

## The Threshold of Representation

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The skin is the membrane that separates us from perceptible matter. It separates inside from out and it is where thought becomes action and emotion sweat. It is the part of our body which brings us into contact with the world and with others, and through which we experience matter. Two different times pass by beneath and above the skin: the perpetual flow of consciousness and the bumpy passing of knowledge.

Giovanni Ozzola's *Superficiale - Under My Skin* (2009) is a work that, right from its title, picks out the two time levels of internalisation and representation. In other words, the moment when the image is impressed on the film and the delay with which the eye follows its movement: real time and the implausible. What we see is the artist's studio from a curious, peripheral point of view, in which the flow of time – or of times – is represented by the passing of light through a window. The window is the one that the artist sees in front of him every day, but no human presence points it out to us: the choice of framing is intentionally anonymous, and the place is devoid of any characterising feature. The fixed camera gives us the idea of an initial editing stage: nothing happens other than the indifferent passing of time. However, this is not real time but rather a reassembly of time, just as the space is almost scenic.

The work originally reminded me of Bruce Nauman's *Mapping the Studio* video, in which it is the space itself that becomes the subject as the place of creation, but in Ozzola's video the clarity and composure of the image initially eludes any such comparison. Ozzola compresses space and time in his search for a partial, alienating shot and a precise time span. He uses editing to break down his experience of reality and recompose it in an image that has a duration and form of its own. The experience of time thus passes first through the artist's experience and later through that of composition.<sup>1</sup> What unites the two forms of time is light – the recognisable sign of the passing of time. It is sunlight, the physical phenomenon that marks out our days, but it is also artificial light, and a scenic instrument that guides the eyes and defines the objects. It is a radiation that illuminates the screen and exposes the film. Light is a wave that enables us to perceive matter, but it is also a means for impressing an image and bringing it to life. It is the threshold of representation, and it marks the shift from consciousness to perception, making the image reality.

Light, its occurrence and provenance, and the place of its arrival have always been a matter for investigation by the artist, just as the photographic medium – the photosensitive material on which the time of vision is impressed and becomes form and substance – is the language that he has always preferred. With *Superficiale - Under My Skin*, Ozzola takes up video, with the image moving in a space-time dimension. He abandons the infinite time of contemplation for the pre-set time of experience. While photographic time is an interval, that of the moving image is continuity. While the fixity of the shot presupposes some imaginary before and after, the moving image confines experience to the projection. So the choice is not dictated by narrative needs, but rather by the need to represent a continuous and repeatable unfolding of action. The artist invites the observer to embark on a cognitive experience that he has had himself, and he does so by reconstructing a new level of time. The focus is thus not on an observation of time, but rather on representing its movement by means of the image. Just as Eadweard Muybridge worked out how to convey the motion of animals in the late nineteenth century, and just as flipbooks create animation through a rapid succession of individual photos, so Ozzola strives to represent the movement of light. He attains this by respecting Deleuze's law of image-time, in a reference to a time that emerges in the relationship between the "space" objects (the artist's studio) and "light". This is achieved by differentiating the various intervals that occur in this relationship. These intervals of movement correspond to the individual stills that the artist takes out of the video, turning them into specifications of the relationship. By means of an operation which reverses that of video, Ozzola

recaptures the individual images of his own vision when he made them his own, impressing them on the paper as though they were a blinking of the eye. And it is precisely in this shift from “discontinuity to continuity”<sup>2</sup> that the image becomes the threshold by which consciousness becomes knowledge and personal vision becomes representation.