Flavio Micheli's *stem*-images
by Giacomo Daniele Fragapane

> As far as the thing and its mirror image are concerned, their resemblance is only an external denomination; the resemblance belongs to thought. The dubious relationship of likeness is – among things – an unequivocal relationship of projection.
>
> Maurice Merleau-Ponty

> In reporting on what I see, I behave like an artist, who offers his observations without consulting others. The presumptuous trust in one's own eyes and brain is a risk worth taking in the sciences as well as in the arts.

The production of the three series of photographic works presented here covers a period of about three years, between 2012 and 2014, during which the three areas of research overlapped smoothly and evenly, like a sequence of dissolves. At first glance, they seem to refer to and reflect one another, revealing a system of differences/repetitions that is both immediately visible and strangely obscure in terms of its premises. The series *Tetra*, which initially triggered the process, assembles groups of four images; the subsequent one, *Werkgruppe 13*, is a collection of individual photographs; and the final series, *Double Take*, is made up of diptychs. Flavio Micheli notes how these macro-groups in turn relate to his previous work, *Time and Again*, created between 2011 and 2013 and consisting of "hybrid" images, re-elaborations of photographs which, through a "pictorial action," trigger a short-circuit between an "objective" perception of reality and its "emotional undoing." *Tetra* and *Double Take* pursue the same end by juxtaposing different photographs, and *Werkgruppe 13* does so by seeking to create images "that refer to a sort of absence that evokes imagination." And so, if this process is perpetual, the question one must ask is, where do we start if we want to understand the underlying logic? I have tried to get to the bottom of this question, at least with regard to the role of photography, and what photography, in this phase of its technological and cultural history, is becoming.

1. It all seems to begin (but, I am now wondering, does it really? What is the origin of this origin?) with a nucleus of reflections, over an arc of about three years, that were tightly interwoven and geared towards delineating a sort of basic photographic device.
In 1997, as part of the exhibition *Lost in Space* at Kunsthalle Luzern, Flavio Micheli showed a series entitled *Aspect*. These large-format pictorial works, similar to illuminated signs, look like opaque glass screens through which we see vague, de-materialized images that we cannot manage to bring into focus. The effect on the observer is an unstable, disoriented perception. In 1999, in a group show entitled *Morphing Systems* set up in an ex-psychiatric clinic in Zurich, Micheli created the installation *Passerelle*, consisting of a glass pane on a frame jutting horizontally from a window, and thus both within and outside the exposition space. In the exhibition *There, Outside* (2000) at Kunsthalle Winterthur, the series *Aspect* was presented again, along with a new series entitled *Eco*. These two groups of images were associated to form diptychs made up of a monochromatic painting applied to the back of a glass pane (which became a sort of colored mirror that reflected the space in front of it, making it merge with the painted material), and a photographic reproduction of that same re-flection. The diptych thus synthesized two different types of media and materials – a pictorial object and a photographic object – and two contrasting visual experiences: a dynamic vision that simultaneously seems to reproduce the space outside the frame and to pull the viewer into the painted surface through the screen, which blurs and de-materializes the underlying image. It is a static vision that re-peats the initial image and everts towards the viewer, mimicking and stabilizing the archetypal form of a mirror. Later in 2000, again at Kunsthalle Winterthur, Micheli showed the series *Imago*, consisting of night-time photographs taken through windows that reflect the interior space and afford glimpses of the exterior.
So, three different types of operations come together in the development of the artist's experimentation: a site-specific intervention hinging on the reflection/transparency mechanism; some images filtered through an opaque pane of glass, which suggest a mobile, three-dimensional, variable perception (as in a mirror); and some monochromatic reflecting glass panes juxtaposed with photographs of what they reflect. In this web of reflections, the photographic medium (a *mirror with a memory*, according to Oliver Wendell-Holmes' famous 19th-century definition) begins to play a pivotal role.
Speaking about this with the author, I can perceive in parallax a sort of enunciating device on his side and, for the observer, an enigma to decrypt[1].
In the conversation, he seems to suggest an implicit genealogical dimension – that is, the works represent a point of departure and of in-terchange: they literally and metaphorically indicate something invisible located *outside* them, an event to be repeated in other works, and of which the photographs show the origin. They record the "first reflections" on the surfaces of the paintings: we can intuit fragments of the exhibition space and of the body of someone – perhaps the artist himself – who was observing at that moment[2]. In substance,

three layers combine and interact like a fabric of reminiscences: in *Aspect*, the pictorial material is de-materialized by a translucent screen, and in *Eco* by a reflecting surface that works as an interface to generate a superimposition of the painting and the surrounding environment, producing a new (virtual) image, which in turn is recorded on a photographic support, which is then printed and juxtaposed with the original, doubling it and placing it in tension with both its *interior and anterior* world (the painting that reflects and melds with the space) and its *exterior and posterior* world (the reflections captured in the photograph become a new picture that stabilizes the first one and in turn reflects the space, in a process of *mise en abyme*).

This is the beginning of a game of doubling, stratification and syntactic development that returns in all the artist's later works, even though the techniques, approaches and themes are different in each case. The hypothesis is consequential to the idea of a genealogical inter-change that enunciates itself as a visual device, like a *machine for thinking/producing images*[3].

Reading some of the analytical texts published in Micheli's catalogues reinforces the sensation that emanates from the works, i.e. the idea of a split method, a dual mode of operating left intentionally unresolved, suspended between ontological interrogation of processes of vision and perception (on mechanisms of the image and of imagination *in and of itself*) and openness to random chance, to encounters and to the bounceback between creative act (which progressively becomes more like a specific mode of "photographic operation" in the sense delineated by Ugo Mulas in one of his famous *Verifiche*) and interpretative act. The hermeneutical, open, process-oriented dimension is inscribed in the very form of the enunciation, implicitly *deictic* and questioning in the way it constantly plays with mirroring repetition, the stratification of unexpected levels and iconographic "migration" and "survival" (Warburg). Here, the meaning of the image appears al-most as a virtuality to be (re)actualized within every gaze that receives it.

2. Micheli shows us a device, a visual machine in which photography has a mainly ideological role. Reduced to its grade zero, to the mere gesture of registering a reflection, it operates here as a total apparatus, organizing a few elementary tasks: cutting out a fragment of the space, fixing a transitory moment, doubling the observed object *into an image*. In effect, relative to the nucleus of works we began with and the artist's earlier production[4], we are now dealing with more canonical *photographic series* in which the photograph is more present, as an historical technique, a precise artistic genre and an iconographic sphere. But above all, following this line of analysis, *as a metaphor of a profound theoretical gesture* – the genealogical hypothesis thus also has an immediate, retroactive effect (capable of reconfiguring, in writing, the first impressions obtained from viewing the works) on the process of interpretation[5].

The reflection does not focus explicitly on the artist's most recent photographic series, nor on one or more specific works, but on the slip-periest, hardest-to-define (especially if the medium is photography) thing, the overall oeuvre of an artist, as well as his "discursive space"[6]. In Flavio Micheli's case, tracing the evolutions of his work over time up to the explorations presented on this occasion, and faced with a nucleus of questions of an aesthetic nature that seem to pop up immediately and clearly (and to which I will return later), I am compelled first and foremost, as a scholar of visual culture with a particular interest in the historical processes of photography, to reflect on the dif-ficulty of identifying precise types of technical and formal operations regarding the *use* of the medium. Photography plays a fundamental, but ambiguous, role in the genealogy of this artist's development. Micheli's photography seems to have navigated a path between a pro-found need for *mimesis*, regulated by moments of validation and slight changes of route, and rigorous formal treatment of the image – to the point of tying his search for subjects to intermittent and fortuitous phases of *illumination*, rather than to methodical surveillance or the classic accumulation/selection procedures typical of documentary work –, and a more instrumental role that basically corresponds to a minimal definition of the medium, as mere emanation of a referent located in the external world and attestation of a *dialectical* tension between the eye and the world[7].

Over time, beginning with efforts that tended towards the conceptual, his research gradually shifted to a more properly phenomenological terrain: from an exploration of the formal boundaries and semantic processes of the picture-form to a reflection on perception, memory and the fascinating and misleading mechanisms of *resemblance by contact* [8] (as in the case of the series *Duett*, which vertically juxtaposes "reproductions of anonymous paintings [found] by chance in everyday contexts" and photographs produced ad hoc to "trigger an asso-ciative mechanism that goes beyond the iconographic aspect")[9].

Micheli has underscored that in his creative processes, every step is always free and intuitive, unconstrained by rules and open to chance. Sibylle Omlin, in the catalogue's presentation of the series of photographs with pictorial interventions called *Time and Again*, includes these words from one the artist's e-mails: "The series […] shows the places I have registered emotionally. The photos were taken over a long period of time […]. Their selection was not planned, but rather determined by random factors"[10]. In the *Conversation* with Stefano Chiodi that opens the volume entitled *Duett*, a few passages lead us in that same direction. Talking about his early works, the artist reveals his need as part of his artistic process to "get beyond an education that established aesthetic rigor as the first commandment." An as-sertion made a bit further on – "For a long time I refused to use photography; I felt a sort of diffidence towards the medium" – seems inti-mately linked to this need.(A similar mind-set, wavering between doubtful detachment and profound attraction, comes across with regard to a few artists of the Düsseldorf school). But little by little, that diffidence seems to have shifted to a subtle reflection, never enunciated as such, on the most basic functions of photography, on its capacity to convey imaginative, mimetic and mnemonic processes. To the point that it can (generalizing, of course) be recognized as a model of the entire creative process and the genre of *Erlebnis* that it entails: "My works take on […] the aspect of instruments, they are instrumental." This highlights a contradiction that I would like to try to sort out. While the aesthetic operation, in its general conception and its final outcomes, consists of an implicit instrumental proof (a device,

in Michel Foucault's sense of the term; a technique for organizing experience) within each individual work, Micheli maintains that "The process is purely intuitive; it's a question of equilibrium and formal precision"[11].

In essence, there are no rules, but the research as a whole, and the order of operations within each project and in their succession, follow a coherent and *steady* development. How are these two imperatives kept in harmony? Or, to be more precise, to what degree can Flavio Micheli's work be described as a device regulated by implicit norms, and to what degree is it instead guided by contingent stimuli and random intuitions?

Compelled to ask these questions by my repeated observation of the artist's photographs, and by the hermeneutic process of writing itself – which is none other than an attempt to lend meaning to intuitions that spring from another person's experience –, I spoke about them with Micheli. His response was a sort of brief re-statement of a passage I had written a few years ago, with which he said he identifies: "Photography is the outcome of a choice, which is generated by a conception of the gaze as behavior"[12]. The complex passage that follows (which I have condensed in turn, and from which I have extrapolated only the parts that seemed necessary, given the premises) does not so much resolve as restate the underlying questions, framing them in a sort of aesthetic breviary. For Micheli, the "grid" of norms and functions, formal motifs and ideological principles, historical values and "archetypes" that is photography "would be merely a theoretical device, without intuition." And no representation of reality could ever develop into a real process of awareness unless said intuition converged with the specific optical unconsciousness of the medium. This idea of convergence or encounter, of an unexpected apparition, also has biographical connotations: "the camera is an artistic instrument that I came across somewhat by chance and that I use instinctively, without having the technical skills of a professional photographer. I'm not interested in *real photography*; I use it as a tool that makes it possible for me to capture "standby" moments, intervals, transits, transformations – to create images that refer back to reality. My latest works often juxtapose two or more images, created a frame in which the individual photographs can interact with one another and create imagination. I think I can say that I'm dealing with an encounter between rule and intuition or the unconscious."

Rule and intuition, then, are not in opposition, but their encounter must be sought or provoked in some way. From it springs a new form of imaginary energy comparable to the Shakespearian *stuff that dreams are made of*: "I am interested specifically in the friction between various realities and conceptions which, in a metaphorical sense, produce a sort of *boson of imagination*. When the news of the discovery of the Higgs boson came out, I was very much struck by the idea that a sort of stem-cell of matter could exist. With this expression I have in mind the energy that's created by means of the juxtaposition of and friction between different images. In my imagery, this energy is an expression of the real, and as such, a *stem-idea*."

3. In the series *Time and Again*, the image is *captured* using various photographic techniques (generally a small digital camera, or sometimes a home-made *camera obscura*); paint is spread over it with a brush; and the whole work is brought together by means of a digital scan of the original physical object, which is thus translated into a new image. In this process, the material of the icon is profoundly altered, so the final work no longer coincides with the original photographic vision, nor with the painted object. If anything, it serves to trigger an imaginative process that develops in an undefined way, like a sort of reminiscence, *inside* the representation, through stratifications of color that invent an anachronistic light and a peculiar space-time. In a few earlier works, *Scenic* (2005) and *Human Nature* (2006), this trigger works alongside the image, spreading from the edge of the picture and superimposing, in a few precise points, monochromatic rectangular sections that seem both censure and formal development of the icon, and also reveal its dualistic dimension as a natural and artificial, *found* and *constructed* object. In the series *Kalib* (2005), various rectangles of a dull color obtained by means of digital sampling are introduced as monochromatic cut-outs in the photographs, erasing a few relatively uniform parts (dull surfaces, areas of light, textures etc.) and consequently altering the perception of the image, casting doubt on its initial appearance and remarking on the conventionality of all photo-realistic mimeses of the real.

It is important to emphasize the a-systematic nature of this method. It implies an important theoretical corollary: the artist's overall Oeuvre does not respond to logics or taxonomies of "genre," and does not concern actual "subjects." Rather, every observed situation is so absolutely *singular* as to appear, in and of itself, almost incomprehensible, but it can insinuate itself in or graft onto other situations, other images, so no work is every really finished, and its content can evolve over time and resurface in different forms (for example, a few photographs from the series *Kalib* return, associated with other images, in *Duett*, and from there migrate to *Werkgruppe 13*).

The two series based on the juxtaposition of two/four images also, strangely, fit within this process. I say strangely because these photographs are quite different from the earlier ones, and call for a much more *direct* observation (the adjective "straight," with its technical and historical-ideological implications, is perhaps more exact). As I see it, these series raise a theoretical question that implies a much larger aesthetic problem regarding the relationship between *liberty and necessity*, and which in the history – and the cultural ideology – of photography, was initially and for the most part understood as a relationship (clearly delineated by Baudelaire in 1859) between *art and technique*. In Flavio Micheli's method there is a certain blatant *nonchalance* with regard to photographic technique. The means serves the end of the production-visualization of iconic objects which make real and virtual determinations co-exist (and we know, from a long debate that we need not re-examine here and that disavows the technological determinism implicit in this conceptual dichotomy, that between the real and the virtual there is no frontal opposition, but rather reciprocity)[13]. Photographic technology is conceived in the broadest possible way, as an instrument of technical reproducibility that is, in and of itself, free from any *specificity*. More than anything else, it serves a creative and imaginative freedom that is not based on control of the means[14] and rigorous discipline of the gaze, as in

20th-century modernist tradition and its followers – documentary photographers, *vedutisti*, reporters etc. (If anything, the artist acknowledges a debt to complex, hybrid figures like Gursky, Ruff, Tillmans and Wall). On the contrary, it postulates the image as an *impure* object, almost by definition: something between photography, graphics and artistic techniques, with its own sense of time and a particular "strangeness"[15].

Speaking of the relationship between his own works and the "raw material" obtained through the use of photography, Micheli defines his images as "an amalgam: on one hand, they coincide with the material that the technique of photography provides, but on the other they become detached from it when, juxtaposed or counterposed with other images, they evoke something else." The corollary of this problem concerns the relationship between vision and imagination and the ideological dichotomy between an esthetic of the real and an esthetic of the imaginary, which it seems to presuppose within the history of technical reproducibility, especially in its most recent developments. The point is how to *position* (also in the political sense that Georges Didi-Huberman attributes to the term)[16] an aesthetic experimentation that, as the author underscores, does not acknowledge the medium's "primacy in terms of topicality", but if anything its peculiar "freedom, expressive complexity and lightness."

4. When this exposition project was first conceived, the series of photographs for *Double Take* had not yet found their definitive form and, in observing a few variations of them, the conversation hinged on how to structure the distance between the photographs. In terms of my own personal taste (which naturally has no epistemological value, but is nonetheless a variable that it would be naïve to leave out of the "hermeneutic circle" of this interaction), the problem seemed to me better resolved in the groups of four images (*Tetra*). They follow a logic of progressive arrangement of the photographs, beginning with graphic juxtapositions between the margins, sometimes rendered more precise through the use of enlargement and shifting (the work on the margins delineates a modernist reminiscence in terms of the process of photographic vision, largely conceived as a *framing* and a reflection on the internal equilibrium of this *framing of tensions*. A few of the diptychs work on a formal level in a way that is similar to the groups of four, while others progress by means of spatial or perceptive associations and articulations, which I would define (but, like Barthes, in a "straightforward" way)[17] as cinematic or narrative. One doubt that I raised regarding the artist's production process, observing the various versions of his works, was whether to print the two photographs on a single page (thus creating an autonomous, individual work, in which the distance between the images is implicit, and is the formal and syntactic articulation of the two visions/frames) or to juxtapose them only later, in the exhibition set-up; this latter idea was eventually rejected because, in the author's words, "it is important that the work be read as one." The question delves deeply into the principle and the *material* of the work (in the negative, immaterial sense of the role of mere *transparent* medium that it seems to play), and more broadly into the planning of the final fruition of the work, the form of its apperception.

It is a question of artistic method which, necessarily, here becomes a problem of interpretation as well (and thus of writing). And the problem cannot be resolved in terms of the classic aesthetic dichotomy between form and material. For me, Flavio Micheli's creative method calls to mind a book defined by its author as being composed of *bits of theory kept alive by the senses*[18]. In it, Rudolf Arnheim reflects "On the relativity of distance: if in an all-but-empty restaurant somebody takes the table next to mine, he has come very close indeed – so close that a special reason must justify his choice. If the room is filled, the distance between two neighboring tables separates us sufficiently"[19]. In Micheli's method, the relationship between the structure of the image and what it represents – its object – presents itself in that sense as a problem *of mental distance*, as a balancing point between identity (or identification) and otherness (or reification), a locus of indiscernibility between immaterial and material, between an existential level and a merely factual level of observed reality. In the two series *Doubletake* and *Tetra*, the distance within groups of two or four images is implicit in the overall structure of the work (and is repeated each time like an abstract formal gesture that activates a concrete relationship between defined images): it acts as *a void filled with meaning*, a caesura or a tension which, materially and mentally, organizes its apperception. In *Werkgruppe 13*, that distance seems to play a more abstract role: when the observer autonomously intuits one or more possible links between the various parts of the whole, the positioning of each image in the series takes on a form that almost *reacts* to the whole, like some sort of latent power.

I think that Arnheim's definition of his book can be flipped to describe this entirety of images made up of *bits of sensation kept alive by a theory*, if we can thus define a multifaceted empirical method that Micheli ultimately calls "intuitive," consisting of "fragments of events that are connected in a free, a-temporal way" – an idea to which the noun "Werkgruppe" alludes – and where the meaning, and the final *positioning* of the work, never lies entirely *in the image* (the image itself is always mute, suspended, questioning). Rather, in a broad, *totalizing* conception of aesthetic experience, it has to do with the organization and arrangement over time of a series of reciprocal levels: on the visual (and existential) level of the gaze with respect to the referential situation observed (the position of the eye, and of the body, gives the framing its original form, and it is then necessary to establish a certain dialectical distance from this initial iconic object, through a variety of methods); on the constructive/structural level of each individual image with respect to the others; on the level of the fruition of the whole – including fullnesses and voids, images and the spaces that separate them, what they say and do not say to us – on the part of the spectator, who has the final task of *being reflected* in the work and putting all the pieces together. Retracing – to use the author's words – "a common thread that Arnheim describes brilliantly, made up of episodes that imparted a flash of understanding I hadn't had before; occasions and situations that left me in a sort of silent wonder; images that transmitted a sense of pre-language."

Notes

1   I first met Flavio Micheli in May of 2016. This piece is the result of our spoken and written exchanges over the course of several months. In general, I tried to transpose the experience of viewing his works into a series of theoretical triggers, riddles I later put to the artist in the form of questions about his artistic practice and the underlying mental processes. I have freely rearranged the material I obtained, sometimes using passages or considerations which, as corollaries, seemed to spring from my premises (which were in turn triggered by the artist's works). Each of these passages underwent later interventions, corrections and alterations. In some cases, when the responses did not seem to be implicated in the logic of the questions, I respected the letter of the text, providing quotes with no further references. The irreducibility of these passages to theoretical postulates seemed to me a precious, somehow visual quality, to be examined and respected just as an artwork would be.

2   It is within a similar logic that I in turn record and share – here above, in the incipit of the text and later on – a few fragments of Flavio Micheli's observations: beyond his own intentions, which of course resist and challenge my interpretation, his words appear here as residues of a dialectic tension, a learning process developed over time and somehow inscribed in the artist's work method. More precisely, they are residues that I was unable to fully assimilate and work out in a paraphrase or a concept, and which thus, in the long run, became hingepins of my discourse.

3   Referring to the exhibition *There, outside*, Cristina Viragh hypothesized: "Maybe reflections make sense only when chance comes into play." Cristina Viragh, *What We Overlook*, in Flavio Micheli, *Dort, ausserhalb/There, outside*, Memory/Cage, Zürich 2000, p. 1. In the same volume, Patrick Frey asserted: "The pictures behind (frosted) glass were intended as model images; the painting almost just an excuse to spark off certain processes of perception"; "they are picture-making machines", and defined Flavio Micheli's creative approach as a form of "skeptical ecstasy." Patrick Frey, *Behind Glass*, ivi, pp. 2, 3, 5.

4   Cf. the catalogue *Flavio Micheli*, Collectanea Istituto Svizzero di Roma, Carte Segrete, Rome 1995. The introduction (s.t.) by Max Wechsler icastically delineates – in relation to the photographic medium in Micheli's mode of artistic production – the underlying reasons for this evolutionary process, which moves from "a long and intense pictorial phase" to expand towards "a vast field of diverse forms of expression" in a progressive "expansion of the figurative spectrum [that] springs from the desire and the temptation to give both a dilated application and a concretization to the imaginary and illusionistic space of a painting." This expansion regards not only individual representative techniques – pushing the pictorial space towards a plastic spatiality –, but also the syntactic organization, on the wall and within the exposition space, of groups of works: "Such correspondences among more or less related elements are often conceived based on an internal interconnection; in certain sense they render each individual element of the exhibition interpretable as a fragment of a larger group, a possible imaginary vision. These works are clearly intended to be viewed as a whole, as the imaginary apparition of a moment." Ivi, s.p.

5   This is what Gadamer calls *fusion of horizons*: "In our understanding, which we imagine is so innocent because its results seem so self-evident, the other presents itself so much in terms of our own selves that there is no longer a question of self and other." "In fact the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing occurs in encountering the past and in understanding the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. *Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves*." "In the process of understanding, a real fusing of horizons occurs – which means that as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously superseded." Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (1960), Continuum, London, New York 2004, § II, 1, *The elevation of the historicity of understanding to the status of a hermeneutic principle*, pp. 300, 305, 306.

6   On the application of this Foucaultian category to the hermeneutics of photography see cf. Rosalind Krauss, *Photography's Discursive Spaces. Landscape/View*, "Art Journal", Taylor & Francis, London 1982.

7   For an interpretation of photography as "dialectical object," see my book *Realtà della fotografia. Il visibile fotografico e i suoi processi storici*, Franco Angeli, Milan 2012, in part. pp. 13-65.

8   Cf. Georges Didi-Huberman, *La ressemblance par contact. Archéologie, anachronisme et modernité de l'empreinte*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 2008.

9   Cf. Stefano Chiodi, *Conversation with Flavio Micheli*, in Flavio Micheli, *Duett*, La Nuova Pesa, Rome 2007, s.p.

10   Sibylle Omlin, *The Abandoned Stage*, in Flavio Micheli, *Time and Again*, La Nuova Pesa, Rome 2013, p. 30.

11   All of the quotes are from Stefano Chiodi, *Conversation with Flavio Micheli*, cit.

12   This is the text as Micheli rewrote it, so I am attributing it to him. For the original see my essay *Sulle origini (di un falso problema). Il "visibile" fotografico e la posizione del soggetto scopico*, http://www.aroundphotography.it/framearticolo.asp?cod=9

13   Cf. for example Jean Baudrillard, *L'échange symbolique et la mort*, Gallimard, Paris 1976; Régis Debray, *Vie et mort de l'image. Une histoire du regard en occident*, Gallimard, Paris 1992; Pierre Lévy, *Qu'est-ce que le virtuel?*, La decouverte, Paris 1995; Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real. The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, London 1996; Derrick De Kerckhove, *The Skin of Culture. Investigating the New Electronic Reality*, Kogan Page, London 1997; Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, London, New York, Verso, 1997; Tomás Maldonado, *Lo real y lo virtual*, Gedisa, Barcelona 1999; Roberto Diodato, *Estetica del virtuale*, Bruno Mondadori, Milan 2005; Mario De Caro, Maurizio Ferraris (a cura di), *Bentornata realtà. Il nuovo realismo in discussione*, Einaudi, Turin 2012.

14   Cf. Roberta Valtorta, *Il retro delle immagini. Caso e controllo in fotografia*, in Ead., *Volti della fotografia. Scritti sulle trasformazioni di un'arte contemporanea*, Skira, Milan 2005.

15   Again referring to the series *Time and Again*, Sibylle Omlin notes that "The photographic overlay between a photorealistic subject and hand colouration generates that strangeness which we unanimously perceive as timeless and an artificial import." Sibylle Omlin, *The Abandoned Stage*, cit., p. 44.

16   Cf. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Quand les images prennent position. L'œil de l'histoire, 1*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 2009.

17   "Dans cette recherche de la Photographie, la phénoménologie me prêtait donc un peu de son projet et un peu de son langage. Mais c'était une phénoménologie vague, désinvolte, cynique même, tellement elle acceptait de déformer ou d'esquiver ses principes selon le bon plaisir de mon analyse." Roland Barthes, *La chambre claire. Note sur la photographie*, Gallimard, Paris 1980, p. 40.

18   "This […] is the formula for what is included in this volume: I have avoided mere images, I have avoided mere thoughts; but whenever an episode I observed or a striking sentence I read yielded a flash of insight I had not had before, I wrote it down and preserved it. These jottings are not a diary. They do not present me as a subject but as a mere supplier of symptomatic experiences – experiences that are meant to stand as self-sufficient miniatures, bits of theory kept alive by the senses through which they were transmitted." Rudolf Arnheim, *Parables of Sun Light. Observations on Psychology, the Arts, and the Rest*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1990, p. VII.

19   Ivi, p. 76.

TETRA