

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 volcan 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 volcan 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.

never be more than two, three people at once'.

And when people will finally make it to the crater, they'll find no objects to be seen, no signs, no sounds, nothing.

The operation Turrell has in mind is all structured in the negative, in a recessive and indirect way. Instead of filling-in he empties, instead of proceeding he draws back, instead of pointing out he keeps silent, instead of concentrating he expands, overexposes a few stops, removes all lenses, even throws the camera away. Instead of adding he subtracts and progressively receding he sucks you into an empty, amazing trap. And while the expectation grows of what is still all there to be imagined, you get systematically deconstructed until you find out that the golden pot at the end of the rainbow is really there but that the pot is you and the gold is the sky on which the rainbow is drawn.

Once on the top, very well led but never supported by Turrell, the deconstruction is total and final. If it succeeds that blue or obscure nothingness is worth more than 10,000 Raffaello's madonnas, because Raffaello's madonnas are the dream of the rebelling man, a splendid statement which we may agree to and share but to which we very seldom belong and never adhere. The transparent air, the perfumed air, the light that dies and is born again, the darkness that grows and fades belong to all for real, their rhythms are the ones of the cosmos, their dimension the only one we can relate to.

At this point however it is not clear any more if it is sun, sky and moon that take shape into the work of Turrell or if it is us. If sky and light are the means to shape an experience or if it is our experience that will give shape to sky and light.

The sky

Men have only been able to fly for 70 years and since then the sky is not any more a place above to look to from ground but also a place above from which we can look down. 'The sky — says Turrell — is a different place to live. There I understood it is possible to live on ground and began to dot it'. Jim Turrell, who among other things has organized and is running a flying school in a small center of Arizona, has always thought a lot about the sky, in fact he's been obsessed by the idea of it since he was little. As a child he was sleeping in a room that had three walls made almost entirely of glass and that used to be a veranda where his father was sitting at nights to watch the stars and teach tunes to mocking birds. Because of curfew there were black screens to cover the windows, and Jim would punch holes into them in the daytime, trying to draw the Milky Way observed at nights.

He's been flying for years, which has

not only taught him to think of the planet on a different scale but also to perceive and discern its lights and shadows that continually change forests and valleys, rivers and deserts, mountains and seas, from morning to evening, whether he runs towards the night or turns his back to the sun setting.

All his recent pieces have to do with the sky and the previous ones were dealing with light (artificial light, daylight, the two together). While Turrell was talking to me about Arizona, the Painted Desert, the colors changing in the sky, above the crater, the people that never look up (and rarely down) and all this kind of things, I kept having thoughts of all sorts, one flash after another, that maybe had little to do with what he was saying, illicit thoughts? — I wondered — not so much — I said to myself later, since they came to mind while he was talking.

The sky is transparent, and even more so at a 1000 feet above the Arizona Painted Desert. There are not even clouds to be seen. The darkness of the night is motionless, because no cities nearby are washing the sky with their lights. The stars are focal points of concentration (if you gaze at a star after a very short time all the stars around it die out until you're wrapped by darkness). When there's nothing to be seen outside almost automatically we concentrate inside and our psychic space broadens because our senses are not disturbed by the million interferences of always, by close signals more or less urgent and imposing (also at the radio night broadcasts are clearer and other broadcasts can be heard that during daytime are flooded by million voices). Then — I was saying — it is possible to listen to things that come from very far away, through the thickness of space and the density of time, things that emerge in waves from deserts of quick sands, like coded mirages of all past possibilities and of all future ones. Like mirages they don't have a definite shape and more than thoughts they are emotions, perceptions, relations, incommensurable distances, wadded sounds, voids of sounds, shivers, explosions.

The experience

Comes to mind also what I was hinting at before, that really, more than with the sky, the light, the crater, Turrell works on tensions and perceptions, to shorten distances, to cut the swings of information, to avoid the course of preferential circuits and flat out the curb of experience, to close the circle, compress it into a sphere and then open it into a spiral, to get rid of mediations, all possible mediations.

The medium (sky) is not the message and doesn't even belong to him (it belongs to everybody). The message is not even experience but to live it first hand.

The point is not so much to have clear in mind the physical scale of the new relationship that necessarily we establish with the planet when we watch the sky and consider it a place to live, where the planet lives with all its curbs, waters, clouds, its days and nights, its winters, falls, summers, springs, before and behind, as much as to live it for what it is, a shift of thoughts, of focal points, of priorities, of attitudes.

Turrell was telling me that he wondered for some time why the Western World needed to have this idea of going to the moon. A great idea, but why? The idea came of course also as a consequence of the fact that the Western World had developed a technology sophisticated enough to make the trip possible. But many other things could also come to mind and anyway we're always full of ideas still technically impossible. So what? Turrell was saying that it is very hard for a western man, living in a strongly mediated technological society, to even imagine a relationship with the cosmos other than going into it physically. In other cultures (eastern culture for instance) people don't find hard to believe that we are already in it, now.

Besides, the degree of importance that technology has reached in our lives and the authority with which it imposes itself seducing us with comforts and all sorts of facilities have made necessary to take progressive leaps ahead. But while the possibilities grow of using certain mechanisms, and consequently to do certain things, the space also grows where we're moving and our perspectives should also grow. In order to keep going the mechanisms he's built with his own hands, man must learn not only to deal with them but with the world on which he's living and on which and for which these mechanisms have been put into motion. And on this world we're now flying. And also beyond. We've all heard the voices of the astronauts and seen the blue and green planet floating in the sky. It almost made us sick.

Our civilization helps us to survive, not to live. The support systems to our disposal tend to become, but never are, our only relationship with life. And so instead of using them for living we end up living for them and remain spectators, overwhelmed by our laziness, bureaucratized like our structures (that don't function) layed out like amoebas in basins of warm water, without soul, without real desires and without truths.

But we can't let others get our kicks for us, unless we fancy to be turned into a caravan of zombies.

And if instead of making art to watch it we'd use art — as it was done in the past — to do other things? Instead than for exorcizing ghosts on the walls of stone caves or to cheer the banquets of princes and kings with the story of Troy,

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to take a superwalk in the Painted Desert for instance? Or to start desiring to take it — which is already something? Or to imagine different stories and different spaces that we like so much that we want to live in and for them — which would be the maximum?

I don't know if Jim Turrell has made up all this story of the volcano and the crater with the purpose of taking us for a walk inside and outside, or to provide us with the possibility of weird inspirations, but I really think that he had also in mind something of the sort.

Turrell's project involves at least two ideas. The idea of a different scale in our relationship with the planet that involves seeing it as a whole, a collage of different countries, different habits, different colors, different people (possibly dangerous), where all these different parts make sense precisely as parts of the collage, not as separate pieces of paper in themselves, green or blue, and then the necessity, *urgent*, that each of us, personally, individually, stubbornly, should take his own personal responsibilities to establish, on his size of bare human being, his relationship with life, without mediating it as ever desperately through the media, but learning to feel, inside with the body and outside straight on the skin, with all the 5 or 6 senses, things and people. All this, which is but the program of an attitude, continuing to do what we're doing already but always adhering to things like sponges.

I'm not advertising some kind of naturalism or a hippy revival, nor is Turrell. We don't need to throw technology and the media in the bin. Let's keep them in mind and at hand, because they're good to use, but let's also recognize them for what they are, mobile and inconstant reference points to be used in the same way that we use aspirin for a headache, to fly to San Diego to visit our aunt or to brush our shoes. ■

Centre Beaubourg

par Jean-Marc Poinot

Un président éclairé

Avant de vous relater dans le détail la petite histoire de Beaubourg, j'aimerais rappeler où et comment est née cette idée. Deux histoires se rencontrent: celle d'un homme d'état et celle des acteurs de la vie artistique française.

L'homme d'état, Georges Pompidou, était premier ministre lorsque se passèrent les événements de 1968. Le souvenir d'une intense vie culturelle par laquelle il avait commencé sa vie professionnelle l'avait conduit à garder un jardin secret. Ce fut entre autres une collection personnelle élaborée avec l'aide de quelques marchands attentifs à l'avant-garde, puis lorsque les suffrages des Français l'élirent président de la République le projet d'un grand centre culturel contemporain.

A l'époque de sa présence au pouvoir, la France devait plutôt gérer le décalage social et culturel vis à vis de sa transformation économique que les problèmes plus complexes tant économiques qu'idéologiques qui se présentent aujourd'hui. Mai 1968 réclamait un partage plus juste des richesses économiques et culturelles alors que les gouvernants et ceux qui les soutenaient voulaient profiter de la faible ponction des travailleurs sur les biens créés pour rendre irréversible et total le développement moderniste. Il ne faut pas oublier en effet que Pompidou fut un ardent promoteur du nouveau quartier de La Défense à l'Ouest de Paris, et des Halles en son centre, tout comme il dut négocier les accords de Grenelle. Pour avoir du lâcher du lest, il savait combien il était nécessaire d'aller très vite dans les autres opérations qu'il entreprenait ou soutenait.

D'un réalisme paysan pour ses électeurs, Georges Pompidou était un moderniste acharné dans la politique.

Mais la bonne volonté du prince n'aurait pas trouvé de bras pour construire son monument si Paris ne s'était lentement réveillé de sa torpeur. Or ce relent d'activité ne vient pas toujours d'en haut. Bien sur le Musée National d'Art Moderne nourrissait comme toute institution des projets d'avenir: aménagements, nouveaux bâtiments, etc..., mais ce ne pouvait être l'organisme qui avait le plus contribué à tuer dans l'oeuf les formes d'art nouvelles qui allait prendre la tête de la révolte. Claude Mollard dans son livre récemment publié, *L'enjeu du Centre Georges Pompidou*, nous donne quelques explications. Il remonte à la création du Musée du Luxembourg et du Musée des Arts Décoratifs, mais il remarque également « l'insuffisance du système éducatif français à éveiller les jeunes au monde de la création sensible » et surtout le fait que « depuis la fin de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale Paris a perdu son rôle central dans la création artistique contemporaine ». Ces mots que l'on trouve aujourd'hui sous sa plume apparurent pour la première fois dans les colonnes des premiers numéros d'*Opus International* en 1967 et depuis quelques années déjà dans les conversations entre artistes.

Ils ne se plaindront pas sans raisons. Le montant des exportations de peintures originales de moins de cent ans était pas-

sé de 2,25 millions de francs en 1965 à 1,80 millions en 1967, chiffre qui ne sera pas dépassé avant 1970, malgré une inflation importante. Bien sur, ces chiffres provenant de l'administration des douanes sont sous-estimés, mais ils indiquent une tendance que l'on ressentait avec angoisse dans les ateliers. Intéressante ou non la peinture peinte en 1966 n'était pas exposée, ne bénéficiait que de peu d'articles, et l'existence même de ses auteurs n'était pas soupçonnée du public. Voilà pourquoi une situation aussi catastrophique conduisit certains à agir. Il serait faux de dire que l'initiative fut exclusivement privée, elle vint aussi de l'administration, non des responsables traditionnels, mais de nouveaux venus.

Ainsi s'établit en 1967-68 un dialogue entre l'ARC, le CNAC, quelques revues et galeries. Ce sont ces interlocuteurs qui s'interpelleront avec vivacité jusqu'à ce que le bâtiment du Centre commence à sortir du sol et que son patron commence à embaucher les uns et à acheter les oeuvres des autres. Autrement dit avant que Pompidou ne prenne sa décision, le milieu artistique français et certaines de ses institutions étaient prêts pour un développement de leur activités. Prêts idéologiquement puisqu'ils avaient réclamé un rôle et un soutien accru de l'état et prêts à produire. L'idée de Pompidou tombait au bon moment même si son cheminement avait été fort différent de celui des premiers concernés.

En effet, comme j'ai déjà eu l'occasion de le signaler dans ces colonnes, les différents domaines de la vie culturelle française ont commencé à se préoccuper d'art contemporain à partir de 1967-1968. En premier lieu l'enseignement universitaire qui servit à former un certain nombre d'étudiants aujourd'hui employés à Beaubourg, suivi par les écoles des Beaux Arts et des organismes divers. La poignée d'hommes qui commença ce travail se trouve aujourd'hui dispersée mais forte de ceux qu'elle a préparés à une participation active à la vie artistique. Pour une fois les analyses des intellectuels, des artistes, des marchands et du chef de l'Etat conduisaient à des décisions similaires. Au manque criant de moyens, Pompidou venait de donner une réponse disproportionnée par rapport à l'état antérieur, bien qu'insuffisante par son caractère ponctuel. Si, dès les débuts ce projet fut critiqué, il semble que cette levée de boucliers est moins due à une hostilité réelle qu'à la défense d'intérêts acquis de longue date et à des luttes d'influence pour infléchir le projet dans tel ou tel sens.

Une décision très vite suivie d'effet

Georges Pompidou prit sa décision en 1969. Il voulait doter Paris d'un centre culturel digne de lui et résolument tourné vers l'avenir. Il trouve alors sur son bureau quelques vieux dossiers: celui du projet d'un musée du XXème siècle en-