted in the visual experience of the subject. It is a *constructed* world. A little over a century from when it was artistically born, such world would in fact be merged into the completely abstracted schemes of perspectival geometry. It is not even a world, for no world exists when you lack the correlated transcendental – the subject living in it, that is, and that establishes it with its acts. It is rather a “visionless domain” (taken from Michel Foucault) that finds in

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<sup>15</sup> R. Krauss, *Teoria e storia della fotografia*, Milan, Bruno Mondadori, 1996.

photography and the cine-eye its perfect medium. The “fully achieved” perspective is photography, Florenskij wrote<sup>16</sup>, and he certainly comes from a good stock of metaphysicians. What he means by “achieved” is in fact *actualized*, brought to its completion. The photographic device is therefore the *form* the perspective device, as illustrated by Dürer’s apparatus, still *lacks*. The cine-eye of Dziga Vertov, Florensky’s communist contemporary is, by using Aristotle’s language, the *telos* of that technique. It is the perfect device that allows recording without seeing, without an act of visual synthesis. Certainly, we look through the lens, (*when* one looks through it; Florenskij could not have known space probes or the huge recording apparatus that crowd our metropolis and record non-stop), but the gaze is simply used to trigger the explosion, it is *part* of the machine and not its “author”. We could therefore call it the machine’s *operator*.

The Russian priest came to disconsolate conclusion: the photographic device shows what the perspective device has always been, even when it was interpreting itself as celebration of great humanistic culture. Nothing else but generalized abstraction that surreptitiously replaces the living experience, striving to replace it by mimicking it; when instead, like in the machines of Samuel Butler’s dystopia, *Erewhon*, it divests its function. If Alberti’s visual pyramid is a window, it is then a window that according to Florenskij that does not open onto the world. If anything, it is a single shutter that closes up, keeping us separated from it and confining us in a claustrophobic and wild subjectivism similar to a pathological narcissism. The recurring thesis in his remarkable books is that the object of great modern “art” is nothing else but the “artist” itself, as he who acts out, like a film director, the refusal of ontology (opposite to the painter of “icons”). Thus, no “art,” no “artist,” but only the affirmation of an absolute immanence with no salient points of transcendence, no openings from which the difference of the divine might consult the difference of the human, no ontic-ontological difference. An impeccable conclusion that the Russian priest shared with Heidegger’s considerations on technique, yet incapable of catching the extraordinary extent of the revolution introduced by the perspective device.

It is in fact an open window. But who accepts to glue their own right eye to the hole dug where the vanishing lines converge to the infinite – such is, let us recall, the position of the subject on the Brunelleschi arch-device – does not see a “world”. Those who criticize the lack of naturalness of artificial perspective are perfectly right about this. Perspective as well as photography shows nothing. Rather, the device, once triggered by the gaze, *catches*, exactly as if it were a trap left in the woods, a *ready-made* piece of the ‘*real*’. The ‘*real*’ thus caught, according to Jacques Lacan’s influential opinion – to whom we must grant the most suitable presentation of “realism” in contemporary thinking<sup>17</sup> – is exactly what begins when the *world* sets, when the symbolic-linguistic order ceases to organize the space of the human experience, when God and man die. Only in this way, it is possible to explain the profound connection between “perspective” revolution and “scientific” revolution, universally detected by whoever has given it even a slight thought. Only in this way, it is possible to understand the reason why the masters of Renaissance intended perspective towards scientific truth and why, over a century later, perspective by painters could be reabsorbed in Girard Desargues’ projective geometry and thus placed within an amazing debate that in all learned areas would reintroduce actual infinity (the *energeia apeiron* that the vanishing point shows on the surface the painting).

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<sup>16</sup> P. Florenskij, *La prospettiva rovesciata e altri scritti*, p. 126.

<sup>17</sup> Essential for the understanding of Lacan’s “realism” is Jacques-Alain Miller’s interpretation of the great French psychoanalyst in his seminars.

What the two revolutions had in common was understood by both the orthodox priest Florenskij and the neo-Kantian Panofsky and, albeit indirectly, even by Heidegger, in his essay *The Age of the World Picture*<sup>18</sup>. They all interpret this common quality in terms of “metaphysics of subjectivity”. The perspective device would in fact turn the world into a Great Object located at an infinite distance and shown to a subject that flies over it without being connected to it at all. In short, Brunelleschi as Descartes. That is all. And it is a lot, let me say, but by doing this we would end up missing the special characteristics of those two revolutions, which is the relationship they both entertain with ‘the real’, when the world – any world – fails. Likewise, we would forget the connection just as meaningful that contemporary aesthetic research, precisely in its most radical fashions, maintains with the scientific enterprise and the great past of the Renaissance. It is no coincidence that those who feed on the abovementioned authors and their interpretation of modernity indulge themselves, as far as aesthetics is concerned, in conservative if not openly reactionary stances.

The path to follow is to be found elsewhere. «*The modern scientific revolution – Gilles Deleuze wrote – has consisted in relating movement not to privileged instants, but to any-instant-whatever. Although movement was still recomposed, it was no longer recomposed from formal transcendent elements (poses), but from immanent material elements (sections)*<sup>19</sup>». What is true for modern scientific revolution is also true for the cine-eye and it is even truer for the perspective device inasmuch as it is a catching device of the ‘real’. In all these cases the metaphysical pretext to recompose a movement is refuted, for instance in the famous example of the horse’s gallop – starting from what Florenskij used to call its “culminating point” or “acme”. In short, the horse no longer poses. Which means, when translated philosophically, that the horse steps off the tripod of the idea where it stood rigid to show off its “horsehood”. The academic philosopher as well as the academic painter is supposed to depict the horse in this privileged instant, which moves from the stream of time to rejoin the Eternal. He is thus supposed to use a “symbol” that is the sign through which an idea is communicated. On the contrary, the perspective device and modern science have chosen a different path. They have been trying to draw the ‘real’ starting from any-instant-whatever, beyond axiological hierarchies. When at the end of the 19th Century Etienne Jules-Maray “scanned” the horse race with one of his proto-cinematographic devices called amusingly “zoetrope” he caught a piece of “real” at its purest state. Exactly as Galileo did, he took the movement – the whatever instant – as absolute and no longer as degradation of the idea. Traditional metaphysics regards this turn as outrageous since metaphysics defines itself as the systemic refutation of such anarchic hypothesis. Confronted with Etienne Jules-Maray’s proto-photogram, Florenskij would only see its total lack of grace and naturalness, especially if compared to the Parthenon’s wonderfully decorated horses, and would rebel with indignation against the abstraction from the real movement performed by the photographic device and, more generally speaking, by the perspective device. According to him, the only *real* movement can be the one that models itself on man’s demiurgic act – the movement, that is, directed to manifesting the meaning that only great symbols are able to completely express. The moment the photogram freezes is «torn from the process and taken as it is, with no past or future, in its contrast to all the others». «[The snapshot]»,

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<sup>18</sup> In M. Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Tracks*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 83 ff (*Holzwege*, Gesamtausgabe Bd. V, 1950).

<sup>19</sup> G. Deleuze, *Cinema I*, p. 4.

Florenskij continued, «catches *only* a moment with *all* its immanent situations, including those we are not interested in and wouldn't otherwise be aware of and this is why every moment is taken *outside* its relationship with the next»<sup>20</sup>. In the *ready-made* produced by the optical unconscious of the device there is indeed no *world*. It cannot be otherwise because the “real” is in it. There you can find only pure image, desubjectified and foreign to meaning. There, the image tempts the painter, inviting him to abandon the artist's role and become a clairvoyant, no more than a humble machine *operator*.

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<sup>20</sup> P. Florenskij, *Lo spazio e il tempo nell'arte*, cit., pp. 176-177.