

Original Texts and Translations

Portrait of a Young Man as an artist

by Carlo Romano

The walls of the principal bedrooms were embellished by paintings of uncommon value and of that eminent school which is so little understood outside Italy. I was amazed when I heard that the owner had painted them all himself. (Edward Bulwer Lytton)

'Human-like beings' pursue words/Le-traset in subterranean passages open to flight defended close behind by automatic weapons at the ready. Along the running flows of lost time torn objects can be glimpsed crashing into one another, overlapping, and tearing each other to pieces again, drifting, impotent, with the unquestionable judgement of movements. The arrow driving in a legalitarian direction leaps to the eye. The Order of the World is on the side of the 'me as I am looking', the abuse of power with the idea of avoiding it already in mind. The picture offered to the eye benefits from being looked at for as long as the offer is accepted; after which the illusion of seeing remains, but one sees only what one would like to have seen, or what 'was'. 'Memory', they call it. 'Focusing' is the fruit of a continuous removal of residual images from the eye. 'To see art', precisely because 'as such' it is regarded as something more, as 'vision', in the sense used in the Corinthians: 'The things which the eye hath not seen... are those which God has prepared for those who love Him'.

The dead hand of the significant on the symbol's legs does not arouse its acquiescence, but horror and flight until it vanishes into metaphor... someone will cry: 'the sense! the sense!', but Simonetti will remain a young gentleman aged 36, reasonably tall, with dark eyes and hair, well-mannered... not a painting.

Almost a prodigy, and prodigious in his assessment of the artistic chances of his epoch, he pokes his nose in, back first, into the gallery scene, forging ahead across coveted ground, quickly or fraudulently seizing its appeased and ill-appeased rules and evident habits; hurried-

ly winning credibility (the Credo of 'other people'), airing his attitudes, now measured, now modish, and always complacent. Amid mounting unpopularity, the artistic milieu is nevertheless agreed on various points: outstanding 'intelligence', good manners (even when insulting), and the capacity for 'quotation', even if a little bit icy. Simonetti stand-offish, at all events.

Surrounded by the mirages of art broken down into the hopeful artistic taste of the banal-sublime to be accomplished on heterogeneously hypnotized lines (from Oscar Wilde to Duchamp), but which find Cage sufficiently recapitulatory, Simonetti broaches music and painting, addressing them in 'Mutica', and not in homage to the 'silences' that would like to reconsider them (with treacherous intent to 're-live them'), but as a *gag* which at last *sounds* like an invitation to keep quiet for an avant-garde that, as he puts it in his essay significantly entitled *Criticism of the Ear* (not a 'moment' of other 'criticisms', but *criticism* there as elsewhere) 'cannot keep quiet about its own poverty and cries out against the abominable mess of culture'.

Simonetti's chances have been to a large extent tied up with the Italian *Fluxus* adventure and transcontinental diarrhoea. By memory: *Gesture and sign*, with Chiari, in Milan in 1964; performances in Turin with Ben and Nespolo in 1966-7; *do it yourself fluxfest present: concert fluxus* in 1967 in Genoa, performing plays by La Monte Young, Brecht, etc.; then the experience of a publishing operation in a markedly Fluxus vein, with Gianni Sassi, a sort of Milanese Higgins (*Bit*, and the ED 912 posters). In the formless congregation he 'is', however, with an eye on the absence of precisely structured links, seeking space instead for his own survival, bearing in mind that the multicoloured terrorism of trade paradoxes is reinvented day by day by multiplying the number of craft in the Anchorage of Needs. Collectors exist. The avant-garde, for that matter, is the collectors' waltz, the *one two three* of abandonment to the flow of current vogue illusorily 'ahead of the times'. Valéry used to say that: 'Man gets hold of certain visions, the power of which generates his power'. The fact that a painting may be rectangular, or that a *tableau* may be a table of prices, is one of those things that bothers nobody. In the multiplicity of scenes per-

formed the misunderstandings are believed to be avoidable if the context of the statement is followed. The expenditure is the purchase of sense. The collection is proof of its accomplishment. Tamed by objects, the owner confuses the dust that covers them up, with the diaphragm between himself and 'knowledge'. By removing the dust he believes he has discovered their souls; but instead, the analyst, who has been trailing him, as Benjamin recalls, uncovers the owner's soul. Art is reproduced on the misunderstanding of 'vision'.

The painting I am talking to you about is a mirror and no one has so far thought of criticizing it. (François-Xavier de Maistre)

On the field open to the début of the mannerist rustling, of hidden passion, of antivirginal mystique and crime, words and gay butterflies settle, and flutter, putting Springtly Teresas of noble mettle into a state of apprehension. The Giusani sisters come to the aid of Simonetti by giving him *Diabolik*. Crime has its genius that is recognizable and can be pointed out. In a Lombrosian way, monstrosity and criminality are merged into one. The index is the adversary's finger. The hand closes and leaves it by itself. The longer it delays joining the company the more it shows signs of courage. On this or on that side of the index-finger, this is the sense. The practice of division has in the index-finger the instrument that represents it and pushes beyond to mix satire and the miraculous, nature and caricature. What is left of the aesthetic future, remembrances of Hegel the dust-man (making 'a clean sweep with the Idea') is the fear, once Céline's and quite classical, a wild admonition to the last on patrol who do not want to make 'beauty' but think of doing so. The 'pointing out' is the dizziness of caution, careful steps and stone hearts that delegate irreverence to the blathering of the avant-gardes to get them to stage the spectre of the 'leap in the dark', while everything is abundant and here.

The mutilation imprinted on the scene does not know that it is opening onto the world. The suffering in pantomime is the scissors that cut the map. True and false, reason and faith, real and unreal go together; 'if you want to express light', says José Bergamin, 'make yourself into a camera oscura'. When the monstrous is imprinted on the plate, tra-

dition rises up to make it divine or to censure it according to cases and latitudes; art and the guillotine (or religion and magic, the little Cottolengo and the circus...). 'The ignorance of the ancients', says Canguilhem, 'regarded monsters as freaks of nature, and the science of our contemporaries sees them as the freaks of scientists'. Refusal becomes a fetish, revolt becomes gangrenous without spreading gangrene any more; it is sheer exaggeration. One looks at it dumbfounded, with the memory of whims marked 'MGM/1932' turned on again in the modern Seventies in 'sick-making' episodes with blinding film truths (*L'altro, Kobra...*). Horror clubs lend their members to the morbid camera which hastens to transform horror into pity. The nightmare presents itself in the shape of the economy; the unconscious projects films on the distribution of labour, the real power, Christian and Jew, the working people, Utopia, blame, the past...

In the days of King Arthur, driven by Harold Foster's pencil, a prince Valiant came to 'a spectral place full of shadows with fantastic shapes, and a ghastly silence'. This was the land of the 'giant', a gathering-place for 'deformed, crippled, deficient beings', organized into a nation living by archaic rules of economy. Valiant brings with him modernity, cosmopolitanism and open-mindedness. As if the adhesion to principles in use in borderland countries might perhaps raise monsters to the rank of normality. But, as an American widow wrote in her epitaph to her husband: 'rest in peace/ until we are reunited'. A young Engels helped to clarify this concept by verifying the working class situation in England. In the wretched past he discovered an inviting cordiality; and in the present, a kingdom of crumbs and rights, a hallucinating filth. But also 'the present' already actual in the 'past'; pit-coal on the heroes' cheeks, Campari Soda in the glasses on the Round Table, flying saucers in the house at Loreto. Prehistory was not over. 'Now it's up to the Mongols to pitch camp in our squares', wrote *La Revolution Surréaliste* in 1925. Like Diabolik, those are the vandals of printed matter. A mass consumer phrase in between the more virulent fringes of *Gauchisme*, i.e., the one that says 'a society that suppresses adventure causes the only adventure to be the suppression of society' becomes the legitimate appendix to the old avant-gardeist proposition. Simonetti puts it into the mouths of Ginko's policemen, Ginko being the man who chases Diabolik. Miracles of *détournement*.

After making a gift of itself to the picture postcard the world covered itself with an ugliness never previously seen. (Guido Ceronetti)

It could be said of Simonetti that to hide a needle in a haystack is his style (Gillo

Dorflès, in a catalogue published in 1967 suggested that Simonetti manages to fuse the moment 'of private and cryptic symbolism with that of an explicit and appreciable semantic quality'). To find the needle again one can always burn the haystack and sieve the ashes. But the theme is not that of the needle to be found or still less that of the haystack to be burnt to ashes. The theme is the hidden needle, those who want to look for it, the process of searching, the finding, the function of the needle, why precisely that one and for what purpose... Simonetti does a painting and says: 'Here there is a hidden needle; finding it is your business'. Or better still: 'There is a demand for paintings, I paint them, you have reasons for buying them...'

A painting dated 1966 is called *Ready - Game Table*. A brief visit to Montecarlo and one to Las Vegas. *Goldrake the Playboy* in the clique, Carolina unripe whom-it-is-not-necessary-to-see, Raquel Welch wild to speak of.

Numerous games of flipper in Milanese bars: *Straight Fluss* (or *Niagara, Quintette, Pocket Ship*, etc.), *game over, tilt, 1-2-3-4-5-6... million*. 'Does Gottlieb exist?', Patrick Waldberg wondered years ago: 'has he a substance, a face, a form? What is known about him is a plain metal stamp, his signature and his legal style, Gottlieb and Co., Chicago Ill... He is ubiquitous with his machines, as invisible as a god, as insinuating as the devil, ready to change the wretched lead of others into gold, in his bottomless safes, he is Gottlieb the Magician, one of those anonymous magicians of today, without prestige, who found their power on rationalized exploitation'. Simonetti considers the Flipper's active principles the same as those of Duchamp's Large Glass. The wish expressed by Duchamp in 1914 that he could do a lucky and unlucky painting comes true for him not by chance, but due to the 'electric pavlovism' of the Bride's domain.

The flood of meanings would seem to debase the notion of art: play, masturbation and coitus interruptus. But in this very corruption the concept of art is confirmed, and is re-cycled precisely in the Euro-American *Fluxus*, into a new 'common sense' which aligns everybody from Natalia LL to Gutuso, to the most thoughtful and to the most histrionic. And Simonetti's closeness to *Fluxus* does not imply alignment, because this closeness, as we have seen, is purely instrumental; but rather, the opportunity to talk about art when ideology would like to see it overtaken by a game. *Ready - Game Table* is, in other words, the *mise-en-scène* within which artistic quality is recognized in its different formulations, in its notorious 'points of view' assembled in their complicity, the invention of the moderns whereby, asking Céline for a loan, 'le moindre obstrué trou du cul se voit Jupiter dans la glace'.

Observing the difference between the ways of thinking, always suggests good scenes. (Howard Hawks)

The person who 'knows how to say' also believes he can convince. At any rate, being wrong does not suit him: the Truth is on his side because he 'explains it'. The only confirmation a sceptical interlocutor may get is that the other person's mouth emits sounds. Which reminds us of Lacan: 'No language would know how to tell the truth about truth': there is no such thing as metalanguage.

Mixed-media is the formula for those who want to convince us to get drunk on very little 'by putting all we've got into it'. This is the ideological cipher on which a generation of customers has been brought up, with a longing for artists that have been banished from the narrow confines of the old specializations.

Simonetti the film-maker talking about western electricity and about the dead in Paris with Frank Lloyd Wright in a frock-coat, an explicit allusion to spectacular architecture against all those who preach the return of the Lumières by forcing invocations in the sense of a legacy to be divided up: 'our' Richter and Picabia, René Clair 'up to a point', Hollywood 'for as long as' it concerns the sociology of stardom and the fanatics of the Sign (of God)... And the same old lesson repeated is that of abominabilism, the 'subterranean', and the 'unofficial', as in the Islamic axiom which says 'I was a hidden and unknown being, therefore I created the world'.

'The cinema as cinema', says Simonetti, 'is nothing but the fantastic extension of the delay which the so-called revolutionary adventures and illusions of culture undergo vis-à-vis reality as a real extension of *capital* in the republic of things sold off immediately in all their modernity'. 'The cinema is in its apostolate period which corresponds, for the history of religions, to their militant period' (Jean Epstein). In the cinema Carl Boehm's clawing insanity in *Peeping Tom* (Lo sguardo che uccide), by Michael Powell. Intoxication taken to the point of crime in order to possess, even if only in the form of a corpse, the body of the spectator, of the inquisitive person who wanted the meaning of the currency he has been using to be disclosed, without realizing that 'by admiring the lustre of a metal he has turned it into chains' (Ezra Pound).

Simonetti's cinema is the spectator's cinema. The choice of film on the newspaper page, the cinema hall, the noises and the 'usherette'... Architecture claiming to be spontaneous like a tangle of astrological destinies, symbol on symbol, 'very high receding skies snail on the treetops, and never quite in obscurity, rarely stary, a wide river pressing against you tumultuous laden with piers: triple rows, ominous, intrusive, banks lost

behind woods cranes....' (Antonio Pizuto). Meanwhile, in the front, from the height of his power, in the vertical shot of Anthony Perkins in *Psycho*, the Camera gives the order to kill. Martin Balsam is only the first victim. Simonetti's cinema, too, 'says so'.

What prayers do men indulge in. (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

For the purposes of art history, the fact that Simonetti happens to be a vegetarian is of little interest. And yet he is, so why not say so? Those invited to luncheons and dinners find him in his apron constructing smells that issue from the kitchen. The waiting guests gulp down wine, red Angera and others, ready to turn into blood. On the walls a period Dada leaflet and black-edged copies of *Osservatori Romani* after the deaths of Pius XII and John XXIII, framed. Books, naturally. A *Bilder Lexicon* (a 1960 edition unfortunately) and an original *Roi Bombance*, though a bound copy (with Depero cloth however) can be singled out. Simonetti the friendly: aggressive in Milan, relaxed in his hermitage on the lake, tender in Genoa, to be verified better elsewhere.

Among paintings and performances, films and concerts, Gianni Emilio Simonetti is established as an artist and, it should be added, on account of the fact that he has read a book or two and that his name appears on the occasional printed page, he would also seem to have the requisites of the philosopher; he is at any rate described in these terms in an article which appeared in the Italian *Vogue* (No. 284/1975). 'Artist-philosopher' is the qualification. His qualities as a host are just sufficient to turn stars back into men. Where Van Gogh's ear and the sheep's heart thrown by Corbière at a woman have gone bad, the less loathsome myths of a precocious genius appear. There were whispers about Simonetti and Nespolo, and they are repeated about Paolini; with the difference that for Simonetti youth is over whilst in the others of his own age group, it has survived. The billiard-cannons of art should be seen as related to these magic spells: 'What does he do, what does he not do?', 'Why does everybody talk about him?', 'Why not talk about him if everyone is talking about him?', and all their monotonous variants 'so that the improved American dream' may spread' and to do so 'a series of other dreams must work together: the Brazilian-Canadian, the Australian-Siberian dreams. Innumerable dreams, grandiose explorations and exploitation' (Toni Arno).

On his doorstep, Simonetti is a giant. In a civilization where everything is private to the point where everybody is deprived of everything, the concept of property is reiterated. The painting which stands out behind him (his, but

not painted by him) reiterates the concept of art. Anyone asking him for an incitement to a partial, fragmented negation will be disappointed. Art and property, like work and society, are confirmed in his *own* tragedy, as in everybody's. Like that of everyone else, he does not 'manufacture sense', or a mythical 'dis-sense', but rather, a reproduction of the sole contemporary 'sense', a positive rationality and nihilism. But beware, as René Guenon used to say, for 'the real term of the tendency which leads men and things towards pure quantity cannot but be the final dissolution of the present world'.

The door closes, in the Taoist allegorism this means holding one's breath. Simonetti has been holding his since 1940. (Translation by Rodney Stringer)

A Piece Made in the Sky

by Barbara Radice

The project. *The sun and Moon Space or Volcano Project* as everybody calls it by now, is a project to which Turrell has been working since 1973, that is since he received a \$ 10.000 Guggenheim grant and could start doing site researches and buying equipment.

He calls it a 'sky piece' because the events involved in the work are the motions of the sun and the phases of the moon throughout the day and the year, the light of the sun and the light of the stars, sky conditions in the atmosphere and certain astronomical events.

For the work he had in mind the first thing to do was to find the right spot. Requirements: it had to be a place existing up in the sky, at least 800 feet above the surrounding terrain, and a place with 300 cloudless days per year (which is not hard in Southern California or Arizona).

After a lot of flying and several months Turrell finds what, also for practical reasons, seems to be the most convenient spot. It is called Roden Crater, from the name of the man that used to own the ranch where it is located. It is a dead volcano in the high desert (ground level 5000 feet), in the middle of the Arizona Painted Desert. Roden Crater, presently owned by the Chambers sisters, will probably be bought by the Dia foundation that will finance Turrell's project. The final budget however will be ready in six months time.

Within the crater of the volcano Turrell will do a piece in the sky that will perform itself throughout the day and night.

Physically it will consist of two spaces: a kiva-like circular chamber set into the bottom of the crater, and the bowl-shaped interior of the crater itself the floor of which meets the ceiling of the circular chamber. The chamber is built in such a way that from it the sky looks completely flat, like a sheet of glass over the opening. Climbing from this chamber to the floor of the crater, as one passes through the illusory flat plane of sky, the sky blows out above. The crater of the volcano will be shaped so that the sky takes the shape of an emispherical dome that makes some sort of a closure continuing the curb of the ground, a dome that at night is sucked by darkness and broadens into a sphere.

It takes a two and a half miles walk to get to the crater. The walk starts off from a house that Turrell is building at the bottom of the volcano, and which will be a kind of restoring place for visitors. 'The reason why I want this house down below — says Turrell — is that I don't want people staying in a motel in Flagstaff or coming down directly from Las Vegas. I want them to sleep down there at least one night, and

Kiva is the Hopi Indian name for special structures used for religious meetings and ceremonies. There are about 25 villages, distributed in two groups in the semidesertic regions of Arizona and New Mexico, that are the remnants or agricultural settlements (called Pueblos by the Spaniards) that reached maximum splendour in the XIIIth century. Amongst these the Hopi belong to the western group. The ancient Pueblos villages were gathered around a central clearing where the kivas were. In the ceremonies that took place in the kivas there was a direct relationship between myth and architectural structure. In the tradition, Iatiku, the God creator, after having taught the people to build the first village, instructed them to build an altar around which the Katchina spirits would arrange themselves ritually as to the four cardinal points. Only as a final act of his revelation, Iatiku teaches them to build around the altar a kiva, the sacred place where the Katchina can rest in the course of their visits to men. So the architectural elements of the kiva call the world of gods and spirits to contact the human. The roof is the Milky Way, the staircase is the rainbow, the bench around the walls is the fog seat on which the Katchina rest. Turrell in his piece uses an architectural structure typical of his cultural environment to enter the volcano crater. So also Turrell's modern kiva is the entrance room to the sky.