

Text by Antonio Natali

Sonus Firenze

We have gambled silence. Over time, and I don't know how consciously; but we have gambled it; burned by the anxiety of efficiency. We've gambled it with mobile phones; which we keep constantly in use so as not to be afflicted by silence and solitude. We gambled it in restaurants; where one usually goes to be in company and to reason among friends, and then, instead, one cannot talk, because of a music that one has not chosen and which is a bit dazed. Silence has become intolerable; because in silence one thinks and thinking is not always beneficial; the contrary. This can be seen when a minute of meditation is required; which is almost immediately broken by applause, which started not so much to exhibit sentiments of participation, but to mute silence. Even at funerals, the applause replaced the silence of emotion or prayer.

The Bible speaks of the desert as a privileged place to infuse new energy into the soul; and the emphasis is not on privation and fasting (which would also be practical for the purification of thoughts), but rather on silence. Forty days in the desert means forty days of silence. Forty days, therefore, of reflection. Forty is a symbolic number; but symbolic also of long duration, even interminable. Thought has its times. Which are usually very far from the convulsion of today's rhythms. The pauses, the slow times, the silences (that is), are salient poetic traits. Naturally for those who are not infected by the noise and for those who hear the charm of silence.

In the last minutes of *Profession: reporter* by Michelangelo Antonioni a body is lying on the bed of an imminent death in a silent room and almost in the penumbra, while beyond the grate of a window we perceive, muffled, sounds and voices immersed in the light of a sunny square: passing cars, a distant old man who says something, a child running, words uttered in different volumes, the sounds of a revving motor, the sound of a bird, a trumpet that plays soft Spanish tunes. Everything is made perceptible by silence. It is the silence, with its intervals, the requirement that makes the distinction of sounds and voices possible. The high lyric that comes is the result of an image that sounds just make it poetic.

There is no music, there are no dialogues; and the few words that are heard have the appearance of indistinct noises. The silence is sunny like the dusty square outside the railing: the only backdrop to the story that takes place in the room, to the inadvertent eye. The lens wedged slowly between the irons to go deep; and it magnifies how much it falls in its field of vision. The eye of the person concerned, guided by the muted sound of rarefied sounds, is seduced. And the heart - moved - merges into that parallel life, becoming part of it.

However, we did not dwell on the epilogue of the Antonioni film by case. The invention of the room and of noises with their evocations of moods, memories, emotions, affections, is also underlined within the Sonus exhibition: an installation that is an invitation to experience the city as its own inhabitants no longer know how to do. The noises of the shops overlooking the street, which the deafening and incessant traffic has muted and which once upon a time one was induced at least to throw a glance inside, have been recorded and are transmitted to the visitor with a technology that allows an absolute involvement; to the sign to be configured in the same way as a recreated reality, parallel (in fact), although perhaps chronologically distant; distant, yet near, because it is impressed in memory.

It is a reality that comes back entirely whenever the senses in a proustian way, will bring it back, together with the melancholy disturbance of not having tasted it as we should have done. With the geo-localized headphones the hearing receives the sounds, and the mind (but I would like to say the heart) recognizes them; and the sounds immediately tune to the projections of images that are pertinent to them, so that the eye enters the places where the artisans follow their work and there is nothing to distract the audience from the life of a city that intensely returns to oneself. Or better, "it finally" becomes ours; since an immersion so integral and vivid one has never experienced before.

Vivid, but also – it will immediately be added - lyric; since this is an experience of the senses that has nothing to do with the phantasmagories of so many current shows, which, pivoting on the fetishes of art history (from Leonardo to Van Gogh) build environments as if they were kaleidoscopic tubes, on whose surfaces the highest texts of western figurative culture whirl in an icy vortex. No; not with Sonus. The senses are likewise stimulated, but it is not the brain that emerges stunned and even dazed; it is the heart that was touched by it, because its strings have been touched by the affections of memory: the used gestures of ancient crafts, the epiphany of sounds now rhythmic, sometimes unexpected, the suspended silences that interspersed noises once familiar, the voices that - sometimes whisper - recite words in the dark. The mind recovers the past and, due to a short circuit, the heart relives it with renewed emotions. It is an ideal circle that closes by regaining its debut. A wax hand can be an icon in a small enamelled bowl: the heat melts the hand and the wax becomes wax, just wax. Ready, however, for another shaping. And again - maybe - a hand.