

ZOUBOULIS - GREKOU

RE-ENACTMENT - REMINISCENCE - RETROACTION

The work that we are presenting is based on the fundamental concepts expressed in our two recent performances, "Action - Reminiscence - Transpositions" (1980) and "Re-enactment" (1981).

Our first meeting with the American public made us feel that we should introduce the various phases of evolution of our work in a form as complete, as well as coherent, as possible. This challenge gave us the possibility to study and produce a composite order of presentation of our work, which also reflects pertinently the most recent direction of our interest in performance.

The various aspects of the artist-public relation that we express in each of our performance, are focused after each single contact that we make. The last experiences have also led us to take into consideration the artist-public relation within the context of time, of history. This aspect came into relief after our "Action - Reminiscence - Transpositions" performance (1980). Its sequence was the next work, performed last summer, "Re-enactment". In this latter work, not only man and so art were expressed in their adventurous voyage through time, but references to man's history were also made, arresting him at a classical posture and represented by the draperies, formed in man's struggle with the material reality.

In our actual performance "Re-enactment - Reminiscence - Retroaction", we attempt to put the weight on the function of retro-action, which admits the re-enactment of history through memory, bringing about, in this way, further transformations of the world's ~~current~~ image.

In a world that menaces with total extermination, it is through a vital action in backward direction that we can prove to be critical heirs of our complex patrimony and agile magicians capable of transposing man's condition of despair to renaissance.

ZOUBOULIS - GREKOU

Performance - Beyond the boundaries of terms.

The adoption of the term "performance" in art refers to a form of action with multiple media, which analyzes and represents the relations and conflicts of the artist within his social and aesthetic environment. Performance is related only schematically to "body-art", sharing a common interest in the use of the body as one of the fundamental instruments for the organization of the entire action. The multiplicity of media which can be used in performance, enables the artist to multiply the possibilities of emotional and mental participation in relation to the reshaping of the objective world that he attempts.

Many of the enraged and violent gestures expressed by body-art, sprang from a diffuse ideological conflict between the artist and the objective world. And that was not the only form of negation against the object. One of Arte Povera's main aims, for instance, was to try and breach, by the use of poor materials, the specific limits which defined the artistic product as such. At the same time, conceptual art was proceeding through a mental analysis of the objective world to amplify the perception of our environment and of our relation with it.

Thus the problem of revitalizing common sensibility against new visual and ideological stimuli, became one of art's main issues and its echo reverberated intensely throughout the 'sixties and part of the 'seventies. For once more in our century, art, instead of being considered as an object of pure aesthetic function and contemplation, was conceived as a global situation, as a state of being which reflected humanity. The aim was a total renaissance. An aim which demanded a bold confrontation, where any risk taken in order to reverse the established relation between man and art was considered legitimate. The conventional materials were substituted by other media and, in the case of body-art, by the introduction of vital forces, coming directly from the artist's body. In this way, body-art succeeds in realizing the public's total involvement in the artist's world, bending together psychic and physical participation in a common space. Moreover, the concept of image and of time and space in art are transformed: space is no longer limited to a potential subject of aesthetic or mental analysis. It also becomes a ritual space, "liturgical" in the true sense of the word.

Space and image associations extend beyond the strict time limits of the actual action. They become an experience and, by extension, they represent a form of behaviour towards the objective world, towards its substance and structure. The artist's body is considered as a vital material which contributes to the transformation of any form of given behaviour. It becomes a symbol of a common attitude towards the world as ^{art} steps down from its academic seat.

Development and modification of Body-Art.

The body as a sign of vital form of expression continued to represent throughout the initial period of its appearance in the sphere of art (that is starting from the late '50s and throughout the 'sixties), an instrument for the liberation ^{from} any type of cultural or political taboo. The significance of man's individuality becomes atrophied in the frame of any form of programmed or controlled civilization. The only guaranteed possession that one can enjoy is his own body, though exposed to all mass dangers of conditioning and alteration. A counteraction to these dangers is the effort to preserve the body's function in opposition to any form of conditioning, by the development of the spiritual and psychic forces. This was one of the fundamental theses which inspired a strong stand for the use of the body.

The initial enthusiastic launch of these ideas is adopted by a great number of artists of various denominations. However, although on the one hand, the wide use of this medium creates a distinct movement, on the other, its own massification brings about a gradual loss of impact. It is understood that the vitality of this medium is opposed to a systematic use. Moreover, it could not perpetuate a cry of protest without demonstrating concretely its efficacy as a renovating force within the specific aesthetic field. As a consequence, with the passing of time, a gradual modification is noted in the adoption of the body, revealing it an important potential for a multiple aesthetic research. Performance is introduced, representing a distinct concept of expression. Body-art's clamorous spontaneity and improvisation are substituted by other considerations of aesthetic nature. The presence of the body is conceived in a sequence of tableaux. The artist's action develops through the creation of a world of images, sounds, movements, symbolically or aesthetically interconnected, which succeed in maintaining the element of vitality by giving the prominent role to the body's significance.

However, the number of artists who use the performance as an exclusive medium is now considerably reduced.

The Meaning of Performance today.

Today performance cannot be considered as an artistic movement standing against the general research which tends to redefine the aesthetic object and its function. It operates, however, in an autonomous way. It does not follow rules of composition, of technical media or of their coordination, nor is it restricted by time limits or specific aesthetic methods of research.

It could be regarded as a spasmodic and isolated form of expression, which permits the artist to establish a direct contact and involvement with his environment. It represents a certain stand towards art, which incessantly claims to comprise all vital energies available to man in order to render to art the quality of a nucleus, wherefrom new emotions and numerous possibilities of identifications and associations can emanate. Performance today could be seen as a frequency, constantly expressing man's primordial tendency to attribute to the body sacral aspects thereby adopting it for the expiation of all conditioning dangers. The vitality of this "ritual" approach to art can produce an immense number of waves of communication and it can, parallelly, reveal an unexpected repertory of imagery for the artist.

The Work of Zouboulis - Grekou.

Nikos Zouboulis is active since 1972 in the field of performance. He first worked with a group of young students who were introducing a series of happenings in the greek art world. Their purpose was to investigate into the expressiveness of new media in visual arts. The use of the body was already one of their instruments, aiming at the arousal of a new common sensibility. His collaboration for the staging of one of Theodore Antoniou's works in Athens (Goethe Institut, 1972), marks a changing point in his work, thenceforth concentrating his interest in the field of multi-media expression.

Zouboulis's basic interest, at that stage, is to keep the public's senses alert towards art and this is evident already in his early works. At the Athens Hilton Gallery show in 1973, he produces a moving portrait. Holding a picture frame, where his flexible material is stretched, he faces the spectator during the everchanging phases of the work's creation. The use

of the appropriate material undoubtedly intensifies the impact of the contact with the public. The elastic which has been invented and manufactured by him is thenceforward used in every action and represents the fluidity, inherent in the perception and expression of the pictorial world. The struggle with the material becomes a constant motif in each of his performances.

His collaboration with Titsa Grekou dates back to 1975 and coincides with a further development in his work: the use of sound and light together with the introduction of installation in space create new relations with the use of the body. The body's significance in the sphere of symbolical imagery is now valued as an object of ample research. The elastic, used ever since 1972, is no further a mere surface which represents pictorial space in its various phases of composition. It symbolizes a diaphragm between parallel and numerous factors, which compound art's final form of expression. It represents a flexible partition between reality and fiction, simultaneously shared by the artist and by the spectator. However, it invariably remains the space which totally absorbs the artist's energies. At the same time, it is behind this material diaphragm that all plastic and expressive activity takes place, involving various dynamic elements as media of expression - the body, its energy, the movement's plasticity, light, shadow, sound. All these forces are joined together in order to collaborate for the composition of man's image in his struggle for liberation and communication - they compose the image of life characterized for its fluid aspect - of art which goes through moments of powerful revolutions to moments of mystical silence.

Before this ideological background, every work of Zouboulis-Grekou has a different story to tell.

Their first complete performance, titled "The Applause" and which was presented at the Expo-Arte International Fair of Contemporary Art in Bari, in 1977, is about the ambiguity of the relation between the artist and the public. Once the performance behind the elastic screen is over, a dry and noisy sound of applause is heard, provoked by a mechanism of wooden hands, handled by the artist himself. The gravity of the preceding action is shifted to this necessary expression of approval which "confirms" his existence. In this way, Zouboulis-Grekou talk about the special character of the artist-public relation which at a certain point is demanded to come to an end, abruptly removing the artist from his narcissistic contemplation to

a violent clash with the everyday demands. The "Applause" is a sarcastic comment about the end of the dream, about the end of the action. In the same way, so is the escape, in the world of art today, bound by certain limits... . It is called upon to contribute to the public cultural needs and the public exists, but it exists moulded by foreign will in a specific attitude. The public responds to art according to a give-and-take principle, familiar to it. All possible mystery created by an artistic expression, which transports the spectator into the vision of another concept of the world, must be interrupted. To underline the fictitiousness of this vision is an inevitable norm or else, should it be affirmed as another truth, as a ritual process for rediscovering certain values, then the results could be dangerously unforeseen...

Their particular behaviour towards the rules of art.

The fear that Zouboulis-Grekou share, is the unexpected imprisonment of the artist's freedom that can occur because of a blind compliance either to the methods of research demanded by a specific theory or to the rules of a certain ideology.

Whenever art has chosen to mirror a certain theory or ideology, without assuming a critical stand, it has brought about both positive and negative results. Its effects have been both reinvigorating and restrictive at the same time. The first image that comes to illustrate a new concept, necessarily becomes the mould for all future production that will adhere to it, with the gradual result of creating various by-products of an original idea, however good or beautiful that may be.

That is why, although Zouboulis-Grekou have chosen as the basis of their research the essential problem of the multi-faced relation between the work of art and the spectator, this interest cannot be strictly catalogued neither in any sector of the field of conceptual art nor in any other category of aesthetic tendency. The various problems of this relation are individuated and consequently considered and expressed by them through an empirical approach. Their own experience after each contact with the material, with the public, with the variable time and space in which they perform, are the elements which stimulate a new point of observation and which segment the image of this complex issue into numerous aspects.

In 1978 they perform "Unicum" at The Modena Civic Gallery and later at the Magazzini del Sale in Venice. ~~success~~^{The} performance could be watched through

a small hole by one person at a time. A special mechanism behind this opening would alternatively broaden and narrow the field of vision. The images created on the elastic by the body in continuous motion, would alter according to the breadth of vision. The action would vary each time. Whatever was exchanged between them and the spectator remained secret, unique, unrepeatabe. Moreover, the time of their contact was undetermined. It did not depend on the programmed duration of the representation, but on the spectator's will of communication. The basic motifs of this action were, however, continuous rapprochement and recession.

In this performance, they underlined the aspect of the uniqueness which characterizes each relationship and which is relative to the individual and not merely to the anonymous spectator. Another interesting point was also made through that work. It related to an issue of aesthetic research which was, at the time, of prominent importance: it was about the answer to be given to all preceding analytical and conceptual work that had been adopted as a process of renewing the ground of art and which was coming to an end. Should the reconstruction of the work of art pertain to the importance of the image, of space, of concept, of their combination or of their fragmentation and so on? Zouboulis-Grekou's affirmation was that what continued to remain of primary importance was the preservation of the vitality of the artist's existence both in the real and in the fictitious world. Their performance intended to fuse together picture and gesture into a whole composed of both static and active elements. The spectator would carry away with him an image which consisted of fragments of their action. However, these static images were incitements for a mental transportation into the sphere of active involvement. Real action and static images composed, in this way, a palimpsest ground on which they chose to work next.

Action - Reminiscence - Transpo^{sitions} was realized in 1980 at the Desmos Gallery in Athens. A dividing distance defines the two spaces, that of the action and of the public. Two elastic surfaces, one horizontal and the other vertical are joined together at angle, thus creating a continuous line of procession for the action. They represent a course in time as well as two different states of existence, two opposed possibilities of conceiving reality. Several rhythmic palpitations gradually animate the horizontal surface. Signs of yet shapeless life. A symbolical language is slowly uttered, designing man at his state of formation. He faces upwards. He is perceived by the universe, by the enviroing nature. These are the elements which borrow themselves as images until they gradually begin to acquire a meaningful significance.

There follows a series of associations between the various phases of man's formation with those of art. A continuous struggle that is not arrested in a definite form. A struggle of conquest, a struggle of tensions between man and nature, an erotic struggle. Withdrawal, departure, return. Various phases of rise and fall. Phases of ecstasy, triumphant moments when the figure begins to arise. At this point, the action is gradually transposed to the vertical screen. A climax seems to approach, when man, standing upright, comes face to face with man. Represented as a terrifying meeting, it gives to the action the start for various efforts of identification, of dialogue, finally leading to the inversion of all meaningful moments established during this contact. So, his shape is yet transformed. The course of transformations does not end.

The series of images formed in this performance can be also seen as snap projections of the history of humanity. They are a few instants, metaphorically referring to existing compositions taken from the history of art. Today we have inherited an immense wealth of imagery, composed of numerous masterpieces and relics of various civilizations. It is not, however, the formal aspect of each of these examples that endows them with an absolute value. What increases their significance is the "spirit" imprinted on them. To talk about the "spirit" may appear as a romantic tendency. To admit, however, that it can occasionally be felt, even if not arrested in any single formal characteristic of a work of art, indicates that whatever has left an imprint on the evolution of history, was not only inspired by a mere will to beautify or perfect the pictorial or environmental world. It was something more than that, which reveals the desire to leave a proof of life, proofs of involvement at varying rhythms of participation in the whole spirit of an age.

So do the plaster reliefs, that Zouboulis - Grekou have cast, reveal their will to leave imprinted not only the body, but also the body's movements with its unquiet swerves. Moreover, the material substance of the aesthetic object which is the product of the action, is proposed of relative value. Each plaster cast stance is produced in a duplicate, covered by the elastic material. This is destined to decay with time, declaring, in this way, its essential rapport with the whole concept and meaning of the work. The interdependency between physical existence and time constitutes a fluid rapport, capable of modifying any concept of a static image of reality, any approach that tends to value formally man's history and development. This is Zouboulis-Grekou's basic credo in what they do in art and in art's role generally.

This particular interest is also evident in the series of small pictures, composed of the two basic elements of their work. The elastic material represents the ground of action and a photographic registration of an instant of the action is recorded on the overlaying transparency. The two parallel surfaces become interconnected through the indefinite and ambiguous shadows which are created by the image of the transparency on the underlying elastic. By drawing some traits of these shadows, the artist tends to reconstruct something that has really taken place, without faithfully reproducing it. Memory acts as yet another factor for deforming reality.

Today that for once more art faces the dilemma of an alternative stand as against the negation of the objective world - today, that art seems to have exhausted big resources of languages, ideologies and theories, the interrogation on its meaning of existence is even more deeply felt. ~~As a consequence~~ As a consequence, it is forced to look back at the mass of heritage that it carries, putting together or correlating past and recent experiences so as to observe them as moments of a span of life. Art can begin to re-register this complex of experiences critically, by free associations and juxtapositions, independently from any time factor which has so far given a logical sequence to the chain of ~~events~~ artistic and historical events. The artist's individual dreams, made at some starting point, can be thus intertwined into this rich repertory of memories. New tales and visions can be the product of an effort to weave the individual formation into the canvas of conflicting yet necessary events of man's history.

In other words, if the problem of painting today is faced by tentative solutions which repropose the canvas and restore the image, if sculpture is in search of the plasticity of the material as medium of expression, the meanings that they convey can no longer allude to past values of space, colour, composition or about their relation. Any new appearance of the image can acquire a valid and meaningful significance if it reflects, in some way, the artist's personal experience, who, having lived through the whole story of the iconoclastic battle, is starting anew to reconstruct a hypothetical world.

The work of Zouboulis-Grekou expresses most eloquently this point. By transporting their contact with the material reality at a primal stage of communication, they achieve to filter ~~back~~ their intellectual heritage and formation back to its primary components. In this way, a distant memory is weaved into a future time. Vision and reminiscence meet each other.

Efi Strousa.
Athens, 1980.

NICOS ZOUBOULIS - TITSA GRAIKOU

Re-enactment

Greece is a real place with a specific history, it stands for a past that cannot change, but it is also a living stage for the present, in which all things are subject to chance, possibility, expectation, a stage set for adventures, ventures, prodigies and dreams, for situations that cannot be described in words or pictures, but only experienced and absorbed on the spot.

Present history is not recorded, but lived.

Nicos Zoumboulis and Titsa Gra^eikou are the kind of people who make present history - who shape the times they live in.

Their relation to their work is purely existential, through their work they channel forth a passionate, insatiable appetite for life, which leads to the furthestmost consequences of the creative act, brushing aside all restraints and inhibitions. Each time they perform this act before us, it embodies an intensity of experience that is new and unique. The outcome is always unexpected, open to experiment, with all the unknown coincidences and unforeseen perspectives that this involves.

These two artists find a powerful stimulus in grappling with problems of changing time and space coming into conflict with tradition.

Their new experimental work is based precisely on this kind of conflict (the moment as opposed to continuity, present and past, destruction and preservation) which shapes and defines the culture, the morals, the metaphysics of this country.

The artists start from the strict methodological organization of an idea, this forms the groundwork, the basic pre-supposition of their work, they then go on to explore the extent of the feasible: how far the idea can be carried. These limits are determined by the artists themselves. But beyond this, the extension into the field of the non-feasible is left wide open: it depends on the participants, on their cohesion, the shared emotional experience of people gathered in a common meeting-place.

The artists' concern has always centered on live art, presentation rather than representation, but in the present instance, they have attempted something bolder: re-enactment.

Re-enactment can mean simply an act that is repeated, but it can also mean an act that has the power to bring forth again, to suggest, to rouse others into a continuation of the act. It can mean participation in a common experience, and also an attempt to recapture an event through the spectator - by urging him to seek his own identity

through his personal participation in the repetition of the act.

This part of the enterprise, ultimately, depends on the public. But the initial impetus remains the artists'. For them, re-enactment is a composite entity that includes both the "before" and the "after" of their particular vision. Their work consists of both the idea and its realization at the hands of the public, thought and action, and the associations aroused by that action, converge and merge into a succession of highly individual, self-existent works: works born of the struggle between man and matter, works invested with bodily motion, the beating of the human heart, the heaving of human lungs, actual organic imprints of life, not substitutes or reproductions of the human presence, works that plug⁴ the acted moment into the flow of time, turning historical reminiscence into living history.

They are works that recall murals, reliefs, monuments, contemporary friezes, funeral steles for this age, fleeting tracings of an act performed with materials of here and now. The sensitive membrane, the thin plastic fabric frankly state their technological origin, the plaster never pretends to be marble.

The action that grows out of this modern material unfolds continuously, emitting the reverberations of live art in the making. Large elastic screens forcefully confirm that this is the present, but a present which has not rejected the traditional.

Behind the elastic surfaces, human existence struggles in search of a meaning within the incessant flow of time. This dialectical relationship between anguished present and idealized past is the central idea dominating the whole synthesis, while the music of Theodoros Antoniou, composed especially for this performance, generates multiple new stimuli towards a total experience, which finally transcends the brief moment in which it takes place and captures the intensity of the initial impulse in an endless re-enactment.

MARIA KOTZAMANI