

In "Dust-trap Book", the skin element, besides leaving images, gathers other prints and dust from the touched elements; the process is thus overturned, and the fingers by touching other things, deposit their image on them, loaded and thickened by different elements. By this process I invade, better still, I occupy the space in a more total way, I dilate my perceptive knowledge, and give this possibility to the spectators as well.

## Lucio Pozzi

*A. ... You already know (dont you) or sense that life is going to be extended far beyond what we now think reasonable.*

*Q. Do you think that there will be a further need for artists after this change comes about?*

*A. We're already at the point where we don't take that idea of only doing what is necessary.*

*Q. I'm sorry, let me rephrase it. Do you think they will exist?*

*A. What else will exist?*

*John Cage*

*in Perspecta 11, Yale University 1967*

1.

Many people have felt for quite a long time that painting is an outdated way of operating, now superseded by seemingly solider, less illusionistic, less artisan or less private processes. One could even go as far as to talk of an anti-painting tradition throughout the whole modern movement. More recently large numbers of painters have given up painting in favour of other kinds of action.

Two important consequences have arisen out of this shifting of interests, namely:

- 1) the reducing of painting to its bare essentials and nothing more;
- 2) the abolition of the concept of art, in that any human activity may be seen as a succession of situations, each springing from a particular combination of factors with compatible proportions. These material, procedural or conceptual factors are all there always, but they are accentuated to a different degree in every situation. As for myself, what I try to do is to think comprehensively, with an awareness of all the aspects of culture, and to avoid specializing my understanding of things even if I am forced to limit my choice of things to do.

\* \* \*

It is useless to establish or to preach which factors or which combinations of those factors are to be included in the category of art and which are not, because art as a category does not exist, serves no purpose and is of no interest. Everything is life, in other words, culture. Utilitarian practice and aesthetic theory are contemporary both in what we call life and in what is defined as art; in the former more emphasis is placed on one, and in the latter more on the other. There is no reason for marking out the boundaries of art or life. There is no sense in saying «this is art and this is not», using the word "art" as though it were a recognized standard extrapolated from the rest of experience.

\* \* \*

I want to avoid being for or against painting or anything else. Any kind of action is acceptable, and that includes painting. But for this same reason each way of operating entails a limited number—and only that number—of possible choices. I regard painting as ultimately devoid of

associations and meanings. It is nothing more than the plain and simple application of colour onto a static surface. And in painting as in other things I am interested in doing things with a respect for the elementary properties of the materials, procedures and concepts that I am dealing with.

This «respect for materials»—one of the canons of the modern movement—does not signify simply a respect for the raw properties of stone, iron, fiberglass, glass or canvas. Material should be understood to mean informative material.

They are as concrete as other materials: optical illusionism (part of the electrochemistry of the brain), manual work and personal experience. They are all elements that can be combined and measured to a greater or lesser extent. The application of colour to a static surface, which implies them, may in turn be considered an element, an informative material that can be combined with other elements, just as a *found object* is combined with others in an *assemblage*.

\* \* \*

It seems necessary, to my mind, to be spectators who are conscious of what is happening and also of what we are told has happened.

It is a control which we procure for ourselves, just as all systems cannot exist without controls.

History, the past. For me it's like a big dictionary of forms whose context is, all things considered, unknown to me. I find in it a card-index of archetypes of the imagination, to which I can have access if I wish.

The modern movement is part of the inventory drawn up in our time to retrace in our own terms all the aspects of life which during the pre-agricultural and agricultural ages of the history of mankind were represented in mythologies, religions and languages that can by now only with difficulty be reconciled to contemporary reality.

The forms, like the materials, procedures and directions of thought, of those times were linked according to hierarchies that symbolized integrated cultures. Now they have reached us but are isolated and meaningless.

It is in this way that we use forms—as mere perceptive stimuli in which the only thing that matters to us is the logic and sense of the combinations.

\* \* \*

I am disturbed by the current use of the concepts of progress, novelty and originality. They are artificial substitutes for metaphysical codes that are by now unacceptable, and as such the substitutes are unacceptable too. They are treated in a too straightforward and unequivocal way.

The interpretations of progress and regress, as they now reach me from my culture, seem to me to be stuck in a one-dimensional conception of time and history. Progress and regress

compared to what? And assessed in what scale, what dimension?

In our technical and cybernetic, multidimensional society, with its overall conscience, saturated with information at infinite levels, the sense and the concept of time need to be changed. The scale of measurement of time is definitely no longer one alone.

\* \* \*

II.

I can attempt to explain what I believe I have done so far. I don't only paint. I do other things too in order to understand painting from outside, from where it isn't, and in order to investigate and catalogue situations in which parameters such as frequency of perception, private/public, describability, recognizability, receiver participation, statics or movement, are present in a decidedly different way from that of my paintings.

For example, I write. Paint and words seem to me to be in inverse ratio. Then, I organize events in which persons and objects are included, which I move and distribute, thinking, in the same way as I do with colour, about distances, densities, procedures and scanning.

I teach. And recently I have been working on body activations and body interferences, or more simply, jewels.

\* \* \*

In my approach to painting I am interested in things like the decision-making process in producing a work, and the perceptive process in receiving it.

When producing a work, I think I proceed in three stages:

- 1) programming (in the choice of materials, dimensions and perimeters)
- 2) semi-programming/semi-improvisation (in applying the tapes)
- 3) complete improvisation (in applying the colours). The extremely fast and intuitive concentration required when I apply a coat of colour and have to understand precisely when to wet the canvas and how much to let the colour dry, and where more where less (acrylics dry in a few minutes), adds to my work a failure risk factor which is indispensable to me.

If in fact the canvas gets over-covered or if too subtle or too hard contrasts develop, I often have to throw the painting away and start again from scratch.

I believe I offer the receiver, or spectator, a number of items for scanning, such as:

- 1) scanning itineraries in different scales, from one direction indicator to the next, from one canvas to the next, from thicker colour zones to other, thinner ones, and, in depth, from layer to layer of colour.
- 2) different levels of contrast which cause the onlooker to perceive the painting in different ways from different distances.

With this method I try to avoid both excessive and paralyzing

systematizations and unjustified arbitraries.

\* \* \*

How I produce a painting. The acrylic colour is applied with a brush, almost always on the whole surface of an unsized white cotton canvas stretched on a frame and hung vertically on the wall. The colour is put on in different degrees of fluidity and density. Quite often, some coats of colour are left to dry for a while and then made to drop off by means of water, using the force of gravity as a determinant factor.

When the first layers of colour have dried, I stick segments of adhesive tape onto the surface, which I remove at the end after many more coats of colour have been applied. This produces direction indicators which are also like detectors, showing the first layers of colour and making it possible to retrace the transformations that have occurred from the first to the last coats.

Every time I apply a coat of colour I imitate the colour I am about to cover, but with a slight transgression or variation from it. I finish quickly so as to forget the characteristics of the first coats of colour, and when I take away the tapes the relations of the painting reveal themselves in ways I have not expected. The colour red is like a constant around which I work with bluer or yellower or whiter reds.

The canvas can still be seen, because the way I put the colour on does not cover up the weft but deposits the colour on each single thread of cotton.

The canvas is presented just as it is, with all its imperfections. It is not so much a medium for the painting as a component of it.

\* \* \*

I don't feel tied to any colour. I don't know how long I'll go on using red. Colours are like numbers, whose interest is provided by combinations, differences and distances, but none of which is preferred.

A colour distinguishes one surface zone, another colour distinguishes another —nothing more. When I decided to start insisting on red, it meant for me the element "colour", to be combined with "applied by hand", "brush", "water", "stretched canvas", "force of gravity", etc.

I can also add that in 1959/60 I was doing enormous modular paintings on paper panels, based on the repetition in loose patterns of irregular red squares whose shape depended on how well the wide, flat brush was capable of spreading the oil colour on the absorbent surface of the paper.

Red interested me because I felt it as anonymous, absolute, and as cosmic as the darkness of space.

It reminded me of the peculiar feeling of giddiness, suspension and seminal emptiness produced in one's eyes and brain by the light and heat of the sun gazed at through closed lids in the late spring. Why exactly do I repeat the same shapes so many times in my paintings? I need years

to understand them. I choose the long rectangles, triangles and squares so as to have the opportunity to investigate different dimensions that produce different physical results when I put colour on them in the manner I've just described, and which also give rise to different scanning circuits for the person looking at them.

\* \* \*

To distribute the densities of colour or the marks produced by tapes, I think of them in terms of elementary logic such as: Identity, Addition, Implication, Diversity. In plain words: more here and less there; here yes and there no; thicker at the bottom, thinner at the top; vertical at the edge, horizontal in the middle; a lot of this on the left, not too much of that on the right; all belonging to the group, etc.

And I think of the distances between elements and their degree of visibility (bigger or smaller contrast).

I try to do everything in the simplest, most ordinary way.