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Pathosformel, La prima periferia (2010)

By and with Daniel Blanga Gubbay, Paola Villani

And with Simone Basani, Giovanni Marocco

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by *Lorenzo Guerrieri*

The stage is sunk in twilight. The backdrop is white, as is the stage, and upstage it curves slightly upwards to form a low partition. On stage, crouching, are two performers. But what captures the spectators’ attention are three inanimate presences. These are three life-size skeletal dummies made of metal, equipped with almost all the joints of a human skeleton, down to the phalanges of their hands.

The two performers have focused on one of the three skeletons. Slowly they try out various ways of moving its metal joints. To give substance to the scene, a sound carpet runs continuously, metamorphic and subliminal, determining throughout the performance the emotional heat of its different phases.

The two performers, who patiently move an arm or head of their metal skeleton, are soon joined by a third, who tends to the other skeleton lying on the stage.

The three performers (Daniel Blanga Gubbay, Simone Basani, Giovanni Morocco), in gray sweatshirts, throughout the performance remain focused on the metal skeletons. Two of them manage to bring one of the dummies to an upright position. Very carefully, all three performers try out the possible leg, arm and head movements of the upright skeleton.

The stage lights are raised, the background sound becomes a slow ticking, while each performer now focuses on one of the three skeletons, which are moved, dragged and made to walk about the stage. One is placed seated on the partition at the back of the stage.

The three performers neither speak nor express particular emotions throughout the play. All they do is carry out their task of moving the skeletons according to the list of gestures and movements preordained by them. The list is of no narrative value and the dummies do not become “characters.” They are nothing but what they are: defenseless skeletal structures in need of an external life to move them. The devotion of the humans toward the skeletons becomes a demiurgic force and at the same time a creatural force bent on movement. It is precisely the movement of the skeletons as such that is focused on, its being determined both actively and passively, and its intrinsic expressive value: the flow of this movement and the background noise can open in the spectators limitless spaces of imagination.

The three performers have one of the dummies carry out nervous, compulsive gestures with its arms, to the point of making it collapse on itself, convulsively, its head on its chest and its hands on its head. Subsequently, the skeleton is seated on the partition in the back along with its companion. The two performers observe the third as he tends to his dummy, until all three work at reclining it on the floor, while the background music again grows louder. The dummy is laid down and then raised up again, until it’s seated downstage, facing the audience. The music has faded until it stops and the creaks and squeaks of the metal joints can be heard.

The three performers focus on one of the skeletons. They seem to dance with it and make it walk around the stage, one tending to its arms, another to its legs, a third to its bust. The sound carpet gathers energy and becomes more luminous.

At a certain point, after the first half of the performance, when each performer is stationed with a skeleton, on stage a little “magic trick” takes place: bits of magnetized metal, on the ground, begin to move around with a substantially random motion determined by their magnetic field. The skeletons are led by their actioners to follow with their heads the rapid movements of the bits of metal. They stretch their fingers toward them and seem to play with them.

Gloom falls once more on the scene and the metal pieces stop moving.

The three dummies are brought to the positions they will have at end of the play. One is made to crawl up to the right side of the stage and, once there, is made to sit with its legs outstretched, in profile toward the spectators. Another is behind it, at center stage, in the same position. The third has remained downstage, seated frontally.

The performers continue to try out gestures and movements with the metallic joints, until each, one after the other, leaves the stage.

The light is dim, with on stage only the three metal skeletons, motionless in their positions.