

In questo libro ho chiesto a molti dei protagonisti del "primo autunno" di scrivere del loro passaggio a Belgrave Square: volevo cronache di un'esperienza. Quasi tutti quelli che han scritto sono stati ospiti a casa mia, abbiamo condiviso le giornate, parlato come non era mai successo prima, o non succedeva da tempo. (...) Adesso molti progetti in un Istituto rinnovato, efficiente, accogliente: andremo avanti con tutte le arti, con le grandi e le piccole istituzioni britanniche, quindi Botticelli al V&A, Giorgione alla Royal Academy, l'archeologia siciliana al British e all'Ashmolean. Molto spazio per la letteratura, il centenario di Bassani e della Ginzburg e un convegno sulla tradizione ebraica della letteratura italiana. Per il cinema, un particolare focus sui cinquant'anni dell'uscita di *Blow up*, girato proprio a Londra da Michelangelo Antonioni. Tanta arte contemporanea, teatro, musica, danza, architettura e tanto osservare, ospitare, riseminare, essere pronti a capire e interpretare i cambiamenti repentini e i movimenti lenti: entrambi sono importanti, decisivi.

Marco Delogu



Quodlibet Primo Autunno Conversazioni a Belgrave Square



Primo Autunno
Conversazioni a Belgrave Square
a cura di Marco Delogu

Quodlibet

Bamba Issa
Titti Maschietto

C'era una volta, prima dell'anno 1000, una spiaggia ad arco, fra mare e monti, lunga 40 km. Per i pochissimi viandanti, quella striscia di sabbia chiara e finissima rappresentava soltanto una via meno pericolosa per spostarsi da nord a sud, magari a cavallo. Dieci secoli dopo, quella spiaggia aveva un nome, Versilia, ma non era molto cambiata: fra dune, rari cespugli spinosi e tamerici, greggi e pastori, freschi di transumanza, e, in ore più comode, qualche poeta e qualche artista in pieno raptus creativo, qualche gagà in tenuta da spiaggia, cioè in vestaglia di seta blu, e naturalmente alcune bellissime donne.

Improvvisamente, un giorno d'estate degli anni trenta, un suono potente, mai sentito prima, squarcia il sottofondo abituale ed un idrovolante plana sulle onde fino alla riva e prosegue sui rulli disposti da un uomo, che oggi chiameremmo bagnino, che ha legato la punta del velivolo ad una barra da traino, e ora urla ai bovi e fa schioccare la lingua come se fosse una frusta. Un minuto dopo c'è di nuovo silenzio: l'idrovolante è al coperto, sotto le capriate di un capannone fra le dune e ai bordi di una pineta che fa indovinare la presenza di una villa. Dall'idrovolante è sceso il pilota, Edoardo Agnelli, è già entrato nella villa accompagnato dalle grida festose di tanti bambini vestiti alla marinara. Sarà così più o meno per quarant'anni, in cui Edoardo muore precipitando con il suo idrovolante vicino a Genova, ed i bambini della numerosa famiglia Agnelli, ormai cresciuti e non più vestiti alla marinara, torneranno ogni estate nella loro grande villa, grande come un albergo, e scenderanno in spiaggia, non visti, attraverso un sottopassaggio ottenuto quando, per disposizione del Duce, villa e spiaggia erano rimaste separate dal grande viale lungomare. Al mare si riparavano in quel capannone che ora conteneva attrezzi da spiaggia e pattini, aveva un bar vista mare e, sul retro, docce artigianali che già funzionavano come idromassaggi.

Ma siamo ormai alle soglie degli anni settanta, e la notizia scuote la comunità di Forte dei Marmi come una bomba: *gli Agnelli se ne vanno, hanno venduto la Villa!* È vero, hanno venduto, villa e spiaggia, con il capannone, e perfino il pattino gigante con il trampolino per i bambini. Ha comprato Nino Maschietto, gestore dell'Augustus, l'unico cinque stelle della costa, e villa Agnelli diventerà la sua perla: sarà l'Augustus Lido, ma ne conserverà gelosamente lo stile e l'atmosfera. Invece il capannone sulla spiaggia, nell'estate 1969, si trasformò in una discoteca d'avanguardia! Il nome, Bamba Issa, un'oasi magica, da un racconto di Walt Disney, con la speciale sabbia rossa contenuta nella clessidra che il vecchio zio Paperone usa ogni mattina per cuocersi l'uovo.

La clessidra a corto di sabbia non funziona e tutti gli affari del vecchio miliardario rischiano di fallire. Paperino e i nipotini volano in Africa, rintracciano l'oasi e dopo mille difficoltà riempiono la clessidra e salvano l'impero del vecchio avaro. Una perfetta parabola del capitalismo e del colonialismo, che la discoteca raccontava apparendo come un caravanserraglio-occidentale, pieno di cammelli-migranti, di tappeti-cuscini, di clessidre-damigiane luminose e di sabbia-polistirolo rossa fresca ogni sera...

Gli autori, ideatori e costruttori furono i componenti del gruppo UFO, studenti di architettura a Firenze, fondato nel 1967 da Carlo Bachi, Lapo Binazzi, Patrizia Cammeo, Riccardo Foresi ed il sottoscritto, Titti Maschietto. La discoteca fu la prima del genere in Versilia, ed entrava in competizione con formidabili club, quali la Bussola e la Capannina, che ogni estate offrivano musica dal vivo ed eventi straordinari con i grandi nomi dello *show business*.

Bamba Issa fu competitiva in tanta concorrenza, rimase aperta tre

anni, cambiando ogni stagione l'allestimento, ma non il tema conduttore di un'Africa misteriosa, ricchissima, eppure debole e sfruttata. Bamba Issa nasceva, anno più anno meno, sulla scia dei Piper di Roma e di Torino. Anche il Mach 2 e lo Space Electronic di Firenze, il Bang Bang di Milano, l'Altro Mondo a Rimini, sono disegnati da gruppi di giovani architetti, già riconosciuti come *radicali*. Alla Triennale di Milano del 1968 partecipavano sia il gruppo Strum, sia il gruppo UFO. Ma, oltre a queste premesse, Bamba Issa fu l'unica ad essere gestita dagli stessi creatori, con formule innovative. Tutti i vinili furono comprati a Londra, in un raid memorabile di un giorno, il giorno prima dell'apertura. Dalla sua posizione dominante sul tappeto volante del Bamba Issa, sotto il tetto dell'ex capannone degli Agnelli, il DJ Piccio Raffanini sfornava musica inedita. Il mondo non era ancora globale, le *new entry* appena arrivate dalla *swinging London* crearono un irresistibile fenomeno mondano e culturale, ed un brivido di modernità scosse la compassata Versilia.

design as a means to challenge the bromidic political landscape and to combat the domination of the 'machine aesthetic'. Gruppo 9999, Superstudio, UFO and others were among those designers. Their shared desire to challenge the modernist ideas that had dominated design thinking and practice of previous years led to a movement known as Radical Design - a movement that came to define Italian design in the 1960s and the 1970s.

Radical Design was born in the industrial north of Italy but it was not concerned with commercial success. Its founders, nurtured in the Florence University's Architecture Department (notably on a disco design course taught by Leonardo Savioli in 1966 - 1967) sought to root design from its traditional context and re-establish its role in society. This movement was deliberately subversive: it was exaggerated, playful and experimental in its function. It was often politically charged, critically engaging with mass consumerism, urban infrastructure, ecology, technology and the dominance of American modernist utopian thought drew inspiration from the power it perceived technology and modernism to have over everyday life, from observing developments in space exploration, and from the cultural theories of Marshall McLuhan.

The leading Room exhibition *Radical Disco: Architecture and Nightlife in Italy, 1965-1970* explores the relationship between architecture and nightlife in Italy during the 1960s and 1970s. These years saw a number of discotheques open across Italy, including several designed by architects of Radical Design. These architects saw discos as a new space for multidisciplinary experimentation and creative liberation.

Pipers, named after the first such venue, which opened in Rome in 1965, they were some of the only built examples of Radical architecture. These pioneering projects invited innovations in art, architecture, music, theatre and technology. Participants included Gruppo Strum who designed both *La Fine del Mondo* in Turin (1966) and *L'Altro* in Rimini (1968). Florence was home to Superstudio's *Mach 2* (1967) and Gruppo Spazio Elettronico (1969). Inspired by New York's Electric Circus club and Marshall McLuhan's media theories, Spazio Elettronico hosted everything from performances by the theatre to a vegetable garden. In Milan Ugo La Pietra designed *Bang Bang* (1968), entered through a boutique, while on the Tuscan coast Gruppo UFO designed *Bamba Issa* (1969), a Mickey Mouse-inspired disco.

When Radical Design's legacy is being reconsidered and nightclubs are closing in the UK, this exhibition explores the relationship between avant-garde architecture and everyday life, and its significance today.

Emilio Ambasz, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape: Achievements and Problems of Italian Architecture*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1972.

Bamba Issa
In a time, before the year 1,000, there was an arch-shaped beach, 40 kilometres long, between the sea and the hills. For the very few wayfarers, that strip of white and fine sand represented only a less dangerous road to move from North to South,

possibly on horse. Ten centuries later, the beach had a name, Versilia, but had not changed much. It had dunes, rare thorny bushes and tamarisks, flocks of sheep and shepherds, freshly arrived from their transhumance. And also, during more amenable hours, a few poets and artists at the height of their creative bursts, a few dandies in their beach gear - that is, donning blue silk dressing gowns - and naturally several unbelievably beautiful women.

All of a sudden, on a summer day in the thirties, a powerful sound, never heard before, pierces the usual background noise and a seaplane lands on the waves, reaches the coast and continues on the rolling logs laid by a man, whom today we would call a lifeguard, who has tied the tip of the aircraft to a towing pole. He then shouts to the oxen and makes his tongue crack as if it were a whip. Silence returns a minute later. The airplane is indoors, under the trusses of a hangar in between the dunes and on the edge of a pine grove that would have one suspect the presence of a villa. Edoardo Agnelli, the pilot, has alighted from the plane and has already entered the villa, accompanied by the merry cries of many children dressed in sailor suits. It will remain this way for about forty years, during which Edoardo dies crashing his airplane near Genova and the children of the big Agnelli family, by now grown-up and no longer dressed in tailor suits, return every summer to their great villa, as big as a hotel, and descend to the beach, unseen, through an underpass obtained at a time when, by Mussolini's orders, the villa and the beach had been separated by the long sea promenade. Once at the sea, they took refuge in the hangar that now contained beach tools and paddle boats, and also comprised a café with a seaside view and artisanal showers at the back, that functioned already as water massages.

Now we are already at the threshold of the seventies, and the news rocks the community of Forte dei Marmi as a bomb: *the Agnelli are leaving, they have sold the Villa!* It is true, they have sold everything, the villa and the beach, together with the hangar, and even the giant paddle boat with the children's springboard. Nino Maschietto, the manager of the Augustus, the only five star hotel along the coast, has bought everything, and Villa Agnelli will become his gem. It will turn into the Augustus Lido, but will jealously preserve the style and atmosphere of the villa. The hangar on the beach, instead, was transformed into an avant-garde discotheque in 1969! Its name, *Bamba Issa*, comes from a short story by Walt Disney. It denotes a magical oasis, full of the special red sand contained in old Scrooge McDuck's hourglass, that he uses to time the cooking of his egg every morning.

When the sand finally runs out, the hourglass stops working and all the business deals of the old billionaire are on the brink of failure. Donald Duck and his nephews fly to Africa, track down the oasis and, after overcoming a thousand obstacles, fill the hourglass, saving the financial empire of the stingy old man. A perfect parable of capitalism and colonialism, that the discotheque recounted with its appearance as a Western-caravanserai, full of camel-migrants, carpet-cushions, hourglass-bright alcohol jugs, and fresh red sand-polystyrene every evening...

The authors, investors and constructors of *Bamba Issa* were the members of the UFO group, composed by students of architecture at Florence University and founded by Carlo Bachi, Lapo Binazzi, Patrizia Cammeo, Riccardo Foresi and Titti Maschietto, myself, in 1967. The discotheque was the first of its kind in Versilia and competed with formidable clubs, such as *La Bussola* and *La Capannina*, that offered live music and extraordinary events featuring the great stars of the *show biz* every summer. *Bamba Issa* was quite

e, given the level of competition, and stayed open for almost three years. Its set-
d every season, but its leitmotiv did not: it remained a mysterious, incredibly
eak and exploited Africa. Bamba Issa was born, more or less, on the trail of the
s in Rome and Turin. Mach 2 and Space Electronic in Florence, Bang Bang in
l'Altro Mondo in Rimini were likewise designed by groups of young architects,
arked as *radicals*. Both the Strum group and the UFO group took part in the
nnial in 1968. But beyond these facts, Bamba Issa was the only disco managed
creators, in innovative ways. All the disco's vinyls were bought in London the
its opening, on a memorable day-long raid. DJ Piccio Raffanini churned out
from his domineering position atop Bamba Issa's flying carpet, under the roof
angar of the Agnelli. The world was not global yet. The *new entries* that had just
m *swinging London* created an irresistible socialite and cultural phenomenon,
er of modernity shook old fashioned Versilia.

i
Baldassarri

7th century the English have loved and collected Carlo Dolci like few other Italian
ue to the beauty of his dazzling, painstakingly executed work. One of his
ces is in the National Gallery in London: *The Adoration of the Kings* (1649), in which
icted himself on the far left, wearing a cap. He was born in Florence in 1616 and
ed his artistic career by painting portraits, of which he was a true master,
ly displaying surprising modernity and skill. The painting of Ainolfo de' Bardi,
Malta, immortalized *en plein air* by the 16-year-old Dolci in the magnificent canvas
Uffizi, is so polished and glazed as to remove him from reality, celebrating instead
ce and the sumptuousness of his luxurious garments, which testify to his rank. His
hes its pinnacle in the metaphorical *Portrait of Claudia Felicitas as Galla Placidia* in
e Gallery in Florence (signed and dated 1675), which associates the two
s in the Church's fight against heresy. As his career progressed, Dolci's innate
talent appears progressively well concealed beneath glazed brushstrokes and an
abstract light, in keeping with his wish to bring his figures ever closer to God. Dolci
ly refined *pictor christianus*, aware of the value of the great tradition of the past. He
nined not to sever ties with it, choosing instead to work in its wake, but elevating
in his own manner rather than passively adapting to it. It is no coincidence that his
e been fiercely contended by almost all the members of the ruling Medici family, the
nobility, and cultured and wealthy Englishmen (from the diplomat John Finch to
of Burghley House and Lord Methuen of Corsham Court), and even by the Polish
Jan Sobiepan Zamoyski. The use of paintings, and even drawings, as a vehicle of
struction is a fundamental aspect of Dolci's work. However, to dismiss him as a
ous painter would be to underestimate his aesthetic message: the painstaking
ne lengthy process of execution, the precious colours, the materials used
d shell gold and lapis lazuli) and the dazzling light make his paintings timeless
an extreme approach that refers explicitly to a pre-Renaissance style, but it also
s a sincere ethic and iron discipline. In his *Self-Portrait* (1674), now in the Uffizi,

Dolci has chosen to paint himself underscoring the punctiliousness of his profession as an
artist. At a time in which rapidly executed paintings were enjoying increasing popularity with
patrons, Dolci purposely went against the tide, making himself a champion of an "old", 16th-
century style of naturalistic vision, impervious to the dynamic, "modern", already 18th-century
style of painting that was so fashionable.

L'Ultima Nicchia

Chiara Nano

Rome can be hostile. Both those who were born and grew up here, like me, and those who
choose it as their home know this. Even a tourist may sense it. A certain inclination towards
flânerie bonds me and Giuseppe Ducrot. This practice has brought us both to concentrate
our gaze on specific places in the city.

Several years ago, it seemed natural to me to cross the threshold of Giuseppe's studio, just
as I had crossed that of other artists during my wanderings. However, that gesture carried an
important novelty. The discovery of this sculptor, busy in a constant hand-to-hand fight with
matter, tirelessly liberating energy by hitting his small mallet and chisel, fixed on the details in
the clay, has been enlightening for me.

I remember very well how *L'Ultima Nicchia* [The Last Niche] began. Ducrot had just opened a
bigger studio. I went to seem him. As soon as I got beyond the door, I was obliged to raise my
chin: the metal cage of an enormous statue left little space for me to manoeuvre. The head of
the Saint crashed into the ceiling and Giuseppe, with his lucid gaze, was entertaining the
crazy possibility of making a hole in the roof so as to make the [statue's] cranium fit
completely. There were blocks of clay scattered all over the floor.

I had already seen Giuseppe realise large size sculptures, but this time everything was
different. He seemed to have picked up an exciting challenge, certainly not devoid of
risks. The external niche in which Saint Hannibal Maria di Francia would have been
installed was much less deep than the others. It had fifty centimetres less to offer a five
metre and a half tall statue, which was to be placed next to the Arch of the Bells in Saint
Peter's Basilica in the Vatican.

I took the risk: "this story must be told". His eyes flashed and he was silent for a second: "You
do it". Then he gave me a small video camera, stained with dry clay, one of those low-
definition family film thingies from the nineties. I turned the camera on and started filming. I
couldn't see much with that lens, but I told myself that the camera was fine for describing the
chaos in front of me. From that moment onwards, I followed every possible step towards
isolating and eliminating the superfluous, adopting a different shooting technique every time.
I was interested in catching the transformation of matter, at every single stage: from clay, to
chalk and resin, to marble. On the day that I began shooting I didn't know exactly when I
would have finished. Giuseppe Ducrot and I worked side by side for three years and a half.
Nonetheless, considering the length of the project, I shot very few hours. There was no
budget, so I had to economise to the utmost. I didn't know who might have been interested in
such a film, but I would repeat everything again today. And I know that Giuseppe, even
though he stated the opposite during the shoot, would be glad to make such a large scale
sculpture statue once again. Or an even larger one.