

Suggested Reality

Denise Agassi's piece Suggested Reality studies interesting imbrications: aspects of the database aesthetics in the general lines proposed by Lev Manovich; and the philosophical implications of binocular vision. If database aesthetics is more readily identified as a contemporary phenomenon within the context of digital culture, binocular vision has found a place in culture in the wake of another intense drive of technological transformation: the scientific revolutions of the 19th Century.

Denise Agassi builds an initial duality around which facets of a more complex polygon are allocated in the exhibition space. The Strait of Gibraltar, also known as "Hercules' Columns", is the geographical space in focus. Portal of the Mediterranean sea, the strait symbolises the separation – or the union – of the European and African continents. The Iberian colonial overseas expansion begun in 1458 with the conquest of Ceuta, today a Spanish enclave in Moroccan territory. Franco's fascism revisited the route but the other way round. The general invaded Spain from Morocco, where he had rebelled against the republican government. A more recent update of this intercontinental traffic is expressed in the tension around immigration routes, legal and illegal. Besides, the Strait denotes the separation between the *Mare Nostrum* and the Atlantic ocean, as well as placing Africa as the Iberian Peninsula's inseparable Other.

The site chosen, therefore, brings in a zone of oppositions and continuities, through which pulses of expansion, predation, contraction, return of the disposed, restoration, destruction and reconfiguration travel to and fro.

But the central point animating Agassi's piece is the quality of the co-existence of the parts constituting this historical and geographical duality. Added to the Europe-Africa duality, there is another one that is more comfortably found in database aesthetics. The images chosen by the artist respond to the same search key-word, but bear diverse results, since they emerge from distinct databases. One image of the pair is extant from the general pool of the internet, by means of widely accessible commercial search engines. The other image of the pair is taken from Google Earth, that is, from the 3D modelisation of the terrestrial globe. Thus, the two images portray the same place from

exactly the same point of view – though the images' codification is diverse, as they were generated by different devices.

The resulting disparity introduces the second aspect, binocularity. That human vision involves the use of two eyes has always been an obvious fact, but the exact nature of the relationship between them is a discovery of the 19th Century. It was then that Charles Wheatstone established unequivocally that we perceive the world in three dimensions because of binocularity. The study of this phenomenon is called *stereoscopy* and it widely impacted 1900's Western culture. Some author go as far as claiming a modernisation of vision took place, grounded on the stereoscopic gaze, a passage from the dominant Renaissance visual regime (whose paradigm is that of the Camera Obscura) to a synthetic regime, whose paradigm is the stereoscope. For the latter regime, vision is not explained by the geometrical relationships external to the eye, which was understood as lenses allowing transparent access to the world. With stereoscopic studies, vision was studied as a cerebral, physiological phenomenon. Thus, there is no unified point of view as illustrated by the apex of the cone of vision, demanding a single fixed observer, typical of Renaissance and the subsequent aesthetic tradition: what resulted from the stereoscopic studies was that binocular vision and the perception of volume and three-dimensional space results from the synthesis of two disparate stimuli. Thus, the modern observer can be described as one who deals with disparate visual stimuli and who seeks to combine some viable space before itself.

It is worth noting that the cerebral operation that combines the stimuli from one and the other eye do not involve the loss of information. Operations such as fusion or overlapping would imply blocking or preserving certain areas of information over others. It is not the case. The three-dimensional image resulting from the binocular observation of the world retains the informational quality in its totality. The disparity between the stimulus generated in the left eye and the visual stimulus generated in the right eye is not erased nor actually resolved, but instead 'synthesised': the disparate parts reconfigure their differences literally "in another dimension", preserving their disparity but somehow stabilised. This 'modern observer', constituted as a cloud diffused between two poles of visual stimulus, instead of a Cartesian point of convergence, will allow for the expansions and reformulations of the notions of visuality and of subjectivity itself in

the fields of philosophy, art and science from the 19th Century onwards.

Therefore, the dualities brought in by Agassi are not resolved by fusion, nor are to be found at some median point, equidistant from the two parts – a point of both African and European water. On the contrary, observation remains cleaved, unable to reach a zone of dimensional comfort. This contemporary observer, studied in *Suggested Reality*, further, has to deal with different codifications, with informational architectures that not always keep a dialogical space between them. In Denise Agassi's work, the observer realises that his or her senses tread at least two unstable grounds, defined by irreconcilable opposition: disparity of codes and geographical disparity.

The space obtained in the work is thus a subjective space of high instability, where duality and disparity revolve in a perceptive vortex animated by fleeting operations of synthesis, denying the observer a fixed or central point where he or she may rest and reconcile with a unified space.

Gavin Adams, 2011