

# Time live on stage

*The artistic oeuvre of Riccardo Previdi*

I.

Stage-d(r)iving ... At first we see a standard-issue Fiat Scudo with a strange metal frame on its roof – a hexagonal structure that is, so to speak, a both abstract and prefabricated sculpture. The latter is illuminated tastefully by way of green neon tubes. The frame can also be folded up – in such a way that its subsequently horizontal surface can be used as a stage for concerts etc. The geometrically reduced form of this mobile *Volksbühne* (2005) by Riccardo Previdi is not just superficially reminiscent of the “geodesic” elements of R. Buckminster Fuller; equally important is that it also breathes their spirit, examples being in the mobility of the architectural situation, the principle of efficient “more with less” and in the concentrated while at the same time open construction of this “people’s theatre”.

II.

Double bind: *Volksbühne* is absolutely typical for Riccardo Previdi’s artistic oeuvre to date. It includes characteristic Previdi features such as the linking of modernism and 21<sup>st</sup> century, of high and low and of “free” and “applied” design, as well as the meshed utilisation of different creative potentials – in this case those of the aforementioned R. Buckminster Fuller, or of Dan Flavin, of the designers at Italian carmaker Fiat and, last but not least, those of the artists actually on stage, e.g. the band Orlando, who performed on top of Previdi’s *Volksbühne* during the 2005 Light Lab exhibition at the Museion Bolzano. A crucial factor is Riccardo Previdi’s tendency to work with a variety of dualisms<sup>1</sup> – which, while otherwise apparently contradictory, are then linked by him to form a new, tension-laden whole. In a way, his aesthetic as such corresponds to a “double bind”, in the sense of a communicative situation presenting two different messages that have an interrelationship but cannot be reconciled; the apparent block as regards the situation makes it necessary to respond to the ambiguity of the communication and its contradiction.

In the case of the *Volksbühne*, one of the implications is that we on the one hand identify Previdi’s oeuvre as art – standing, as it does, in the middle of an exhibition and being clearly designated as such<sup>2</sup> – while at the same time also

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<sup>1</sup> Luca Cerizza referred to Riccardo Previdi defining his forms “on the basis of a sort of duplicity” (in: *Young Artists in Italy at the Turn of the Millenium*, Milan, 2005, p. 172).

<sup>2</sup> Another example being the exhibition *Lichtkunst aus Kunstlicht* (“Illumination art from artificial light”), ZKM Karlsruhe, 2006.

seeing it as a usable platform whose apparently mass-(re)producible form makes it more reminiscent of an everyday consumer object than an autonomous artefact. It first derives its meaning from inside the hermetic white cube, e.g. via references to kinetic art. At the same time, it moves – quite literally! – outside the art system and can prove both itself and its functionality at, for example, open-air concerts. The relationship between the two lies in what has in recent years been termed “crossover”. “What is to be done?” (Lenin)

### III.

Display it again, Ric: Previdi’s series of “tatami works” likewise have, as it were, a display function. A tatami is a traditional Japanese floor mat made of rice straw; it is also used for placing under a futon. Over the course of time, these mats change colour from green to yellowish-brown. In Japan, this is seen positively as a sign of what could be called “developing with age”. The DOJO show at Milan’s Micamoka space saw the installation of Previdi’s debut tatami work – *Tatami + Pirelli* (2005). Parallel strips of white adhesive tape were placed across the huge window panes of the exhibition space, leaving equidistant gaps for light to shine through. These “redesigned” window panes (as a classic “double bind” of inside and outside) then served as a projection screen for a 3D reconstruction of the start of Michelangelo Antonioni’s legendary film *La notte* (1961) – the scene in which the camera pans skyward to the famous Pirelli Tower in Milan. The light that emerged from the white cube to reach the outside thus created a suggestive effect that interweaved the “inside” and “outside”.

The 2005 Moscow Biennale prompted the young artist to construct *Tatami + Melnikov*. In this case, the “tatami” comprised a perforated wooden board onto which a 3D animation of Moscow’s constructivist Melnikov House (1927), an icon of avantgarde architecture, was projected. This was another example of Riccardo Previdi using a light-permeable display as a shared surface for displaying an “external” aesthetic statement from the (recent) past.

This moment of the historical in the form of “developing with age” – for this is precisely what the artist achieves through his current staging of a “previous” aesthetic – also plays a central role in *Tatami + Zabriski Point and seven chairs* (2006). In this case, the tatami aspect was represented by simple, upright roof beams onto which the scene from Michelangelo Antonioni’s cinema classic *Zabriskie Point* (1970) where the (modernist) building explodes is projected as a loop. In addition, the exhibition incorporated seven chairs, constructed in accordance with the principles set out by Enzo Mari in his 1970s DIY furniture manifesto. The chairs and the “tatami” were made from the same wood – once more providing a kind of loop.

Once again, Riccardo Previdi used his art (of “tatami”) to present artefacts from recent history. The permeable nature of his tatami is evident in the fact that,

instead of being “originals”, these manifestations prove, as it were, to be slightly “flawed” – possibly marred by memory and maldevelopment. This is the crucial factor, placing Riccardo Previdi’s revision of the modernist aesthetic in a finely balanced position: he neither negates the original – which, as claimed by e.g. Frederic Jameson<sup>3</sup>, would be typical of the postmodern – nor does he have an unfailing belief in the presence and effect of the original. Just like the double bind, arriving at a new stage of life is in itself an extremely ambivalent process.

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Berlin, March 2007

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<sup>3</sup> e.g. in his 1984 article entitled *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.