

# The Memory of Space

by Lorenzo Beneditti

*"Nous vivons dans l'espace, dans ces espaces, dans ces villes, dans ces campagnes, dans ces couloirs, dans ces jardins. Cela nous semble évident. Peut-être cela devrait-il être effectivement évident. Mais cela n'est pas évident, cela ne va pas de soi." [1]*

Georges Perec

Lo spazio dell'immagine [The Space of the Image] – held at Foligno in 1967 – was the first great exhibition in Italy to celebrate environmental installation as a new dominant technique in artistic research. More than forty years later, this exhibition remains relevant for the direct line that connects it to the work of Marco Fedele di Catrano and his examination of the relationship between image and space.

This relationship analyzes the crisis of images in our historical period, constantly devalued through their use by the mass media and for the multimedia capabilities of new technologies, which have brought us in recent years to consider the image in its relation to the exhibition space. It is an attitude which is in contrast to a positivist trend during the 1990s, and which in this generation has developed as a critical aspect. Marco Fedele di Catrano interprets the crisis of images within a physical space through the parallelism of the technique of mounting. The crisis of images is thus interpreted through its transposition into an environmental dimension. In his artistic research we can observe an elaboration on the theme of a tautology of place. The place is duplicated assuming only the topographical semblance of its place of origin.

Through the combination of shape-images and shape-places, Fedele di Catrano's work is characterized by the concept of the superimposition of spaces in which the use of photographic techniques within an exhibition space is explored. This attention to physical place and to the 'supporting' structure also indicates his inclination to view the wall as an integral part of the work. Fedele di Catrano's photographs are thus amplified by their expository structures, which are themselves sculptures or, better yet, spaces. This boundary between sculpture and installation is defined by the projection of shapes within a space, and in the construction of architectural elements as though they were images. Sometimes his environmental installations are reproduced photographically, in a dialog between image and space which often elevates their material and physical aspects. This process, after having begun as a photographic conception of a space, thus seems to come full circle.

In Side-Back-Walk (2010), installed in Munich at RSTR#, the artist carries out a dialog between private and public dimensions. Between the semi-private space of an apartment building and the public space of a sidewalk, between the public dimensions of an exhibition and the private ones of his own body: it is a dialog between various contexts, through the use of doors to construct a platform transformed into a lay altar from which the work C.A. Tense (2010) can be observed, through the photograph of a drawing by Carla Accardi drawn, and subsequently tattooed, directly on the artist's arm. In these two works the transformation of architectural elements as 'communicating' structures can be seen. The doors of the space are transformed from their functional identity of opening and closing into the functional situation of a platform. The body becomes the support for an artistic sign. The connection between

the body in movement and static space is created through photography – as a membrane between body and space, between sign and symbol. This relationship between space, photography and surface is also evident in *Exchange*, realized at the American Academy of Rome in 2008.

The artist plays with the balance between symbols and contexts. Removing the plaster from the walls of the exhibition space he exposed the stars which make up the symbol of the European Union. The direct intervention on the walls of the exhibition caused the viewer to reflect upon the territorial and physical nature of the context that audience was presented with. Fedele di Catrano works on the 'skin' of the wall, lifting the material as if it were a sculpture, transforming the space into both object and image. A photograph of the intervention on the wall becomes, in turn, a separate work that decontextualizes its place of origin.

One of the fundamental concepts of recent modern art is its dialectical relationship with the exhibition space. From the loss of the museum's and the frame's rhetorical forms as the limits of a work, art has advanced, creating an increasingly accentuated osmosis between container and contained. And it is the elimination of the frame which brings us to this tension between image and space, a tension that in the work of Fedele di Catrano is constantly balanced by the relationship of the photographic image with the internal space into which it is translated. Fedele di Catrano, besides creating a dialog between work and place, creates a memory of the place in which a work was previously exhibited. An example of this is the reconstruction of his living space in the exhibition space of Berlin (*North South Ovest East*, 2007), which was taken and transformed repeatedly in other exhibition spaces, each time creating a memory of the place in which it was realized (*Perpetuum Mobile*, Rome, 2007; *So Far So West*, Lausanne, 2009). The first thing created in a new place is the artist's studio which, inside the exhibition space, attempts to show its place of origin. This leads to the duplication of the exhibition space and the exhibited space, one space representing the present and the other the memory of another space. Making the two spaces coexist creates a conflict in the concept of the present which recalls the Bergsonian conception of *déjà-vu* as a present corruption of the past. One space is the true 'exhibition' space while the other two are virtual 'exhibited' spaces. The similarity between the two virtual spaces creates a state of irrationality. The sensation of 'being' in three places simultaneously shows the fusion of the public context, the exhibition context, and the private context of the artist's studio.

One finds oneself confronted by the dialectic of the public and private space, the artist's studio and its dimensions. This dynamic evolves through showing and hiding. In this sense the work of superimposing different spaces has a political connotation which refers to the 'public' dimension of the space. The topographical geometries of north and south, east and west have always had political considerations in our history which force us to use architectures of memory that, with the passage of time, interweave and create increasingly complex structures. It is in this weaving of architectural memories that we must imagine the installations of Marco Fedele di Catrano, intent on showing us the physical contradictions inherent in the translation of a memory to a space.

1. *"We live in space: in spaces, in towns, in the countryside, in corridors, in gardens. This seems self-evident to us. Perhaps it should be self-evident. But it is not self-evident, it does not go without saying."*