

Manhattan

BY MARTA GONZALEZ
A special job

SEVEN

LANGUAGE

PSYCHO-BABBLE AT THE PLAZA

SOMETHING HAPPENED at the Plaza over the weekend... something unplaced when not totally unrecognizable. Inevitably, fashionable when not merely inoffensive.

For three consecutive days, the International Psychoanalytic Movement presented its Fifth International Congress of Psychoanalysis, a full-measure spectacle on "Sex and Language."

But the sex was devoid of sensuality and the language barely passed for communication. And the metaphors that

Continued on page 2



BY MARTA GONZALEZ

SEX AND LANGUAGE

Continued from cover

blasted through the earset translators of journalists sent them reeling through the halls to grip each other's arms and whisper (among other things): "Courage!"

The billed topics had titillated: "Copulation and Expression," "The Body and the Scene," "The Psychology of Dirty Words." But...

From day one—Thursday—ambiguity scented the rarefied air at the Plaza like a potful of simmering garlic. Only one thing was certain: This tantalizing continental stew was costing somebody about a quarter of a million dollars.

Who?
"Eez just us," insisted Massimo Meschini, a movement official with sad, brown-velvet Mastroianni eyes.

Politely, deferentially, he lifts himself from the exquisite stone planter in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum, where a Thursday evening cocktail party, financed by the Banco de Roma, is in genteel flower.

He turns round and round, offering a mocking glance over his shoulder. "Eez nobody behind," he purrs. "Why everybody ask who eez behind?" His shoulders lift, his palms jack upward. "Eez just us—the movement!"

Meschini is—everyone in "the movement" is—eager to please the press, so anxious, he explains genially, that they have flown "at least" 50 journalists from Italy and France.

Most of them, presumably, are at



Armando Verdiglione, president of the International Freudian Movement.

their "mechanistic" approach to sex, American therapists for their directive attempts to "cure," and psychopharmacology. Psychoanalyst Thomas Szasz even attacked the conference's namesake, Freud, with "Herr Doktor" stand-up-comic funny stories. One could only conclude that the "movement," in its frenzy for "name" speakers, didn't care much what anyone said so long as they showed up.

Not everyone did show up.

Among those billed for the first session were no-shows Bella Abram, Robert Altman, Bob Guccione, Gay Talese and John Simon.

"We sent them all letters," said Giovanni Sancristeforo, a pretty young psychoanalyst and movement official. In the absence of a reply, she admitted cheerfully, the names were advertised anyway.

Freudian symbolism got a workout in some corners. Psychoanalyst Martin Weich reported treating a "deviant" patient who made obscene phone calls. The long cord of the telephone, Dr. Weich averred, represented the mother's umbilical; the patient's excessive masturbation and ejaculation, the need for his mother's milk.

And so the beat went on. The President of the movement, Armando Verdiglione—a plump Liberace—pounded out a few opening metaphors and then shuffled through the various happenings like a worried father. His "idiom," which was printed for the press, read, in part,

the party. Few have been stranded in the huddled pack of paying customers outside the door of the party. They were among the 1,000 who paid \$40 each to attend the conference, attracted by what one official estimated as \$15,000 worth of advertisements, ads that touted, among other things, this party.

AH, BUT never mind. Organization was of small import to this heaving, popping congress, a "Dolce Vita" swollen into a three-day assault.

Great names in the intellectual world mingled with psychoanalysts from New Jersey who once "knew Freud." A singer warbled. A poet shouted his verses. A woman performed a "post-modern" dance. Heavy-lidded philosophers held forth on arcane subjects and film director Lina Wertmüller ended her address with a forthright: "I hope you didn't understand a word I said."

The conference, according to its advance publicity, claimed to be a response to the tendency of American psychoanalysts to break with Freudian theory. American analysts, the movement's literature implied, had moved toward a therapeutic technique in which sex was treated as a biological or "mechanistic" function rather than one that was closely connected to verbal discourse. In its attempt to re-connect sex and language, conference officials drew on speakers from varying cultural disciplines.

Novelist William Burroughs, for example, addressed the subject of "Sexuality and Language." Filmmaker/novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet discussed "Playing with Fire." Director Lina Wertmüller's subject was

"The First and Second Reading of Symbol."

Most of the speeches, however, were so abstruse, their delivery so oblique, that most of the audience had difficulty making sense of many

buzz word at this convention. Along with "genitality," "fetish," "the void point that is always moving," "unessence" "terrorism" and the names, if not the presence, of nearly every Deep Thinker on a philosophy de-

Great names in the intellectual world mingled with psychoanalysts from New Jersey who once 'knew Freud.'

of the speakers' conception of sex or language, let alone the proclaimed unity of the two.

"Sex," announced psychoanalyst Annalisa Scalco, keynote speaker of the opening session, "is always in league with parricide." The suggestion here was that the Oedipal myth was, as Freud claimed, still a prime source for the understanding of sexual behavior.

"Parricide" (killing a parent) was a

partment reading list.

If a center could be isolated in this great babble of what one journalist dubbed "hi-chic gibberish," it was a sort of anti-ideological stance. But for many of the speakers, it seemed, the goal of conveying an anti-ideological position demanded a frontal attack on ordinary comprehension.

(Also under attack, along with ideology: Masters and Johnson for

"Sophistry to dialogue. Rhythm to harmony. Sex to fusion. Until something precipitates. At the highest pitch of univocity, equivocation..."

PHILOSOPHER Philippe Soliera, his rosebud lips curled around a black cigaret holder, damp bangs waving across his forehead, announced "My sex is French," illustrating the point, apparently, that sexuality was inextricably tied to language.

Soliera's audience—international types in rumpled, no-color linen, red nailpolish, scuffed cowboy boots and gold Rolex watches, elbow to elbow with retrograde hippies, suburbanites and the ubiquitous journalists—perked up a bit on that one. They resumed their stony-faced impassivity quickly when Robbe-Grillet launched into a discussion of how writing a novel is a "sexual crime."

At that, a clique of journalists headed for the hallway. "If you're writing a color story," said one, "the color is mud."

Somewhere, the journalists all knew, behind all this, or through it, or under it, were some important ideas. But they were buried beneath the sawdust of the circus.

"My British colleagues warned me not to come to this," confided one American psychoanalyst. "You know, most psychiatric organizations in America completely snub these people...these Freudians, so it's good that they came here."

Alain Robbe-Grillet was asked whether he thought the conference had been successful.

"Je ne sais pas," he said, with an enigmatic smile. "I don't know what the people who are running it had in mind."