

they are not mere tautological spirals revolving upon themselves, but beginning and end, sharp, dry, of a story. That's maybe why they are also transparent. Certainly that's why they made me curious.

The Memphis blues are all there again, chairs, walls, doors, floors, corridors, beds, objects, and all the obsessions that being an architect involves, to repeat undaunted the oldest questions, the ever-known statements, here mixed and diluted with different memories, remote intuitions wearily digged out here and there, with the retina inside out and a reflex in the brains to photograph the nostalgias.

That things can be carried further Sottsass believes it for sure, even if he's sharp with his statements, hard with his questions, and leaves very little space to breathe. He believes it even if he throws his « very very beautiful architecture » on a stony hill, surrounded by a few branches of fake-like leaves, darker than the sky above. So what? Even if one of the many rooms where assassinations are being decided grows on another desert, made out of stones that look like malignant tumors, speckled with darkness like the pedestals that hold the columns of power, dressed of flowers without perfume and mournful, menacing drags. Memphis blues again or not, it can always change, as long as, it seems, we keep letting ourselves be seduced by this bastard planet, day after day, with a little more detachment, the sight very little sharper, and always in a manner that must be striking, involving, final.

Other blues

I said at the beginning that I didn't know how to take these works, because I didn't think I could refer them to a specific context familiar to me. It came to mind then that also the context where he was moving was not familiar to him. One of the many things peculiar to the epoch in which we are living is that we feel all somehow stuck in the context in which we are operating, and while we don't feel that we have to remove our interest from it, we're also aware that it can't be no good to be confined in the neon-lit corridors of a superbureaucratic structure, that the need is to cross-over and walk along the perfumed wild paths of the story of our species. That's why many cross-overs have little to do

with intellectual interdisciplinary interests, and are instead the outcome of a true necessity to touch the skin of people that travel through different territories.

This work of Sottsass one doesn't know where to put it because it doesn't want to be put anywhere, it isn't looking for a place, but for a state that is not there yet. We are all continuously searching for states that are not there yet, for spaces that are untouched or smoothed by time. To break out we often need to behave like crazy phantoms and swear that it is the light breeze of the ocean, not the dry flame of neon lights that blows on our shoulders.

When Sottsass writes that the only real environment is the cosmos because it is not intelligible, cannot be scheduled, classified and so forth, he knows very well that this involves a continuous movement, a non-stop-going, a perfect balance, exceptional elasticity and mobility, continuous flows of vital energy, chain-grids of diagrams, roads crossing that we thought interrupted before.

In that context he's entered with primitive, thin materials, easy to disguise and camouflage. Some he borrowed from the wood or the river, others he took with him that are such obvious, paradoxical ready-mades that needn't be disguised for they result in themselves cut-out, a negative print on the text. Nor are the camouflage and the disguising secretly done, just ambiguous and bipolar, as the cosmic events that they are trying to tune in with. All the structures are in sight, the poles held up by long-stretched strings, although not all the strings are there to hold the poles or to keep down the ready-mades. With their same presence they openly declare their status as outsiders and their will to amalgamate, which is also how they become welcome guests and do not remain pompous ornaments, without grace.

All the built structures are light and so deep down rooted that they can afford to flirt in the provisional, props found on location and put together for a game. They recall certain signs and writings drawn on sandy beaches and destined to be cancelled by water, but fallen into such an intensity of desire that each drop of water will remember forever to have washed them away. They are camping constructions, transformable walls, to fold and take away, mutable and transitory like seasons. The ribbons, the bows, the tiny strips of paper (perhaps

toilet paper) will blow with the first wind or will be slushed when the rain starts falling but have the freshness of a flower neck-lace that you want to lay at night, before sleeping, on the bed of your lover.

The lines of these structures don't try or care to follow the ones of the landscape, they don't seem to share formal preoccupations, they lean where they can, fall and stay on the ground and let the grass climb on the poles, the leaves grow on strings and threads, and the cloth move freely around. They seem, really they are, tricky traps. Set up for who?

A camera is possibly the most natural means of expression of this century and Sottsass uses it naturally, as a pencil to draw — you will pardon him his professional deformation — on a sheet, that is the landscape around him, the signs of his own alphabet.

The comparison with artists using the same medium comes natural — you will pardon me now my professional deformation. Sottsass doesn't record plastic surgery operations on the skin of the planet (land art type), nor cuts out slices of reality to compose in a different manner, nor does he use a background to tell a story before it. Rather he deduces a story from a background, which is left to live free, autonomous, to create the correlative of a continuous cultural revolution, because there's nothing that is possible to conclude and nothing that wants to be, on Sottsass's side, concluded. In fact it's hard to say whether the landscape is to serve ribbons and poles or if ribbons and poles are to serve the landscape as ornaments, votive gifts or such.

And in the centre is the cosmos, not man, or rather the centre is somewhere in the middle between the two, sort of intergalactic alliance spoken maybe at the door « through which, sometimes, "you" are meeting your love ». The question is — I suspected it from the very beginning — that deep down Sottsass loves life more than art, prefers the juice to the essence, and that the famous fruit, instead of painting it, hanging it, section it and study it under a microscope, instead of putting it under glass or plexiglass, with the risk of it going rotten — maybe — he prefers to swallow it in a gulp.

Barbara Radice

(translation in English by the author)

Luca Patella

VITTORIO FAGONE

Considered one of the most interesting and lively creative personalities of the past years, Luca Patella occupies a very special position in the panorama of advanced art research in Italy today. Although he is among the animators of certain Roman art circles where a number of paradigmatic developments have been achieved by the new Italian avant-garde (from Pascali to Kounellis), Pa-

tella has not frozen his own image as an artist and his own working horizon into any specific zone. On the contrary, he has always preferred to experiment along more « adventurous », continuous and free lines.

In fifteen years of closely woven activity his work presents a consistent and constantly advancing picture. Among several successions and patterns of re-

search three clear constants can be suggested:

- a) a vital expansion (or explosion) of the materials and articulations of artistic language, its connections and meanings;
- b) the highlighting of the relation between what the artist does and how the public receives it, as the identification of a field of creative behaviour;
- c) the regaining of the artist's role as an

organizer of a critical knowledge of reality, as the producer of a non-affermative, liberatory language which is the antagonist of conditionings by «authoritarian languages».

It must be said once that images and writing in Patella's work are guided towards the pole of a creative redefinition; freed from subjection to a closed code. The *real* images almost always exalt the virtuality of improbable or fantastic happenings, observed from outside any automatic casuality. The writings (one only has to look at the series of *Gazzette Ufficiali* or at the book *Io sono qui*) open on to a different oblique and generating denotative order through the play of rapid breakings-down, recompositions, contaminations. Images and writings are arranged within a «humanistic» field of perceptions, behaviour and reflections which give back a perspective curve to the *rationality* and to the *fragility* of all knowledge.

In the operations that Patella has carried out in the last few years (from his *Sfere naturali*, 1968-69 to *Alberi parlanti*, 1971, and to his latest *Analisi proettive in atto*) the images are not *exhibited* but *induced* as generators of meanings. They belong not so much to an order which associates them with determinate objects (images as names) as to a broader space of mental recognitions and reactions (images as models or projects for the liberation of creative behaviour).

Throughout these stages of his development Patella starts up a remarkable circuit. Almost didactically, he proposes obligatory points in a cognitive itinerary through which it is possible to regain an *overall* field of perception, the revelation of a peculiarly original aesthetic experience.

The aleatory margin of many of his more recent works is to be appraised in view of a final result; it is — vitally — part of the economy of a plan which

takes these elements into account as if they were variables with the capacity to act positively. It is important to note that the recovery of different and often not homogeneous linguistic materials (images, writings, situations, gestures) and of relations internal and external to these materials, is governed by the constitutive necessity for a new model of experience, and by an aesthetic awareness compelled to use the different media in a *non-restrictive* way.

The non-restrictive use of media naturally widens their expressive potential, their easiness to handle and their inner significative strength. Films (Patella is among those who in Italy have acted with surprising promptness and effectiveness in this sector of research) can be worth as much as a series of slides and as much, if not more, than the painted image.

This perspective is made explicit in his *analisi di psicovita* (1974-1976), which are expansion of images and provocations of eidetic situations within an area of relationships. Patella, however, does not shut a conceptual mechanism inside the schema of a behaviour, nor does he perform a rite or exorcism, but he sets forth a rational process *didactically*, recommending that the viewer make his way through it, checking its experimentability and its capacity for linguistic definition. The action achieved in this manner does not isolate a privileged time — that of aesthetic experience — as opposed to the usual and «general» time, but, on the contrary, it contaminates the closed space of the *aesthetic* within a more extensive reality where images, words and actions can attain a sense and a code before *concepts* and *precepts* have split the land in four (like the traditional hair).

On the other hand the different «experiences» which the exhibitions at Antwerp and Bari were able to show in sequence, underline the significant stopping-places in a most unusual journey.

Mention has already been made of the *Films*, which Patella began making in the mid-1960s. These are at once analyses of new ways and means of *making art* and recordings of indicative experiences ranging from *Sfere naturali*, short in 1968-69, which are reflecting and vitally polysemic universes, to *Alberi parlanti* (1971); but one should also mention his *Grammatiche dissolventi* (1970-72), *Muri parlanti* (1971), the dense, and what might be described as continual, series of *Tele e acqueforti fotografiche*, and the very recent *Libri totali* where the extremely fast exchanges of pictures and writings move different and reverberating planes of reading across the screen. Every time Patella prompts the spectator to move about in a dialectic space which, beneath its appearance as an unexpected spectacle, compels him to become aware of a broader, freer and more plastic universe.

I am convinced that in the art of this century a distinction can be drawn between two main poles or patterns. On the one side *opacity*, and on the other, *transparency*. Opacity still absorbs the gesture, the anxiety, the sense and the profound ambiguity to be found in doing, in objects and even in materials. Transparency discloses the mechanics, the constitution, the signification, the virtuality of every image (visual or mental), the dizzy ambiguity of identity.

If this schema is taken into account, Patella's position at once becomes clear. It was Duchamp who said that the spectator completes the painting and asked art to go (*to go back*) to the *mind*. And when Duchamp wrote «to the mind», he meant it in the sense of the French term *esprit*: intelligence, irony, critical spirit. For nearly twenty years now Patella has been amusing himself by mixing these elements as slides, sounds, words, smells, shadows and mirrors within each of his «totalities».

Vittorio Fagone

Ut Pictura Architectura

GIANNI CONTESSI

UT PICTURA ARCHITECTURA Notes on painted architecture

In 1971 a not very widely read book called *Mnemosyne*, by Mario Praz, was published. It is concerned with the «parallel between literature and the visual arts». The starting point of the book is the old and much-discussed theory of a «unity of the arts», by which the author does not set much store. He prefers to make a moderate reference to the well-known theses by Propp on the morphology of fairy-tales in order to attempt to establish a «structural» connexion between different cultural phenomena, or rather between different «media». This is clearly equivalent to maintaining that a system of relations exists which affects the various creative sectors of a given epoch, and

indeed is clearly linked to one and the same structural pattern. This means believing in the existence of an art System, which is quite different from a Unity of the arts. Whilst in fact the former suggests the presence of structural affinities among the various sub-systems (that can be invoked only in their disciplinary specificity), the latter has to do with presumed ideal affinities among the various languages of art.

Going still farther ahead, we can state that beyond the hiatus produced by the «historical» avant-garde movements and by a number of neo-avant-gardes, which maintained and still maintain that their task is to prolong its action, art continues to be based upon the use of constant elements in time, that is to say, of permanent characteristics of which

«only» the function changes. This function changes because it alters the historical context within which that function is situated. Or else, as Aldo Rossi sustains in regard to architecture (1), at times the function has even been lost, with the result that we continue to make use of something that has been reduced to form alone. Therefore, the hypothesis that a System of art does exist concerns both a synchronic analysis and a diachronic analysis of the phenomena.

Memory can link different artistic experiences, and a thesis of this kind would seem to be not entirely unreliable (2), seeing that it is moreover borne out in architectural circles by Rossi's «poetic theory» and, in a different direction, by the Five Architects' thesis. It is, of course, not a very technical, but rather a