

Noises from Above (2005-?)

Here follows the story of *Noises from Above*, a project started in 2005, being produced only in part and never came to an end. We consider it a highlight of our practice, but every time we find reasons to stop it, as long as we are not able to clarify some core aspects of the project.

Some years ago we decided to start a work based on the town of San Damiano. It is a one-hundred inhabitants small town located in Pianura Padana, northern Italy, close to Piacenza, about 10 kilometers far from where we used to live and work; the area of San Damiano is balanced between the presence of two closed structures: on one side the massive incumbency of a military Air Force airport - for some years NATO base, and, on the other, the creation of a sanctuary, following a supernatural event that happened during the sixties: the apparition of the Virgin Mother Mary to an old woman, called Mamma Rosa.

Now, San Damiano is a kind of unreal place, completely deserted and empty during the days of the week and full of pilgrims from all over Europe (particularly from France) on Sundays and on religious festivity; so close to local countryside, but so disconnected to reality, it continues to manifest itself only by the sound of military rehearsal flights that invades periodically the soundscape.

In the beginning we decided to give the project the form of a documentary, based on landscape shooting and interviews, related both to military and religious spheres, trying to define which possible common points or dialog forms they should share.

We produced a dossier, in order to find some local support from institutions and get the permissions to do inspections and shooting in the area, extremely protected, not only the airport, but also the sanctuary which is private and not properly open to this kind of things.

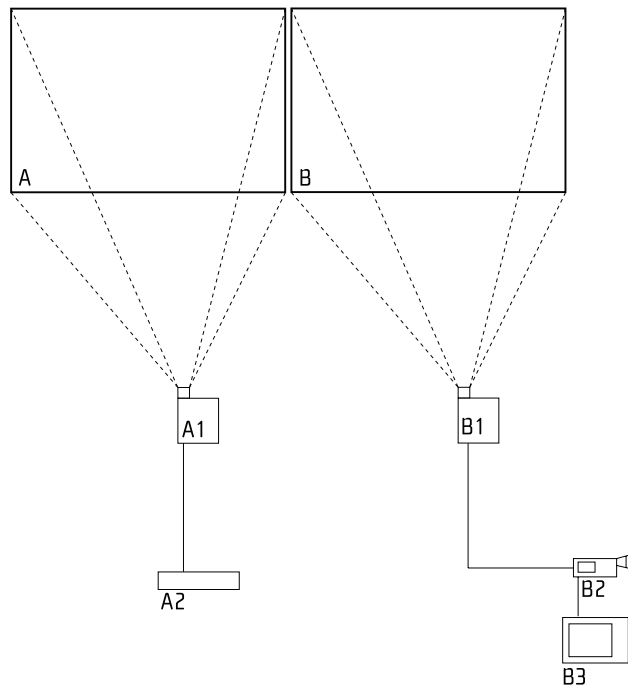
We got the defense of Piacenza's local authority of arts and entertainment department, this meant a document attested by councillor that give us a recognition for the project, but no funds for production.

After getting this, we started to ask for permission to do shooting inside the airport, aware of extended timing of those kind of requests, first via telephone, and the answer was unexpectedly open and positive, then via fax and from there we did not get any answer for a long time.

Beside, we kept going the project, so we decided to produce two preliminary trailers, each one consisting of an interview: the first one to an inhabitant who live in a country house neighbouring the south border of the airport, the second one - in fact not planned but captured on apparition anniversary day - to a man who was distributing strange holy pictures, whose tell the photographic process to discover Virgin figure in apparition shots.

We set some rules to shoot interviews in private houses, visible in *Trailer 1*, such as switch on the camera before the encounter with the person interviewed, do a lot of close-ups of ornaments and furnitures, a portrait of the person interviewed in outdoor, particular attention to sound capture making use of different microphones and so on... The aim of these trailers was to give an idea of the languages and choices behind the documentary, to make a more complete package to introduce the project to festivals and fundraisers.

Actually, from the beginning, we planned not only a documentary version but also a side-project: a live media performance, composed by two video projections and a live soundtrack. In a way a sort of expanded version of the documentary, destined to different fields of action. So, in September 2005 we proposed the project to Netmage festival, hold every year in Bologna, dedicated to live media and cross platforms projects. Here we collected the first refuse, because of the embryo stage of the work.



Noises from Above
projections planning,
live media, 2005.

Then, the following year we presented the documentary project to the association Filmmaker, based in Milan, which produces small cinematographic production via an annual award; we passed the first selection but the project had been refused in the final step, due to "too much artistic" reason.

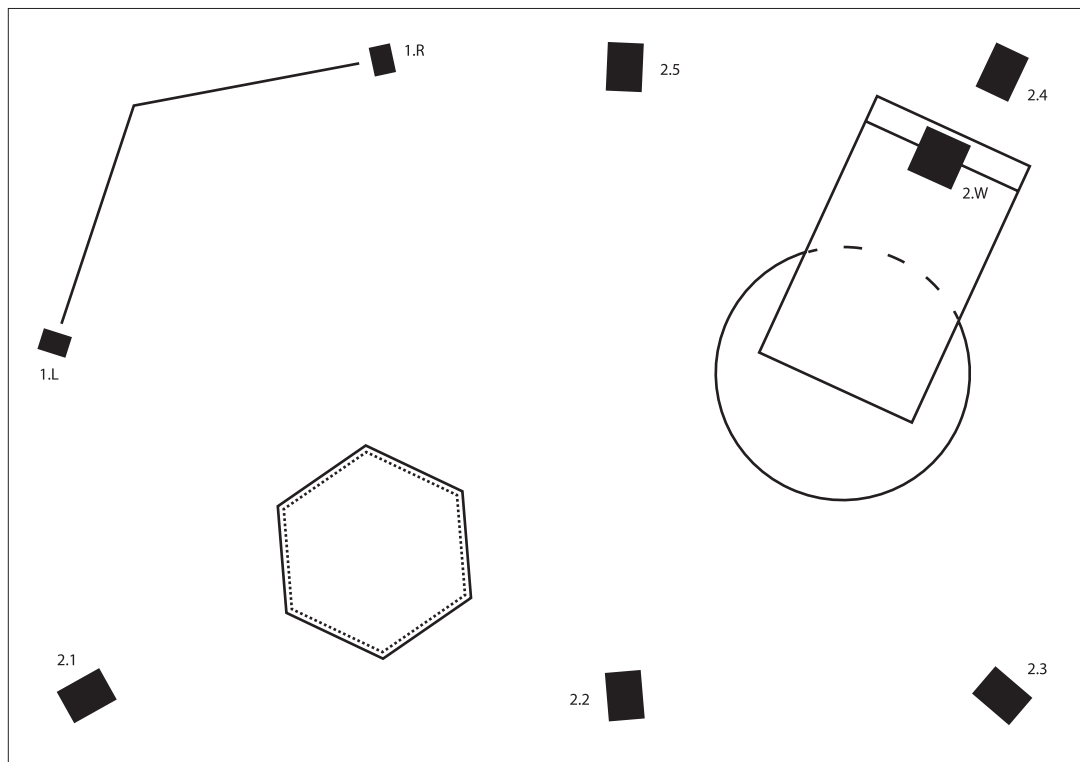
This second refusal caused a stasis of the work, we abandoned it; even if sometimes emerged, it remained hidden more or less for a year, until we discussed it with Andrea Lissoni, one of the curator of Netmage festival. It might be the beginning of 2007, just after *Bissera*, a work done in collaboration with Moira Ricci and produced by the 7th edition of Netmage. This brought us again into *Noises from Above*, this time with new consciousness and objectives.

We decided to transform it again, trying to coordinate our main ideas into a proper exhibition. Basically we were not interested anymore in the documentary side, everytime we showed trailers to someone we got involved with political-social discourses, whose weren't our interests at all; we wanted to speak about this portion of the real in abstract terms, we decided to use *Noises from Above* - and the town of San Damiano - as our space for experimentation.

We decided to keep the moving images one of the focal part, resizing them into a double screen video installation in which explore the possibilities of a short narrative path, looped a fixed number of times but introducing inedit elements in each of it; we gave ourselves precise structural rules, acting in the scenario of San Damiano and its characteristics. Nonetheless, we had some serious difficulties in imagining the video; we still do not have yet a clear idea of it, but a multitude of inputs. One clear point is that we were dissatisfied by the 'real' image, we were into a more psychedelic vision, but we didn't know how to realize and yield it.

Beside, we focalized on the idea of two installations: the first one is a lookout tower, where the spectator should walk in to get a different perception of the space and observe the video installation; the second one is more complex and connected to a child memory of one of us: a vague recollection of a day in children's playground associated to the noise of military plane passing over it. The installation may look as a circular merry-go-round in-

serted into a box; spectator sit over it, enter into the box and experiencing their position into a fake scenography built behind him and visible thanks to a mirror positioned on the opposite side of the box. Finally, there would be an audio installation on 5.1 system synchronized with one of the dvds, but distributed all over the room, to create a kind soundtrack of the whole exhibition.



Noises from Above
exhibition planning,
installation, 2007.

Getting back to the project, we continued to do research and fieldwork; that's how we discovered an extremely interesting fact: during the first half of the seventies William Xerra - an artist who lives and works in Piacenza - worked on the town of San Damiano and did a performance called *La Verifica del Miracolo* (*Miracle Checking*). At the time, every friday Virgin communicated with Mamma Rosa, sanctuary was filled by faithfuls waiting for the apparition and preying together. William Xerra decided to go there with some witnesses, Pierre Restany was one of these, to fix the image of the virgin on a white canvas in an impromptu manner; nothing happened, and he just wrote on the canvas "niente" ("nothing").

We met William and he explained us the action in details, he gave us a small book published for that occasion and a valuable video documentation of the performance. It is natural that this event will influence our project but we still hadn't gotten any idea about how to include it... we were thinking of re-create something on site with William, but this was kind of complicated, anyway we are sure that we wouldn't make use of him as a person to interview, it was more connected to the idea of re-enactment.

We were so enthusiasts about the project and its directions (even if the video installation was still a big question mark...) that we talked about it every time we had occasion to introduce our work.

For instance, during our introduction in Como at Fondazione Ratti - Advanced course in visual arts (visiting professor: Joan Jonas), we finished our presentation with *Noises from Above*, we also showed a clip from Xerra's *Verifica del Miracolo*; after that, one of the curator asked us: «sounds interesting, where are you going to realize it?». We had no idea.

We also talked about it in a couple of interviews and during the studio vis-

its in Paris during our residency at the Centre des Recolléts promoted by the Dena Foundation, there we presented an installation called *Fire Makes the House Grow*, and one of the object shown was Xerra's book. *Noises from Above*, even if we weren't working on it, was still vivid in the back of our minds.

Something strange was happening: this project was taken in as already done, as a finished work... or as a work in progress on which every day we work constantly; and this was not true.

Unconsciously, we fed this process.

We decided to place two photos of the apparition (part of the ones we collected on San Damiano's books and postcards) as top image on our website and to credit them as "*Noises from Above* - ongoing project"; usually we keep that space for the last work done, but finally we kept it for more than a year.

On November 19th 2007 we received an e-mail from 50° Stormo's press office, military airport of San Damiano. They informed us that we got the permission from Rome headquarter to fix an appointment in order to realize our documentary.

On January 8th 2008 we went to the airport. As we did not know how to realize the video, we decided to take this visit only as an inspection. They were extremely kinds and open to any form of documentation apart from a secret area inaccessible to public; we toured all the perimeter, seventeen kilometers, with an official at our complete disposal. We just took some pictures of architectural elements.

We met also the captain, and tried to explain what was our interest - in short, we told him that, probably, the finalities of our work will be in the field of contemporary art. As told already, they seemed absolutely open, any forms of 'promotion' was welcome. Now that the possibility to work inside the base is within arm's reach, it seemed that we had lost the interest to do the project, we were unable to give it a complete form.

We were into other projects, but couldn't think about *Noises from Above*... we had been so impressed by a sort of sound barrier, an inclined still plane used to test plane's engine: its function is to deviate hard sound toward the sky and reduce the impact on the sanctuary, which is in the exact direction. We used a photograph of this structure as a starting point of the work *Village Oblivia*, on which we worked from october 2008 to january 2009.

Noises from Above is still in standby, archived as "ongoing project".

Planes continues to fly, and each time we hear one of them we think that we must get back to *Noises from Above* and keep it alive.



GoogleEarth views of San Damiano, bottom image on the left shows the sanctuary, it confines with the airstrip.

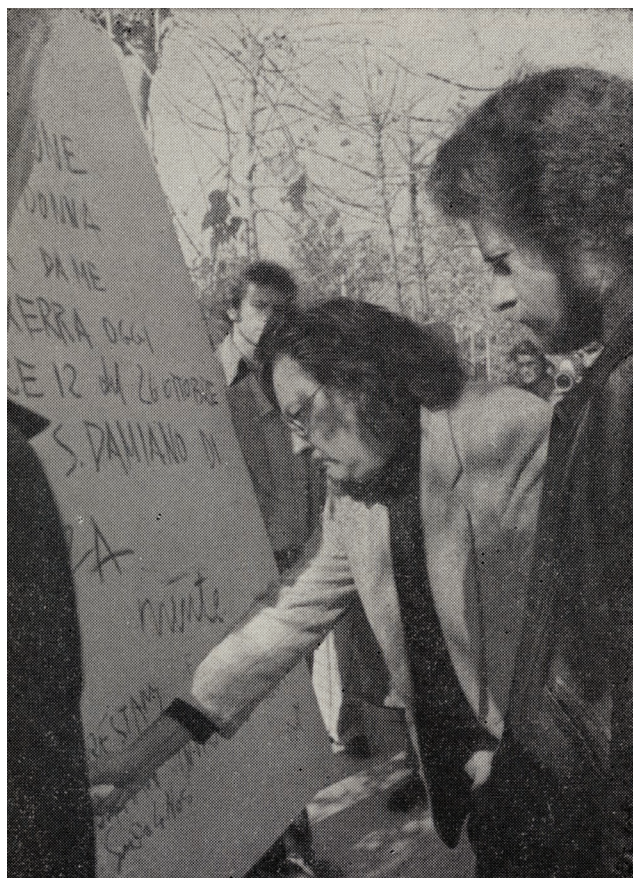
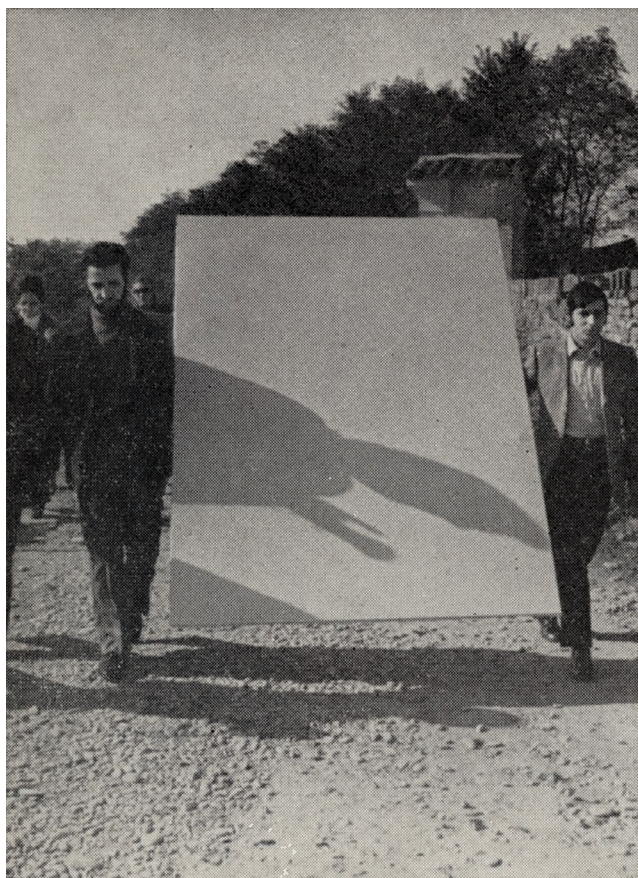


Mamma Rosa inside the "Giardino di Paradiso", where the Virgin appeared for the first time; notice the double gateway.

Piacenza, li 10-10-'73

Pierre Restany è lieto di invitarLa all'atto di devozione che il pittore William Xerra terrà in S. DAMIANO di Piacenza, venerdì 26 ottobre 1973 alle ore 12 precise, in occasione della 417 APPARIZIONE della MADONNA delle ROSE (detta del pero).

Il pittore William Xerra darà luogo nell'occasione, alla registrazione dal vero, in extemporanea, dell'apparizione medesima, con tela di cm. 150x200 ed ogni mezzo adatto.



William Xerra's *Verifica del Miracolo*, 1973. On top, official invite to the "act of devotion" by Pierre Restany.

