

## FABIO MAURI at A SPACE

Fabio Mauri, an Italian artist, recently visited Toronto and gave a lecture and a performance at A Space (October 11-12).

For Fabio Mauri, art is a structure of knowledge of the universe. But art finds itself within a political context that determines what knowledge is (that is, knowledge of nature), as well as determining what culture and art are. Both knowledge and art within a society, therefore, are ideologies.

The Italian artist who uses the ideologies of nature and art and politics as the content of his art (without making it the subject matter) has a relation with his public that is lacking in Toronto and Canada. There is no need to mediate between his art and the public, because, in Italy, politics is the matrix of both art and daily life. Or rather, art is exactly that mediation between the public and the objective social reality that is ideology.

Ideology is a system of representations. (On ideology, Louis Althusser has written: "It will suffice to know very schematically that an ideology is a system (with its own logic and rigour) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts, depending on the case) endowed with a historical existence and a role within a given society.")\* Fabio Mauri's art is a juxtaposition of these representations with each other, or the projection of these representations on the concrete objects acted upon by ideology. What is usually a continuous, inclusive totality (i.e., ideology) is confronted in opposition, discontinuously.

Played against each other, ideologies reveal themselves. The means of the presentation allow the spectator to witness and interpret the performance as a concrete didactic model where ideologies are seen in a structural and discontinuous relation to their objects -- objects that are the receptors of the representations of ideology and objects formed in relationships by ideology. Now their object quality merely becomes the surface for the projection of representation rather than the screen of reception.

Transmission and reception, thus, form an important part of Mauri's art. In a society, there is cultural and historical transmission: representations of culture are passed on, especially in art works. There is a need to remember in order for a culture to continue to exist. Thus art is the memory of culture. But there is also the necessity not to forget for political reasons. Thus the need to remember historical fascism in order to deal with neo-fascism. On the individual level, there is transmission as interpretation and understanding. Transmission occurs between the artist and his audience, between the work and the individual, transmission of content which must be interpreted and understood by each individual. Thus the importance of the projector which, for Mauri, is a mechanical model of the mind's relationship with the world.

We can talk about Mauri's work as dealing importantly with ideology and transmission. But the two, however, are interconnected: ideology is continuous transmission, the reinforcing matrix that surrounds our lives. Ideologies also change in relation to production and thus they serve to adjust men to new relationships with the world and production. Mauri also maintains that transmission and communication between individuals is ideological; "Language is War," he states.

Mauri's performance consisted of six simultaneous projections of different films on human bodies and objects. All the films have an historical dimension in that they are well-known commercial films. Fritz Lang's Metro-polis was projected on the back of a young nude black man seated at a piano. Joan of Arc was projected on the chest of a nude young woman seated on a stool; while Eisenstein's Alexander Nevsky was projected into the top of a full milk can. Pasolini's Medea was shown on a t-shirt on a chair back with a jacket wrapped around. Louis Milestone's All Quiet on the Western Front was shown on the naked chest of a young man whose face was covered by a black ski mask and who was seated on a stool; and Mizoguchi's Ugetsu Monogatari was projected on merchant's scales. While all the films were played simultaneously, each unit of projector and object "screen" comprised a pocket of seemingly closed activity within the space.

Each projection was like joining a bicycle wheel to the top of a stool. The films were removed from their usual context of a movie theatre and were brought into conjunction with their "products," a term that I will keep in abeyance until I explain it below. In a movie theatre, the film is projected on a flat white screen; its image is transparent. The projected image is a pure example of transmission: it is as if projected directly on the "screen" of the mind. Mauri, in his method of presentation (like Godard within film itself, adapting Brecht's alienation method), finds means to deflect that transmission so that we can examine consciously what we usually absorb unconsciously. For in Mauri's performance the spectators are in a different relation to the projected film: they are not the direct receptors of the film, but see it obliquely, so to speak.

Individually and in their total effect, the projections produce compelling visual spectacles, but also make the spectator see the film image in a new way: both the physical image and the ideological content of the image. It was dazzling to see the opening sequence of Metro-polis played on the back of a nude black. But what does it mean to project a film on a body? What does it mean to project Metro-polis on the back of a nude black figure at a piano? -- a film made within the ideology of the period that seems to combat the social tendencies of the period, but in its fascination, in the technical structure of the film, the film absorbs within itself the very structures of what it was attempting to expose. It is proto-fascist in itself.

Taken together, what is the relation between the films in terms of content? In one word: ideology. The juxtaposition of the films reveals what was/is latent and unconscious within them, that is, their ideology. (It is necessary to say a few words on ideology. One point is it is not necessary for the ruling class to have knowledge of the ideology or for them to use to use it in a consciously manipulative way. Althusser once again writes: "The ruling ideology is then the ideology of the ruling class. But the ruling class does not maintain with the ruling ideology, with its own ideology, an external and lucid relation of pure utility and cunning. When, during the eighteenth century, the 'rising class', the bourgeoisie, developed a humanist ideology of equality, freedom and reason, it gave its own demands the form of universality, since it hoped thereby to enroll at its side, by their



education to this end, the very men it would liberate only for their exploitation. . . . In reality, the bourgeoisie has to believe its own myth before it can convince others.") Examine the content of some of these films. Metropolis: class struggle; Joan of Arc: religion, nationalism, war; Alexander Nevsky: nationalism, war; etc.. Or look at the producers of the films: Metropolis: German; Joan of Arc: French; Alexander Nevsky: Russian; Medea: Italian; All Quiet on the Western Front: American; Ugetsu Monogatari: Japanese. All of these are the great industrial powers, and all were the major participants in World War II. Each film should be examined in its context as well. Alexander Nevsky, for example, has as its subject, the development of national consciousness in Russia catalysed by the historical struggle against the Germanic people. The film was made in 1938 and, besides what artistic merit we find in it and indeed look to it for, it had a political and ideological function in terms of the threat Soviet Russia saw in Germany. The film was used to arouse the national sentiment against contemporary Germany. Past history served the ideological present.

What then is the relation between the film, its subject and unconscious ideological content, and the individual or thing on which it is projected? (And I use the full force of the term "projected" -- in its violence and violation -- not just in its normal film sense. For example, the young man, face covered with a ski mask, is in the position of executioner in relation to the projector/executioner which projects images of war on his chest.) A film is a sequence of still images appearing in motion due to the momentary retention of images in our perception. In Mauri's case, we have this illusion of moving images projected on a live but still body or objects, that is, things that usually are the subjects and images of the film. The bodies might as well be objects. In fact, what the spectator is in a position to see is the relation between the ideological product (the film) and the product of ideology (the individual or object). Some might call the latter the reified individual or object of his labour (the milk can, scales). This is too simple a solution perhaps, because our role or situation in ideology is more complex. It is a matter of transmission and interpretation which are active procedures.

Yet Mauri does not maintain, as Walter Benjamin did in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," that the viewing of the film itself is critical, made critical by the very nature of the medium of the film. Benjamin thought that "with regard to the screen, the critical and the receptive attitudes of the public coincide." Whereas, for Benjamin, it is precisely because viewing becomes habitual that it is able to be critical, for Mauri, it is the acceptance of the "natural" and habitual that must be subverted.

Why doesn't Mauri make a statement about ideology? Because he believes that his own language would be only another aspect of that ideology; "Language is War," once again. A verbal analysis would be imposition, projection. In the performance, ideology is not examined internally and analytically nor contextually (as I treated Alexander Nevsky above). Rather,

it is presented by juxtaposition (with other ideological films) and by superimposition (with its products -- and as in surrealism). Ideology thus is revealed to be a totality. Perhaps this is the reinforcing role of music in the performance where it produces a pervasive atmosphere, a grounding for our experience. It is an abstract analogy in the manner that it encompasses our unconscious experience, that is, creates an encompassing totality.

Althusser has said of the ideological concept, in contrast to a scientific one, "that while it really does designate a set of existing relations, unlike a scientific concept, it does not provide us with a means of knowing them." Art, while neither science nor a concept, in this case provides us with that means of knowing ideology. But art itself, as part of the superstructure, is ideological. In turn it must subvert itself, make itself present or absent, and force the "unconscious" ideologies to "conscious" surface by the juxtaposition of ideologies.

But this procedure is useless without the spectator. The spectator must be aware of the new role he occupies in relation to transmission. It is oblique as I mentioned earlier, as if the spectator witnessing a play from the wings of a set saw all the artifice of the production revealed to him. Setting aside the content of ideology for a moment, the structure of each separate event of projection, mechanically reproduces the human event of reception, transmission and interpretation. An image is projected on a body, then reflected to another and interpreted: an image becomes an interpretation.

An ideology cannot be displaced by mere knowledge of it because it reflects and incorporates an historical necessity and reality. It is in ideology that men become aware of their lived relation to history (art and culture) and the world (nature) and hence become capable of altering that relation. Fabio Mauri lives in a specific ideological situation in Italy that is shared with us and is yet different. His work, however, directs us to the mutuality of understanding within the horizons of ideology.

\* Louis Althusser, "Marxism and Humanism," For Marx.

Philip Monk

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NANCY HAZELGROVE at HART HOUSE GALLERY

Nancy Hazelgrove has said that art is a means of getting to know yourself. Her exhibition at Hart House Gallery (October 3-20) of colourful, energetic paintings shows an artist who is still getting to know herself but whose work is ambitious in confronting the more enduring issues of abstract painting.

There is nothing gimmicky about the show, and in this sense she should be commended. Painting, especially abstract painting, is a medium which throughout this century has developed a long tradition. It is difficult to