# Art

*Francesco Moschini*

The most striking feature among the qualities of artistic work that have marked recent years of study, seems to be both the concept and output of "relational aesthetics". A critical interpretation that often seems to recur in contemporary artists' initiatives but that, above all, returns periodically to put a spoke in the wheel of the whole art world, a world that has adopted and promoted a sort of unwritten rule that gives assistance to the development and functions of contemporary art, that gives support to work that is "strongly social" in style (by "social" meaning every field of concrete human activity) and has altered and facilitated the rapid evolution of an historical period that, in an increasingly distinguishing and distinctive way and considerably ahead of other art forms such as architecture, has seen a new and direct involvement by the artist with the commercial world, mastering, perhaps too quickly, changes of technique that have left behind and maybe forgotten some art forms such as Conceptual Art or Original Body Art. The contemporary art world seems to consist of a number of centres, within which the coordinating teams bring sublime pretences into play, those that warrant the spectators' involvement and lead them to look carefully at the interpersonal relationship between the object and the artist as essential for completion of the work, seen as personification of a defective authority that goes away from the *artist/deus ex machina*. These events have a direct influence on the behaviour of those who regard the economic "macrosystem" of the art world with greater apprehension than they do the "microcosms" of artistic study. Every day the evident successes achieved by a series of impressive exhibitions, shows and great events held at regular intervals (Biennali, Triennali, Quadriennali, etc.) are held out to us as "not to be ignored"; here, amongst all the wretchedness and conceit, the undoubted qualities of artists who continue to respect, above all, the extraordinary legacy of the best Duchamp / Dada tradition, are still on display. This is particularly the case in Europe and in Italy, where artists continue to prefer a more equal relationship between each other and resort to the theme of memory, autobiography and allegorical invention. These include sculptures, installations and paintings that, calling perhaps for a more discrete role, unite the history of art from the 20th Century, via Metaphysics and Abstract American expressionism to the many, easily identifiable adventures of first, Informal art, then "Cold" informal, Neo-avant-garde, Arte povera (Poor art) and Conceptual art, to the pyrotechnic outburst of the Transavantgarde with its degree of separation, to the Post-modern, the epic of the Immaterial, Deconstruction and finally the Posthuman condition. But with a surprisingly lateral sort of approach, which from a casual reading might be defined as the practice of hybridisation, interbreeding or nomadism, artistic study today, more and more inclined towards the idea of cross-fertilisation, still seems to waver between continuity and permanence for those elements that, in meta-historical terms, seem to reoccur between the classical and the contemporary. They are encountered and confronted in the most diligent artistic study, just like buried signs always resurfacing as a watermark: the relationship between nature and artifice, the polarity between structure and pure veneer and that between the *Antigrazioso* (of the historic avant-garde) and irritating monstrosity, the assembly of different attractions opposed to the codified duality of the paratactic or, in comparison with the hypotactic, the avoidance, at last, of spatial and temporal consumption as an alternative to the frequent dimensional irritations and, finally, *Horror* and *Amor Vacui* opposite the fawning historicism of continuing attempts at a return to order. But this aspect, formed of interwoven complexities and conditioned by the need for media communication, is more and more often compared today with that of simplification through one single idea. It is the aspect that best embodies the state of immediacy, of departure from traditional rules, from those of the marketplace to those of recourse to the medium as a vehicle for the message that indicates a compelling state of here and now, of art without doubts, inhibitions and agonising anguish. A certain laxity in the artwork exposed to public reaction is what currently seems to characterise performance and video art, which appear so remote from the staged individualism of the Sixties and Seventies, triggering a process of increasing liberation for the artist in question.



Tony Cragg, *Stack (tas)*, 1983.

# Art and architecture

*Francesco Moschini*

Investigation into the relationships between the visual arts and architecture, in the contemporary artistic climate, is research that offers a wide and complex study opportunity, due to the intertwined nature of its multiple pathways and implementation methods. Investigations start from the relationships established at the beginning of the last century, with explicit interdependence, between the Modern Movement and the Avant-garde, relationships much sought-after by artists and architects. Critics such as Pevsner, Giedion, Argan and Tafuri, up to and including Celant, undertook a critical assessment of the history of architecture, at different times and in different ways, that interacted with interpretations of contemporary art, pointing out the extraordinary reciprocity of artistic and architectural experiences from the early decades of the century until current times, critical interpretations that made it obvious how the figurative and architectural arts were continuously interconnected and demonstrated the existence of a robust intellectual structure that has always destroyed any doubts over the possibility that architectural techniques might be the autonomous outcome of self-determining design. In this way, any concerns were overcome that arose from proposals to undertake architectural and artistic studies that would simultaneously examine and challenge the idea of the supremacy of aesthetics in architectural output to the detriment of objectivity in technical and operational practices. Le Corbusier maintained that the designer was duty-bound to be a well-versed and sensitive connoisseur of art. Today it is possible to confirm with certainty the existence of various but common places and areas of exchange between art and architecture, fields in which the suspicions have been overcome that just contact between one area of expression with another might, indeed, weaken the distinguishing features of each. It appears a more and more interesting prospect today, in circumstances profoundly different from the past and certainly more complex and intricate, to take the opportunity of identifying a series of connections between the visual arts and architectural design and works. It is legitimate to think that such an investigation could lead

Mimmo Paladino, *La montagna di sale*, Naples.

to the enrichment and renewal of both critical and cognitive methods and artistic practice. It is reasonable to think it might be possible to identify the existence of places of inspiration and common lines of research in the most recent of modern times. But what must always be borne in mind are the respective peculiarities, safeguarding them from that progressive slippage that has most recently undermined their respective foundations. If the occasion was extraordinary, in the mid Sixties, of an interdisciplinary meeting between artists and architects, arranged by an expert like Maurizio Sacripanti as part of his courses at the Faculty of Architecture in Rome, having a significant impact on the relationship between such front ranking personalities (though without it being explicitly conceded) as Achille Perilli and Franco Purini, then certain later trends have made holding a further debate more difficult. If *Tra presenza e assenza* (Between presence and absence) by Barilli and Irace, at the end of the Seventies, offered for the first time a universal, even too generous assessment of a season of disciplinary cross-fertilisation, leading to national and international prestige, then more confidential and intimist but very tense studies by individual figures always committed to restoring the theoretical and critical foundations of architectural design (too often reduced to a pure and simple promise of architecture for an immediate return, on too many occasions one after another), diluted the heroism of the few in a bungled attempt at a "diffused atmosphere". A response to the almost two decades of silence that followed and to the abandonment of those design plans with art and architecture crossover ambitions seems to have been made more recently but without any great clarity, in the architecture section of the latest presentations of the Venice Biennale, at least beginning with the one by Fuksas, which threw open to the architectural world the virtual paradise of

artistic studies, with a widespread feeling of *déjà-vu* if not of belated and guilty gestures. Luckily, as counterpoint to these confusing and divergent exhibitionary trends and in the context of actual implementation, came the adventurous Guggenheim at Bilbao where the shared vision of life and operational practice between two personalities such as Gehry and Oldenburg took the historical avant-garde's idea of the *antigrazioso* to a surprising outcome that showed itself, on this occasion, charged with that sense of "annoyance" due to excessive iconic value from the presentation of the work as a "flower of evil" in the city until redeeming and reversing its destiny as a place of decay. Architectural innovation might currently be subdivided into three new kinds. The first is a new awareness of the fragmentary nature of the city, with the great metropolitan cities no longer the centre of attention. The second kind is that which returns to detailing surfaces, spaces and things like large organisms and not like mechanisms only concerned with the individual buildings. The final aspect of the new approaches, and one involving great change, is Information Technology, interpreted not as the rendering of a design by computer but rather as the fact that we are passing through a phase of "rendering the very idea of architecture"; architecture is seen as a field for conducting experiments and cloning hybrids of landscape and technology. This hypothesis can be used as a starting point for undertaking a reconnaissance of current architectural literature; it might seem impossible to execute a bequest on behalf of architecture since very little would remain on record other than an overall anti-symmetrical stance that, with the best of intentions, might be associated with that non-stop contest between the spirit of Apollo and the soul of Dionysus, an ethical and aesthetic conflict fought from the earliest moments of western culture. A giddy transformation of the patterns of architecture appears to take the traditional architectural vocabulary back to an "unprogrammed degree zero", to give us a new architecture whose qualities are still to be fully understood. A classic example of this was Forster's recent Biennale, where the intention was to put forward a visual synthesis to reconstruct the course of the last twenty years, which clearly set out the consequence that synergy between the anti-academic enlightenment (from Frank O Gehry to Zaha Hadid) and conversion to the liturgy of Information Technology has left no room for neo-rationalist academicism. Far away and out-of-date is how that great point of departure now seems that was the 1980

Biennale (in what way and to what plan remains open to discussion), a watershed in the contemporary history of architecture where all the great masters, Aldo Rossi and Peter Eisenman among them, became like future stars of world architecture. It was undoubtedly an exciting moment in time, even though everyone then had to watch the pervasive effects for which the phenomenon of Post-modern extremism was responsible. In a society where the trade-name is the sole attribute that warrants credit and attention, the world of architecture, just like the world of fashion, is attempting to recreate itself as a brand; the aim nowadays is to sell a complex package in which the theorist Architect is in tune with headline opinion. None of this, however, can justify facile flight towards the feared "spectacle" of architecture with its mythical "archistars", nor the more recent phobias of those who feel apprehensive about the disturbance created by a section of the critics involved in the "architecture shows" manipulating the sort of architecture on show, all uniformly consistent with the visual arts. Germano Celant, in a text published by "Lotus" in 2005, expresses hope for an architecture that "rids itself of functional aspects", i.e. that works on its skin and then puts in the services, becomes in essence "a plastic object", similar to a sculpture, "physically pure" (Benevolo, 2006).

# Artificial Intelligence

*Antonino Saggio*

Today we can use computers to construct a city or house – not just physically but also assigning its residents physical and psychological characteristics. Once the construction of this world has been completed, given the fact that we are now living in the "new subjectivity" of post-functionalism, we can verify how each inhabitant reacts to the different spaces. Intelligence and artificial life merge, as millions of players around the world are fully aware. Thinking of effectively created ambiences, the reference is to Ada, built at the 2002 Swiss Expo. Ada is an architecture capable of interpreting its visitors' feelings and changing as a result. Underlying this architecture is a team of psychiatrists, IT experts, architects, physicians and artists,