

Combinazioni Provvisorie

Text by Mauro Zanchi

In *Analogie e Memoria* - a body of work produced in Matera (Basilicata) between the late seventies and eighties - Mario Cresci merges signs, images, text, drawings, notes, fragments of icons kept in archives and drawers; projects, collages, posters, extracts of printed texts and images, borrowed photographs. A diary of an iconic journey in which all the elements are composed of each other, much like a dummy for a large book. The photocopies - 56 of which are housed in the first room of the gallery - become "works" in the sense of art as an idea, to be understood as propositions that fulfil a cognitive task. Cresci makes use of the most anonymous of our communication means: in this case replacing the use of the camera with a photocopier, where he lays out his whole world; one defined by visible reality and cognitive explorations, in an attempt to avoid the formalistic implications tied to the canons of classical photography. He attempts to enact a depersonalization of the work, adopting a substantially anti-individualistic stance. Only the creative energy justifies the momentary individualization of consciousness, yet it exhausts its function at the very moment in which it carries it out. The conclusion of the creative effort is the denial or rather the elimination of the ego in favour of a mental endeavour expanded within the anthropological, social, ethnographic environment of the southern region of Basilicata in the seventies. From a conceptual point of view, we can also find a critique of the notion of style. The world is full of more or less interesting objects. Cresci does not intend to create further ones, yet through his photocopies he declares the existence of such things in terms of time and space. The work places itself (also in the tautological sense) in relation to other things and issues, whose interrelationality is found beyond the direct perceptual experience. With the work situated beyond the direct perceptual experience, our understanding of it depends on a documentation system. The system in this case takes the form of what can loosely be defined as meta-photography, scans, signs, intended as simulacrum of reality. Cresci's photocopies question art, yet this challenge can only be seen as an epiphenomenon to a development that could still be "expressive". Therefore, these interventions would be even more literary and anecdotal than resolutely analytical, if it were not that the photocopies are to be understood as sentences that further articulate the cognitive process of the works: "They do not relate to the matter of painting or even to the photochemical process of photography, as the act of photocopying is intended to quickly obtain an image on paper and is based on real time action and the immediacy of the final result, allowing for the adoption of new visual material born out of the process itself; above all the work relies on the surprise of the final result and what is often not expected. I wasn't thinking in the slightest about the self-referentiality of the artistic gesture and action, but rather about the feasibility of a project - a book - intended as a collection of memories, a search for the meaning of my action in the folds of artistic language: a simple collection of traces that I was leaving behind year after year in my artistic activities within a particular setting such as Matera, the focal point that influenced everything I was doing. Moreover I felt the need to give immediate visibility to the huge archive of signs, images and writings through a vessel - a book - that was to be planned as a unique work, an artist's book, an open-air logbook, a continuous meeting of meanings, references, analogies, signs pointing to other signs, forms that change according to sequences that arise from observing reality through - yet not exclusive to - the photographic medium. Photocopied images born every day in different places where I often happened to stay for many hours, as I often did in the printing labs in Matera, where I witnessed the technological evolution that was taking place, ushering the advent of the first Macs and the inception of dot matrix printers. "

The double page spreads from the *Analogie e Memoria* series, obtained from a printing machine designed to reproduce an original in an infinite number of copies, represents a desire to break down the rules and methods of a structural and prefabricated system: "The task of the artist must always be to dismantle and recompose conventional situations in order to recreate new and different ones, sometimes through the simple act of adopting minimal or invasive movements depending on the type of research undertaken, in my case through a value structure focused on two-dimensional images. Through this approach - a very simple

and direct one in respect to other artistic practices - I found the immediacy of an analytical and radical approach in the photo-graphic treatment of signs by avoiding the extended timeframes required by the darkroom “.

Cronistorie (1970) was born in a cultural and artistic climate where video-art employed new technologies, activating suggestions, instincts and formal solutions found in experimental and avant-garde cinema; a projection into the experience of everyday life, within a social space where everything turns into something rather articulated and complex, similarly to being immersed in an action-event where the organic meets the inorganic and nature is measured by the artifice. In Cronistorie - a forty five minute 16mm film, reassembled in a 10' video piece - Mario Cresci constructs a story and undergoes an investigation on popular culture in the southern Italian region of Basilicata. Cresci's depiction is both realistic and visionary, moving between tradition and avant-garde, between work of art and mysterious projection. Images move in densely anthropological scenarios, within the mystery of peasant rituals, animal sacrifices, religious processions, within the shaded areas of the collective rural unconscious. The narrative draws on an inexhaustible source of the world's latent images, shining a light on signs, paths, footprints and oneiric maps in dialogue on a formal and perceptive level. Cronistorie is set in the seventies - within a context of blending experiences, contamination of ideas and vision, distant and often anarchic viewpoints - and can be viewed as an attempt to understand the reasons for my detachment from the norms of seeing and feeling that animated the reality of those years. "Art was my only way to survive and to keep away from all that I viewed and felt as inhumane, wrong and false. The video in its essence is also this: a concentration of uneasiness that finds in a particular place like Tricarico a similarity to what I later observed in Macondo from 'One Hundred Years of Solitude'."

In Cronistorie the unraveling of the image-sound flow furthers a narration on the border between the real and the resurfacing of a vision. In this case, the images do not require the spoke word, comments, or a further reading in order to exude meaning and trigger the signifiers that spring into action: they narrate their own visual rhythm - perhaps one more intrinsic to the sphere of what is considered archetypal - in the same manner in which it was played out in a specific moment and period in history. Yet this all might not have happened, if not within an indefinite timeframe or in a pre-logical dimension.

The video opens with the the leaves of a succulent plant growing like flames in a circle around the core of every life that blossoms. A close-up focuses on a male face speaking into the microphone. His face turns to the listeners in a constant movement, aided by a side to side framing tremor. From the face we quickly shift to a close-up of a lit bulb and back to the face again, and again, and again up and down between the two subjects, until the camera follows the series of lit bulbs towards the light decorations adorning the space where a local town party is being held. The lights and the wooden plank that holds them up, guide us to the end of the cable where we find two rural men listening and a stone face. With a slaughter gun, a donkey is killed, falling to the floor. The blood flows out of his temple and slithers into the drain hole. Pigs chase each other in the pig pen. The stabs reach them. Splashes of blood splatter on their bodies as they try to escape into the narrow space between the barriers. They are now on the ground, waiting to be washed down before the slaughter. A close-up on the hand of a farmer who pits the earth in order to place seeds that are already roots of a growing plant. Pigs are skinned. The camera trembles through various close-ups of the peasants participating in a popular town festival. The bishop's miter hat mimics the mouth of a fish facing the sky. It seems to be waiting for something, perhaps spirit, leaving an empty space to fill. Swines are not given pearls, just the death of their flesh. The wolf has also been caught and is now brought to the village fair, flaunted and tied to a cart. A priest carries a wooden arm in procession, its index pointing towards heaven. The pig hangs upside down on the slaughterhouse bar, forming somewhat of a vertical axis that connects the earth to the sky; an animal sacrificed with its soul, closely tied to the leg pierced by the hook clamped to the bar. The wind moves the clothes of those in procession, the crosses and the banners, the laundry hanging on the iron wire, the tall grass on the fields.