

“SNAGS IN PALLADIO”: THE CHILLY PROPORTIONS OF SEDUCTIVE ENCHANTMENT OF THE BODY.

By Elisabetta Pozzetti

Michele Manzini's backlighting is amazing. It is both Apollonian and Dionysian, devoted to rational thought and yet extraordinarily prone to irrational impulses.

Eyes like needles spike thought in the vast mazes of knowledge, and evolve a shift from design to architecture, art, and philosophical thought. The depth of his gaze is like the light of a smile that suddenly calms when caught by fierce illumination. He has studied landscape by opposing the concept of instability and conflict to harmony. He is not interested in representing but, rather, of presenting: an expression can live without any physical manifestation as long as it has the visionary force of its concept. Landscapes, like places, become situations in which the anthropic element generates interactions able to shake preconceptions and prejudices. Reality is a site to be explored in all its contradictions, uneasily balanced, as it is, between Cartesian clarity and visceral pathos. The latest action he has been involved in has been "Snags in Palladio", in which his architectural side has related the mathematics of Palladian proportions to the imperfect and exciting perfection of the body.

MICHELE, LET'S START FROM THE TITLE. WHAT DOES IT MEAN AND WHY IS IT IN ENGLISH?

In Italian snags could be translated by the word "inciampo". A snag is one of the many forms of error, and error is one of the many ways in which we can experience knowledge. Since antiquity a subject who is knowledgeable is a subject who has no body, who has renounced the body and thus keeps his distance from the errors that, as Plato said, are caused by the "barbaric slush" of our desires, passions, and needs. According to me this has been an insuperable problem in the history of Western thought which has always tried to deal with the same problem: how to be freed from the body and the experience of the body.

"Snags" is a word that, differently from the corresponding word in Italian, has a different musicality and sensuality when it is pronounced. I was very interested in the contrast between semantic meanings articulated in this way, and such a simple harmonic pronunciation.

IS COMPARING YOURSELF TO PALLADIO PRESUMPTUOUS OR NECESSARY?

I carry out my projects knowing that it is necessary to overcome those oppositions that still lead us to consider the history of thought in terms of evolution-progress or, on the contrary, devolution-regress.

I considered Palladio's work to have a "retroactive" attitude, one in which the field of inquiry is never given in a clear and definite manner but is structured as a continuous series of anticipations and reconstructions.

Jan Laplanche held that two traumas are necessary in order to make one. An event is registered only as the result of another that re-codifies it; we arrive at what we are only through postponed actions. I believe this analogy often pervades my works. A continuous process of pushes ahead and regressions, an articulated system of anticipated futures and recomposed pasts. A delayed action that overturns any kind of banal scheme of

before and after, cause and effect, origin and repetition.

From this viewpoint, even when my thought is confronted with the past it always returns from the future and is put into perspective by my works in the present. This bizarre temporality often accompanies my work.

DOES THE FEMALE BODY ACT AS A TOOL FOR UNHINGING THE MOTIONLESS PERFECTION OF PALLADIAN ARCHITECTURE?

The worlds inhabited by the body, senses, and passions have often been visited by artists and poets. However, these travellers have always been attracted by two horizons. On the one hand, there is the wish to invade those places with a harmony consisting of order and measure and, on the other hand, there is the irresistible seduction of darkness: often Conrad and Sade were lost in the darkness. On the one side is a possible yet always unobtainable happiness, and on the other the brink of an unfathomable abyss. To our eyes both these worlds seem equivalent, equally terrible and frightening because words do not exist for either of them: everything seems mute and unrepresentable. Perhaps it is this awareness of precariousness that can help us to understand that there are other paths apart from those that have been historically followed. That it is possible to translate what is unrepresentable into a language and sense.

IN ELABORATING YOUR WORK THE TEXT IS A BASIC ELEMENT. BEFORE ARRIVING AT A COMPLETED WORK YOU NEED TO FACE UP TO WRITING, AND THIS IS BOTH A MEANS OF ANALYSIS BUT ALSO OF AN INNER AND INTELLECTUAL CLARIFICATION. IN "SNAGS IN PALLADIO" I SEEMS TO ME THAT THE WRITING HAS GAINED THE UPPER HAND OVER THE ACTION... IN THIS ROLE AS A DIRECTOR, HAVE YOU PERFECTED DIFFERENT WAYS OF APPROACH?

I have always devoted myself to theoretical writings in a humble way and, perhaps, with an approach that is very different from the usual one. I have always considered them as the scaffolding that we use for construction but which afterwards it is convenient to remove. As far as I am concerned, what is destined to remain is not the theory but the work. The judgment that theoretical writing aims for, at least in art, concerns this ability to bear fruit: its fertility rather than its truth. And this work is no exception. I shared the texts of the project with all those who have collaborated with me, in particular with the performers with whom I talked a great deal about various themes. There were very many meetings before beginning the research into gestures. I can say that together we found a slender thread which we could follow.

THE ACTION IS DIVIDED INTO FIVE SCENES: SYMMETRIES, DOMESTIC SPACE, ALLEGORIES, THRESHOLDS, AND MEASUREMENTS. DOES THIS ARTICULATION ANSWER TO A NARRATIVE NEED?

More than a narrative I would speak of an attempt to define a "plot". The plot is simply what lies between the story and its telling. It is a device that attracts: it promises the revelation of a meaning that is late to arrive, that pushes itself towards the moment when, perhaps, the veil will be taken from our eyes, the moment when we know who the guilty party is. It continually pushes towards knowledge. In this sense, the plot is involved with a wider aspect of "desire" and this interests me a lot.

IN "SNAGS IN PALLADIO" YOU HAVE CREATED A DIALOGUE BETWEEN DIFFERENT ARTS: ARCHITECTURE, VIDEO-ART, PHOTOGRAPHY, MUSIC, AND DANCE. IS THE RESULT A HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIP OR DID THIS DIFFERENCE LEAD TO A DISSONANT EXPRESSIVE FORCE?

In these times I think we have begun to glimpse the need to overcome old ways of representing reality. One possibility is that images of thought, images that have been decisive for modernity, group together into constellations and transform themselves by overcoming the idea of metaphors to become "figures". In figures, the fragments of the world surrounding us are not recomposed into a conciliating and decisive image but remain partial, portions. And it is here that the old "me the conservative" idea, the self of habitual intelligence as Proust called it, can give up its power and allow the emergence of a complex and plural subject. Only the figure, as Musil wrote, has the possibility of remaining undecided between various worlds, of making the difference visible and also offering it the experience of sense and pathos. The figure is the establishment of another thought. A thought that runs through the "images" and concepts, and retains the two "half truths" of modernity: the abstraction of the concept and what, throughout the history of thought, have been defined as myths, analogies, and metaphors.

AFTER PALLADIO, WHAT OTHER ARCHITECT FROM THE PAST WILL YOU DISTURB? IF, OF COURSE, YOU WANT TO LET US KNOW...

I don't know yet. My work always has an "endogenous" origin. If my works need a space, I choose it with great care because for me it becomes a material I can work with. For the time being, I can tell you that I am considering various projects and for some of these I foresee a dialogue with a space with strong architectural implications.

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