Performance alla Milanese

Giorgio Verzotti

Milan doesn’t love performance very much. Apart from private galleries, there are almost no spaces devoted to this kind of art. One of the few is SIXTO/NOTES which within a year has become a reference point with very precise tendencies. The organizers concentrate on events, installations, and environments, with particular attention to media-oriented ones (film, video, and photography).

This season SIXTO/NOTES began with a festival, “Lo Scarto Dell’Occhio” (in Italian, this phrase has three different meanings: the refuse of the eye, the swerve of the eye, and the difference of the eye). The festival opened with three young artists working for the first time in Milan. Vincenzo Ghiroldi’s performance was based on elementary gestures, like putting up a tent in the space and plaiting his partner’s hair, that give shape to symbolic structures (such as a speech about sexuality). Arturo Reboldi and Giovanni Caligaris taped all the action, balanced between the analytic and the existential.

Jurgen Olbrich followed with a performance somewhat similar to the work of Marina Abramovic and Ulay, and not very different from the corporeal expressionism typical of the Viennese body artists. Roberto Masotti set up a photographic installation in the first room and a simultaneous frequency-concert in a second room. This concert was based on improvisation and on the idea of “theft,” for example, using quotations from other European contemporary musicians.

More complex works which clarify the tendencies of SIXTO/NOTES were those by the artists Luisa Cividin and Robert Taroni (Interval at Limehouse)—who are the organizers of the center—and Ferruccio Ascari and Daniela Cristadoro (“Egypt, Egypt!). These pieces were elaborate semiotic inquiries into space and time that used visual and aural media as instruments of analysis. Interval at Limehouse was made up of two sequences performed both outside and inside the space. In the first part, Cividin and Taroni sat and held on their laps two slide projectors which produced their own images on a grating over their heads. In the second sequence, they fell outside a car with a slow and sudden movement. Indoors, there were three TV monitors showing flashbacks of the action, and a film projected on a wall. These sequences were structured as repeated “moduli” with an intensity increasing to a breaking-point, resulting in a violent bodily encounter. At the same time, the actions were vehicles for the
emission of visual signals fed into a continuous circuit, a flux involving inside and outside—real factuality and virtual reference. Inside, the two sequences of the video tapes which correlated with the film inserted another perceptive process, that of the comparison of common codes in analogous systems (film and television images).

In *Egypt, Egypt!* Ascari and Cristadoro created an analytic structure which produced relationships between images and screen. Each element—even the performers—assumed the role of images and of support. The image was projected on screens which betrayed it by withdrawal; the first part of the film was projected on a transparent curtain that gave an inconsistency to its thickness while the direct action of the performers dancing (visible through a window) was continuously interrupted and repeated.

The same operation was executed in the soundtrack with music by Strauss and Ravel decomposed into moduli-cycles. In the second part of the performance, the images of two films were sent around on the walls through a system of mirrors set in front of the projectors. Another sequence was projected on a container filled with white lime while the performer's body, used like a pure element of support, again sent the fixed images of its double in a neutrally-treated nude body.

Both these performances worked at causing a blackout in the processes of *significance*. This short circuit is obtained by creating a

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Roberto Masotti's

*Giustapposizioni Improprie*
term which includes a new generation of groups close to the theatre, and supported by critics like Giuseppe Bartolucci. There are also other groups closer to visual art, and those interested in the idea of mixture. In the SIXTO/NOTES festival, for example, Mario Martone, who belongs to the theatrical group “Falso Movimento,” gave a solo performance based on American cinema language as the mythological moment of its cultural ghosts. “Think about the big screen of a drive-in,” said Martone, “with the intense colors of a Hollywood film crossed by the invisible nerves of an explosion: this is the theatre which we want to do.”

Giorgio Verzotti writes about Italian performance.

"denotative flux" which precludes total reception in real time, and therefore a "connotation" from the audience. This flux, moreover, does not construct a hierarchy among the signs; it doesn't become a "vehicle" for the appearance of a meaning. Performances are centered on the analysis of the ostensible sign, so there is no representation but only the presentation of linguistic elements which are taken for reality in themselves. The elements are analyzed in their grammatical structures, not on the level of the message in the sign.

This practice of linguistic transgression is very similar to the semiotic theories of Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, whose procedures interest many Italian performance artists. These artists are defined by the unsuitable designation “Post-avanguardia,” a