# Before *Il Verri*. Milanese Avant-Garde Magazines of the 1940s and 1950s

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# Before *Il Verri*. Milanese Avant-Garde Magazines of the 1940s and 1950s*

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ABSTRACT

The essay discusses the characteristics of some small magazines (bordering on illustrated leaflets) published in Milan in the 1950s that supported avant-garde art. MAC (Concrete Art Movement), Spatialism, and Nuclear Art spread a lively, in-progress idea not only of artistic practices but also of the link between art and literature, with particular attention to the potential of concrete poetry. The birth of the magazine *Il Verri* in 1956 marks a slowdown in this expansion and creates the conditions for the poetics of the Italian Neo-Avant-Garde, with its 'political' loyalties and exclusions.

KEYWORDS

Italian literature in the 1950s, Italian avant-garde, Italian modernism, Italian small reviews, art/poetry relationships

* This essay is a translation by Elisa Maria Garattoni (Interlinguae Srl) of Paolo Giovannetti's essay 'Prima del *Verri*: riviste milanesi di avanguardia negli anni Quaranta-Cinquanta del Novecento', originally published in *Periodici del Novecento e del Duemila fra avanguardie e postmoderno*, ed. by Paolo Giovannetti (Mimesis, 2018), pp. 79–114. This translation was made possible thanks to the generous support of the Department of Communication, Arts and Media "Giampaolo Fabris", IULM University of Milan. The journal wishes to thank Mimesis for kindly granting permission to publish this translation.

## 1 Matters of Method

The Milanese periodicals under consideration here — *Arte concreta* [*Concrete art*], with its appendix *Documenti d'arte d'oggi* [*Documents of contemporary art*], *AZ*, *Azimuth*, *Il caffè* (later *Il nuovo caffè*), *Direzioni* [*Directions*], *Il gesto* [*The gesture*], *La parrucca* [*The wig*], as well as the first two years of *Il Verri*[1] — share two characteristics. The first is a general flair for the avant-garde, or at least an aesthetic and/or social project that is critical of Italian mainstream art (and beyond). Incidentally, the 'moderate' or even 'very moderate' *Il caffè* and *La parrucca* owe a great deal to twentieth-century 'giovanilismo' — a cult of youth that was typical of magazines such as *Leonardo* and *La voce* [*The voice*] — which, contradictorily, makes them break away from the tradition while conforming to it at the same time. The second characteristic is the relationship between these periodicals and *Il Verri*, started in 1956 and still published to this day. In theory, this relationship could be taken for granted. I mean that, in light of the (so to speak) official history of the Italian avant-garde — or, more precisely, the neo-avant-garde — according to which the Milanese *Il Verri* marked the beginning of a journey that would ultimately lead to Gruppo 63, the Novissimi group, and beyond, one could be tempted to conclude that all those magazines did was 'lay the ground' for Luciano Anceschi's cultural product.

The point, however, is to test both of these assumptions in practice, first and foremost via the customary tools of historical literary analysis. The far too obvious connection between irregular, often odd magazines — which, as we shall see, are actually 'non-magazines' — and the incredibly consistent *Il Verri* should be investigated in depth, and perhaps questioned. The research method I would like to apply in order to do so, however, is slightly different from that normally used by periodical scholars in Italy. Starting at least from Eugenio Garin and the series published by Einaudi, *Cultura italiana del '900 attraverso le riviste*, through the research of Alberto Abruzzese, Alberto Asor Rosa, and Luisa Mangoni, up to the papers by Giuseppe Langella, Elisabetta Mondello, Massimo Rizzante, Edoardo Esposito, and Franco Contorbia[2] — only to

1 *Arte concreta* was actually published in four series. The first is a collection of catalogues measuring 9.5x21 and issued between 1949 and 1950, although the first brochure covers the debut exhibition of Movimento Arte Concreta, or MAC, which took place on 22 December 1948. The second, better known series covers the years between 1951 and 1953 and is comprised of fifteen 17x17 issues. The third series, covering the 1953–54 season, is made up of eight unnumbered and undated 22x32 issues (in that period, the publication was called *Arte concreta. Bollettino del MAC e del sindacato nazionale arti non-figurative*). Lastly, the fourth series, not a periodical in the strict sense, includes the four volumes published between 1954 and 1958 under the title of *Documenti d'arte d'oggi* (it should be noted, however, that the first of these gathers the materials already published in the 1953–54 'periodical', without a few documents but with some additions — one of them will be discussed in note 52, another one in note 59). *AZ. Mensile d'arte* was published in twelve issues on an irregular basis from July 1949 to April–May 1952. *Azimuth* was released in only two issues in 1959–60. *Il caffè. Rassegna di libera polemica artistico-letteraria* was published twice monthly from June–July 1949 to November–December 1950 (eight issues in total). As mentioned, with the July–August 1950 issue, the magazine changed its name to *Il nuovo caffè. Rassegna di libera polemica artistico-letteraria*. The three issues of *Direzioni. Rassegna d'arte e di poesia* were released between 1958 and 1959. *Il gesto. Rassegna internazionale delle forme libere* was published once a year in four issues from 1955 to 1959 (the second issue in 1957, the third in 1958). Lastly, *La parrucca. Giornale letterario* was published on a rather irregular basis between 1953 and 1963, with a hiatus from 1958 to 1962 (forty-two issues in total).

2 Einaudi published the series entitled *Cultura italiana del '900 attraverso le riviste* in six volumes between 1960 and 1963. See also: *Eugenio Garin, Cronache di filosofia italiana 1900–1943* (Laterza, 1955); Alberto Abruzzese, 'Da Trieste a Firenze. Lavoro e tradizione letteraria', in *La classe dei colti. Intellettuali e società nel primo Novecento italiano*, ed. by Lucia Strappini, Claudia Micocci, and Alberto Abruzzese (Laterza, 1970), pp. 217–311; Luisa Mangoni, *L'interventismo della cultura. Intellettuali e riviste del fascismo* (Laterza, 1974); Alberto Asor Rosa, 'La cultura', in *Storia d'Italia*, vol. IV, *Dall'Unità ad oggi,* t. II (Einaudi, 1975), pp. 821–1664; Giuseppe Langella, *Il secolo delle riviste. Lo statuto letterario dal «Baretti» a «Primato»* (Vita e pensiero, 1982); Elisabetta Mondello, *Gli anni delle riviste. Le riviste letterarie dal 1945 agli anni Ottanta* (Milella, 1985); *Le riviste dell'Europa letteraria*, ed. by Massimo Rizzante and Carla Gubert (Dipartimento di scienze filologiche storiche, 2002); *Le letterature straniere*

mention a few — one can definitely identify a 'civil' and 'national' common thread that runs through Italian periodical studies. The magazine is seen as a testing ground for collective (almost identity-defining), non-literary content, an ideal space for exploring ideology, politics even, and for a sociology of the country's typical literary choices. And indeed, this is precisely what foreign observers notice in Italian modernist periodicals — the fact that, in so many cases, they serve the purpose of bringing together culture and political debate, or even politics as such.[3] Generally speaking, while it might seem obvious to Italian scholars, the thread through the centuries that connects the Verri brothers' *Il caffè* to *Il conciliatore* [*The conciliator*], to the Florentine magazines of the early 1900s, as well as to *Il politecnico* [*The polytechnic*], *Il menabò*, or *Quaderni Piacentini* [*Piacenza notebooks*], actually stems from placing more emphasis on certain themes and issues rather than on *others*. Rather than on 'pure' literary values, before anything else.

Well then, the aim of this study is to steer away a bit from that approach, using categories of analysis taken from the most recent developments in periodical studies. In particular, drawing on the remarkable *Modernist Magazines Project*[4] of Andrew Thacker and his colleagues, as well as on the methodological guidance developed by ESPRit, notably in a recent paper by Evanghelia Stead,[5] I would like to juxtapose our magazines with the 'little reviews' of modernism. At the same time, I shall try to capture the interrelation between the small and the large — the cultural dynamism implied in transitioning from a little, often self-made magazine, published by a loose group of intellectuals, to a formally established, or quasi-established, fully-fledged periodical.

More precisely, three steps will need to be taken in order to better identify and distinguish the factors at play.

a. Ascertain whether the magazines under consideration here are indeed 'little' in nature, according to a model that can be referred to both Remy de Gourmont's bibliographic and critical practice,[6] and to Ezra Pound's militant action. Incidentally, a well-known (at least abroad), ideologically charged quote of his is perhaps worth mentioning, as it is revealing of Pound's radically modernist attitude:

   > Honest literature experiment, however inclusive, however dismally it fail, is of infinitely more value to the intellectual life of a nation than exploitation (however glittering) of mental mush and otiose habit.[7]

*nell'Italia dell'entre-deux guerres. Le riviste di cultura. Spogli e studi*, ed. by Edoardo Esposito (Pensa MultiMedia, 2004); Franco Contorbia, *Giornalismo italiano* (Mondadori, 2007–09), 4 vols.

3 This is the argument that Sascha Bru makes in the introduction to the section about Italy in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. III, Europe 1880-1940, ed. by Peter Brooker, Sascha Bru, Andrew Thacker, and Christian Weikop (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 439–44.

4 The first series, edited by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, is *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. I, *Britain and Ireland 1880–1955* (Oxford University Press, 2009); vol. II, *North America 1894–1960* (Oxford University Press, 2012); vol. III, *Europe 1880–1940* (Oxford University Press, 2013). The second series, edited by Eric Bulson and Andrew Thacker, is *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Global Modernist Magazines*. Extensive information on this topic is available in Italian in *I modernismi delle riviste. Tra Europa e Stati Uniti*, ed. by Caroline Patey and Edoardo Esposito (Ledizioni, 2017); espescially in the essay by Andrew Thacker, 'Verso una mappa delle riviste moderniste. Alcune considerazioni di metodo', pp. 13–32.

5 See Evanghelia Stead, 'Reconsidering "Little" versus "Big" Periodicals', *Journal of European Periodical Studies*, 1.2 (Winter 2016), pp. 1–17.

6 See Remy de Gourmont, *Les petites revues. Essai de Bibliographie* (Mercure de France, 1900); anastatic reprint Ent'revue, 1992.

7 Ezra Pound, 'Small Magazines', *The English Journal*, XIX, 9 (November 1930), pp. 689–704 (p. 699).

In other words, the little magazine is understood as an arena for literary exercises, which, while prone to failure, can lead to true artistic 'progress'. Taking his cue from Bourdieu, Thacker has gone so far as to suggest that we construct a 'periodical field'[8] — that is, a system in which experimental journals, always on the verge of fading into silence, are contrasted with more established ones (the so-called 'big magazines'). Of course, the interplay of forces of interest to us concerns in particular the magazine towards which the others (supposedly) gravitate: *Il Verri*. It is no coincidence that I shall use it as a touchstone in most cases. However, our scope of analysis should be broadened to encompass other publications too, notably *Galleria* [*Gallery*], *Aut Aut*, *Il mulino* [*The mill*], Giambattista Vicari's *Il caffè*, *Nuova Corrente* [*New current*], and *Officina* [*Workshop*] (the 'pool' identified a few years ago by Giuseppe Langella and Giuseppe Lupo actually includes over twenty remarkable magazines issued between 1949 and 1956).[9]

b. Then, using the categories devised by Raymond Williams[10] (rather than those of Pierre Bourdieu or, if relevant, of Vittorio Spinazzola),[11] I shall try to pinpoint the *cultural forces* that characterize our magazines, the kind of *formations* they spawn in literature and art, especially in terms of their relations with the social system as a whole. What types of intellectual communities do they represent? Are there any novelties compared to tradition (also considering the legacy of modernism and the Italian avant-gardes)? In order to categorise the way in which the group behind each magazine works, Williams's tripartite model seems very useful indeed.[12] For example, based on that model, one could distinguish between more specialised or narrower publications (think of *Arte concreta*), almost exclusively linked to the specific field of visual arts, and magazines that actively tend to incorporate alternative values by bringing together varied aesthetic competencies.
c. Another thing that should be ascertained is whether and to what extent such a methodological slant actually provides a framework suitable for discussing certain ideas that have been passed on to us. And I mean this both in light of the debate

8 See Andrew Thacker, 'General Introduction. "Magazines, Magazines, Magazines!"', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. II, pp. 1–28 (p. 19).

9 See *Il secolo dei manifesti. Programmi delle riviste del Novecento*, ed. by Giuseppe Lupo, introduction by Giuseppe Langella (Aragno, 2006). See, in particular, Giuseppe Langella, 'Introduzione', pp. XI–XXVIII.

10 See Brooker and Thacker's remarks in 'General Introduction', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. I, pp. 1–26 (pp. 16–21). See also Luca Somigli, 'Dagli "uomini del 1914" alla "planetarietà". Quadri per una storia del concetto di modernismo', *Allegoria*, no. 63 (January–June 2011 [but January 2012]), pp. 7–29 (pp. 21–22). Of Raymond Williams, I primarily considered *Culture* (Fontana, 1981), as well as the seminal *Allegoria*, Italian trans. *Marxismo e letteratura* (Laterza, 1979).

11 Unsurprisingly, I am referring to Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, Italian trans. *Le regole dell'arte. Genesi e struttura del campo letterario*, introduction by Anna Boschetti and Emanuele Bottaro (il Saggiatore, 2005), and to Vittorio Spinazzola, *La modernità letteraria* (il Saggiatore-Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori, 2001). The functionalist analysis conducted by the latter and specifically focusing on the layering of the literary audience proves especially useful in this type of research.

12 Within what we call 'literary modernity', Raymond Williams (see note 10 above) draws a distinction between dominant, residual, and emergent 'cultural forces'. The first are the ruling forces that prevail within a given society; the second correspond to the legacy of tradition that tends to be superseded by current dominant positions; the last consist of attitudes that challenge dominant practices. Williams's categorisation, while clear, does not rule out the coexistence of all three forces within individual works or movements. As concerns 'cultural formations', what matters here is the external impact they have, that is, the type of work the groups carry out. This can be aimed at specialisation within a certain field or medium; aimed at an alternative, cross-disciplinary creative tension encompassing various arts; or even aimed at all of the above, as well as being imbued with an idealistic, utopian, and ultimately political opposing attitude. While the first approach usually defends art for art's sake, the second is typical of modernist groups, and the third characterises the avant-garde in the strict sense. On this matter, useful remarks are made in Somigli, 'Dagli "uomini del 1914"'.

around the canon, and therefore around historical literary issues, and most of all in terms of the general understanding (i.e. methodological approach) of the relationship between 'avant-garde' magazines and artistic and literary practice. In brief: i. Can the linear, progressive development suggested by the majority of Italian literary studies be confirmed? ii. To what extent does the 'specificity' of a magazine qualify it as avant-garde, and to what extent, conversely, as modernist in general?[13] iii. With reference to point a. above, is it really undisputed that the 'obvious' outcome of these dynamics and upheavals is a publication like *Il Verri*? Would it not be possible for our little magazines to be the expression of forces aiming at something a bit (or very) different?

## 2 Starting Points for an Analysis

2.1 I speak of 'starting points' because I do not wish to present a systematic, all-encompassing analysis, first and foremost due to space constraints (such a study would occupy an entire book), but also because I think that, in this way, I can focus more on the questions of principle.

A first, necessary remark to be made concerns the *heterogeneous nature* of the material and the fact that the texts under consideration here are only partially comparable. On the one hand (*Il caffè*, *La parrucca*), we have collections influenced by early twentieth-century literature, *La voce*, and Giuseppe Prezzolini, which place a strong emphasis on 'giovanilismo' as well as on the aesthetic moderatism of Novecento Italiano understood in its broad sense. On the other, we find periodicals and bulletins that, while being the expression of 'experimental' artistic phenomena, strive to be open to literature, and most of all to distance themselves from mainstream press in order to go down a different, almost residual, and yet somewhat original route.

2.1.1 For a start, and in spite of the variety of contributions, *La parrucca* had the audacity to publish its own manifesto, the content of which while undoubtedly unusual, is not in itself parodic (unlike other manifestos, as we shall see). *Manifesto parrucchista* was published on 30 November 1953.[14] Without quoting the whole text, some of its points (twelve in total) are rather informative:

> 1.
> Existentialism is dead — we have carved its tombstone.
>
> 2.
> We are supportive of Futurism as far as its war on diplomatic prudence, pessimism, and neutralism is concerned. We do not share the same hatred of tradition, books, Libraries, and Museums. We do not feel inclined to act like anarchists.
>
> […]

13 See the note above.

14 This can also be read in a photographic reproduction in Alvaro Strada, *Storia di una rivista inesistente. «La Parrucca» 1953–1965* (Viennepierre, 2005), p. 29. Although the bibliographic references it contains are unfortunately quite inaccurate, the book itself is very useful.

6.
Communists are yesterday's innovators. Today, the trend has changed and Communists are no longer relevant. We hate the *masses*. Every man must be an island in love with the universe.

7.
Love implies possession. We want to remain open to all experiences and test ourselves in every possible way. We do not want to become attached to anyone, so that we may have everyone.

[…]

10.
Love for the individual, intelligence, and culture. (Rediscovery of the European culture — true culture and good taste are European).
Suppression of snobbery and rudeness.
Need to dress properly. Respect for the Authority. Quest for Beauty. Beauty is necessary.

11.
Individualism and common sense. Clarity and simplicity. Realism.

[…]

Giovanni Anceschi, who frequented the circles of *La parrucca*, called that manifesto 'neocicisbeo'[15] — despite an impressive number of generic statements (concerning beauty, common sense, realism) and conservative clichés (sympathy for the establishment, fear of the masses), a truly original element lies in the emphasis on what we might call free love, and on the need for elegance. Thus, the proclaimed death of existentialism paves the way for unprecedented dandyish attitudes. I have referred to 'giovanilismo', and not entirely out of context, considering that *La parrucca* was founded by an eccentric twenty-three-year-old man, Alessandro Mossotti, and, above all, that it is usually cited in connection with the authors who wrote for it, mostly beginners, who would go on to become well-established writers in the second half of the 1900s — from Nanni Balestrini to Vincenzo Consolo, from Giovanni Raboni to Antonio Porta, from Raffaele Crovi to Alberto Arbasino. As a matter of fact, however, the manifesto does not seem to express an *overtly* generational position. Conversely, a distinguishing feature of this periodical — which was born under the aegis of Giuseppe Prezzolini and would publish his work,[16] as well as writings by Indro Montanelli[17] — is precisely its retrospective look at not-so-recent twentieth-century history.

Such coexistence of contradictory elements is a hallmark of the much more unassuming *Il caffè* (renamed *Il nuovo caffè* after issue no. 4 of July–August 1950). Despite a pervasive argumentative and resentful tone, this magazine is incredibly vague when it comes to its programme. If we consider an editorial piece from issue no. 2 (1950), *Nel nostro spirito la verità*, which includes a few excerpts from a draft manifesto ('of Realromantica') originally published in no. 1 (1949), the following statements stand

15 Giovanni Anceschi, in *Il Gruppo 63 quarant'anni dopo. Bologna, 8–11 maggio 2003. Atti del convegno* (Pendragon, 2005), p. 138.
16 A piece called *Le piaghe di New York*, 1.3 (30 November 1953), p. 4.
17 See his letter to Mossotti, 2.4 (22 June 1954), p. 2.

out: 'The world needs goodness, humanity needs to start believing in itself and its values again'; 'In our spirit lies a force stronger than things, even stronger than fate itself'.[18] These would be the answers to the issues of the postwar period. All or most of the periodical is marked by mediocrity, with pieces dominated by hatred of anything new and by Catholic moralism, sometimes reaching unbelievable heights. One need only think of editor-in-chief Resy Fiorani's explicitly racist attack on Alberto Moravia, in an essay whose title says it all: *Ebreo moralista lo scrittore Moravia?* (Writer Moravia, a moralist Jew?). Among other things, the author claims: 'The sentiments that are dearest to our Latin soul do not resonate with him — affection between mother and child, pure friendship, first love'.[19] Speaking of *L'Agnese va a morire*, Luigi Orazi wrote: 'On the whole, despite a certain greatness, Agnese appears inhuman, cold-hearted and, all in all, boring. The atmosphere is too reminiscent of certain political rallies filled with faith and bombast'.[20]

The only positive note is perhaps the editorial staff's alignment with the views, now virtually forgotten, of 'lyrical realism' and the so-called Terza Corrente, championed by Aldo Capasso and Lionello Fiumi in particular.[21] Leaving aside any considerations about the unimpressive outcomes of that cultural endeavour,[22] what is of interest here is the fact that the avant-garde was *aging*, literally. The name of Fiumi, who had played a key role in the theoretical promotion of free verse in Italy,[23] is now dragged into an argument against both the new lyricists' 'arcanismi' and the most recent trends in painting (and Abstract Art in particular). But then again, the fact itself that an old-fashioned academic like Alfredo Galletti adhered to Terza Corrente speaks volumes about the degradation of certain content.[24]

2.1.2 Moving on to the other side under consideration here, we enter a completely different world. The undisputed crisis of Italian modernism (modernism/avant-gardism, as it were) is seen through the opposite lens of new, and even radically new values. The first thing that catches the eye is the way in which certain magazines are produced in practice. Before visually inspecting these products (often simple leaflets or cyclostyled sheets, but sometimes actual fine art pages, each virtually one of a kind; Fig. 1), we should consider the words of Giuseppe Salto, whose gallery hosted the works of MAC (Movimento Arte Concreta) starting from 1948:

18 *Il caffè*, 2.2 (March–April 1950), pp. 1–2. The manifesto in question, *Principii per un manifesto della "Realromantica"*, signed by Giuseppe Carlo Maini and Resy Fiorani, was featured in issue no. 1 (year I), pp. 5–6. It affirms a very nebulous theory that seeks to reconcile personal ethics, of course 'spiritualised', and historical pragmatism, for the sake of an art 'capable of transubstantiating, with its otherworldly breath, the contingency of existence by filtering the reality of nature through the soul, thus originating pathos, which is not an irreconcilable conflict between two opposing worlds, but the fruitful and intentional pursuit of a comforting balance' (p. 6).

19 Resy Fiorani, 'Ebreo moralista lo scrittore Moravia?', *Il caffè*, 1.2 (August–September 1949), pp. 12–14 (p. 12).

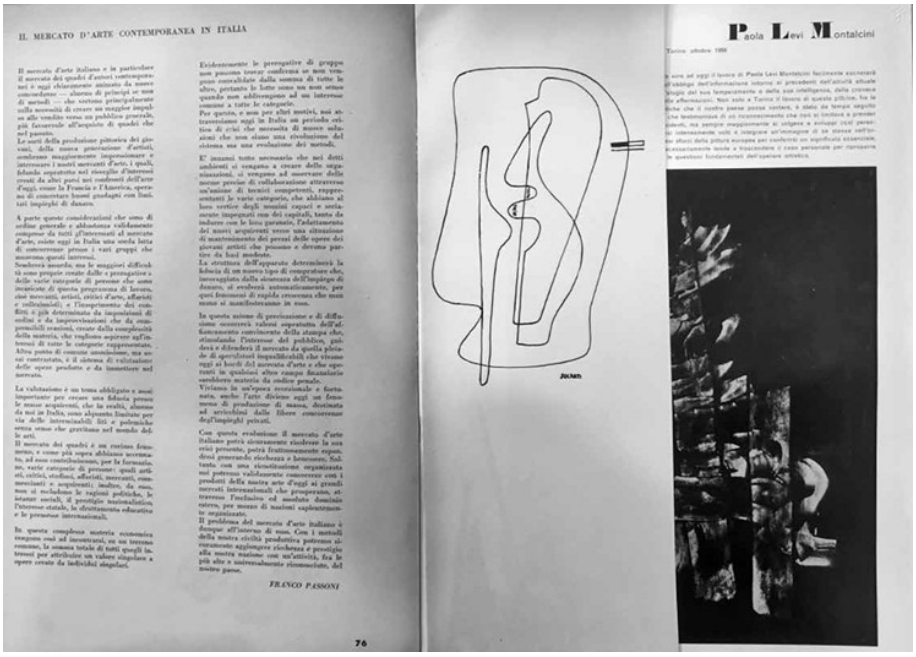
20 Luigi Orazi, 'L'Agnese è andata a morire a Viareggio', *Il caffè*, 1.3 (15 October–15 December 1949), pp. 7–9 (p. 9).

21 See, for example, Lionello Fiumi, 'Realismo lirico o Terza corrente', *Il caffè*, 2.3 (May–June 1950), pp. 3–8.

22 On this, see, for example, Mario Landolfi, *Aldo Capasso e il realismo lirico* (SamniCaudium, 2014).

23 Reference is made, in particular, to Lionello Fiumi, 'Appello neoliberista', in *Pòlline* (Studio Editoriale Lombardo, 1914), pp. 7–13.

24 See Alfredo Galletti, 'Lettera aperta a Lionello Fiumi', *Il nuovo caffè*, 2 (September–October 1950), p. 4


IL MERCATO D'ARTE CONTEMPORANEA IN ITALIA

Paola Levi Montalcini

Fig. 1 Layering of materials in *Documenti d'arte d'oggi* (1956–57).

> Monnet […] suggested that we held some exhibitions and issued some periodical publications, which were not regular at all, because they depended on whether on a Sunday morning Monnet and I had the time to glue together a seemingly random collection of announcements, catalogues, cutouts and, perhaps, add a 'travel sculpture' by Munari.[25]

Even the exact date of the first issue of *Arte concreta* is uncertain — although the official year, the one for the libraries, is 1951, the activity of MAC is actually documented ever since its first exhibition (which opened on 22 December 1948) in magazine-like[26] collections of flyers and invitations from 1948, 1949 and 1950. However, the fifteen issues dated between 1951 and 1953, on which our analysis will specifically focus, can be considered (so to speak) magazines in their own right.[27] On the other hand, from a strictly literary standpoint, the period immediately after that (1953–54), which saw the contribution of Luciano Anceschi (and the use of a bigger format, actually a series of cyclostyled pages stapled together with brochures and other materials), is of significant interest due to the presence of a certain number of poets, including Giorgio Orelli, Luciano Erba, Renzo Modesti, Nelo Risi, and Edoardo Sanguineti.

Something along these lines could be said of *Il gesto*, the first issue of which is actually no. 2, according to the colophon itself:

> This issue no. 2 of *Bollettino internazionale d'informazione del Bauhaus imaginista*, published on the occasion of the exhibition *Il gesto* at Galleria Schettini, Milan,

25 See Nicoletta Ossanna Cavadini, 'Le relazioni del Movimento Arte Concreta fra Milano e Ticino', in *Gillo Dorfles. Movimento Arte Concreta (1948–1958)* (Mazzotta, 2010), pp. 21–30 (p. 23).

26 This is the cataloguing choice of the Braidense National Library, where I conducted my research. See note 1.

27 There is an anastatic reprint of this series, edited by Silvio Spriano (Galleria Spriano, 1981). Useful information about MAC can be found in *Esperimenti di sintesi delle arti. André Bloc e Gianni Monnet in un percorso fra esponenti dell'arte concreta* (Studio Dabbeni, 2016), a digital version of which is available on the gallery's website, <www.studiodabbeni.ch> [accessed 22 April 2018].

June–July 1955, was printed by Arti Grafiche Fratelli Mascherpa on behalf of EPI Editoriale Periodici Italiani. Milan, June 1955.[28]

Overall, readers find themselves immersed in a rather mysterious world of publishing initiatives intertwined with one another, in which the same invitations may appear, and the same contributors be involved, in different periodicals.[29] The very idea of verbal text becomes problematic, the art of words and that of images constantly overlapping. Now virtually forgotten, the poetry of Antonino Tullier (whose Futurist background should not be neglected)[30] is perhaps the most fitting example of this type of attitude. Harshly criticised by Edoardo Sanguineti,[31] his *Poesia bilaterale*, published in MAC's *Documenti d'arte d'oggi* in 1958,[32] was printed on transparent paper and can be read on both sides of the page. It begins as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| T | T |
| A | A |
| M | T |
| O | O |
| | |
| T | T |
| I | O |
| M | T |
| O | O |
| | |
| T | T |
| O | I |
| M | T |
| O | O |

In spite of the criticism, there is no doubt that experiments like this one have much more in common with Concrete or Nuclear Art than — say — certain verses by Giorgio Simonotti Manacorda included in the same volume: 'L'aria colore di zolfo / risacca agli ultimi crinali, / la pianura è di là, lontana al torpido bivio d'acque, / svapora la città del borsalino. / I platani di Bonaparte / fanno un'onda leggera / al vento della gloria / nella piana calpestata di storia. / Le domestiche storie / di Maino il bandito / e di Bordino

28 *Il gesto*, [1] (1955), colophon.

29 For example, issue no. [1] of *Arte concreta*, 1953–54 series, perhaps dated September 1953, includes a contribution by Beniamino Dal Fabbro, *Definizione dei nucleari*, printed on the back of a leaflet announcing the Nuclear Art exhibitions that would take place between June and September 1953 in Milan and Brussels. Then, in June 1955, Dal Fabbro himself would write an editorial for *Il gesto*, [1,] p. [1].

30 A 1943 work by Tullier, *Manifesto dell'amore mediterraneo*, is included in *Canzoniere futurista amoroso guerriero*, ed. by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Farfa, Giovanni Acquaviva, and Aldo Giuntini (Istituto grafico Brizio, 1943), pp. [7–8] (see *Manifesti, proclami, interventi e documenti teorici del futurismo*, ed. by Luciano Caruso [Spes-Salimbeni, 1980], no. 309). Among the poetry works of Antoni[n]o (Nino) Tullier (1916–58), *Poesie 1942–1943* (All'insegna del pesce d'oro, 1945) (under the name of Nino Tullier), and *Poesie*, illustrated by Aligi Sassu (Edizioni Fiumara, 1949) (under the name of Antonino Tullier). The intertwining of this peculiar figure's literary production and art-critical work would deserve thorough investigation. For an overview, see *Esperimenti di sintesi delle arti*, p. 62.

31 See Edoardo Sanguineti, review of *Documenti d'arte d'oggi. MAC 1958*, *Il Verri*, 2.3 (October 1958), pp. 125–28 (p. 125). See, more generally, the very informative essay by Federico Fastelli, 'Dalla prefigurazione alla nuova figurazione (1951–1963): Sanguineti, i Novissimi, le arti visive', in *Verba Picta. Interrelazione tra testo e immagine nel patrimonio artistico e letterario della seconda metà del Novecento*, ed. by Teresa Spignoli (ETS, 2018), pp. 211–234.

32 Nino Tullier, 'Poesia bilaterale', in *Documenti d'arte d'oggi. MAC 1958* (A. Salto, 1958), n.p. In fact, the paratextual note to the volume — 'Contains a travel sculpture by Munari and a bilateral poem by Tullier' — identifies the poem as an independent work of art.

eroe / veleggiano nei mantelli di fumo / dentro ritmi di mosto'.[33] The fact remains that such very physical assortments of incoherent pages, which here we call 'periodicals', pose a number of problems that are far from easy to resolve.

Evidently, the definition of little magazine — or of magazine as such — does not fit well with *Arte concreta* (including its 'non-periodical' appendices) or *Il gesto*; nor, for that matter, is it appropriate for *Azimuth* and *Direzioni*, which have similar characteristics. In order to define these initiatives, we might have to use the term 'esoeditoria' instead.[34] Their financial struggles and tendency to form groups (as well as a certain inclination towards manifestos, which we shall discuss again later) are reminiscent of modernism and the avant-garde, but their appreciation for 'forms' such as the catalogue, the leaflet, the ephemeral brochure, and the design object shifts the emphasis to something rather different. The 'bibliographic code'[35] they follow seems to demote them from the status of magazines tout court to that of potential or virtual works — almost as though they were *materials for* a magazine or, as the case may be, an exhibition or a performance. A 'prelude to', rather than a self-standing periodical issue. The topic is both crucial and sensitive (and I shall go back to it). According to Marco Meneguzzo, from an art criticism, if not an art history perspective, *Arte concreta* represents the 'best expression' of MAC, also because it was printed in 'fifteen issues using an unprecedented square format'.[36] And one may well wonder how this is possible, considering the significant degree of unfinishedness involved.

The case of *AZ*, a purely art magazine, is somewhat different, and stands as a notable exception. Created by artist Mario Ballocco and gradually but steadily opening up to design and applied arts over time (in 1952, Ballocco was among the promoters of the first Exhibition of Industrial Arts and Aesthetics, held within the 30th Milan Trade Fair), *AZ*'s graphic choices appear to be more conventional, starting with its format, which is that of a regular 49x36 sheet. Most of all, *AZ* has an educational and encyclopaedic approach that emerges from the titles of its articles — such as *Epoche* and *Correnti* —, aiming to showcase the history of recent art and its movements. The uncompromising wing of Concrete Art[37] (so much so that it published a piece by Max Bill, one of the most consistent foreign concrete artists),[38] *AZ* established collaborations with personalities of the likes of Francesco Flora and Luigi Pestalozza (as well as a very young Emilio Garroni).[39] Ultimately, it sought to reconcile the opposites of *La parrucca* and *Arte concreta*, as if to normalise the MAC's bulletin by adding contributions from modernism and Novecento Italiano.

33 *Documenti d'arte d'oggi. MAC 1958* (A. Salto, 1958), p. [4]; the title of the poem is Monferrato.

34 This neologism, which literally translates as 'exo-publishing', was invented by Bruno Francisci in 1971 and has been especially successful in the field of art. See Giorgio Maffei and Patrizio Peterlini, with Marco Bazzini, *Riviste d'arte d'avanguardia. Esoeditoria negli anni Sessanta e Settanta in Italia* (Bonnard, 2005).

35 About the notion of 'bibliographic code', see Brooker and Thacker, 'General Introduction', p. 6, and the remarkable reinterpretation of Matthew Philpotts, *Defining the Thick Journal: Periodical Codes and Common Habitus*, Panel MLA 2013 <https://seeeps.princeton.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/243/2015/03/mla2013_philpotts.pdf> [accessed 22 April 2018]. Note that the same webpage of Princeton University contains other useful bibliographic references: <https://seeeps.princeton.edu/sample-page/colloquium-readings/>.

36 Marco Meneguzzo, 'Il MAC a Milano', in *MAC/Espace. Arte concreta in Italia e in Francia*, ed. by Luciano Berni Canani and Giorgio Di Genova (Bora, 1999), pp. 55–59 (p. 56).

37 In Giorgio Di Genova's words (Berni Canani and Di Genova, 'L'arte concreta e l'utopia delle arti', p. 23), in the early days of MAC, 'Dorfles […] was yet to break free from his past as a Surrealist painter, to which he sought to bend Concrete Art instead'.

38 See Max Bill, 'Il pensiero matematico nell'arte contemporanea', *AZ*, 3 (April 1951), pp. 1–2.

39 See Francesco Flora, 'L'arte e la parola', *AZ*, 1 (July 1949), p. 2; Luigi Pestalozza, 'Espressionismo dodecafonico', *AZ*, 1 (December 1949), p. 1; Emilio Garroni, 'Arte astratta e concreta a Valle Giulia', *AZ*, 3 (April 1951), p. 3.

2.2 Leaving this last, incredibly interesting exception aside, the picture seems rather clear. On the one hand, the weary remnants of Novecento Italiano and avant-gardism, gradually losing appeal, and even combined with a widespread dislike for anything new — only the corny manifestos and, above all, the fervours of 'giovanilismo' are left. On the other, a confused background noise of impromptu initiatives lacking real planning, yet indicative of something striving for structure, for form.

Let us now try to apply Raymond Williams's categories. The magazines of the first type are expression of cultural forces that lie somewhere between the *residual* and the *emergent*. On the one hand, they have connections with a fading rebellious past; on the other, they are emergent in that they offer a chance for expression to young authors who will later be active on various fronts, between the dominant scene and more or less innovative practices. On the *external* front, however, the avant-garde or *alternative* element — the attack on the cultural establishment — is very weak, and virtually non-existent in *Il caffè*. This can sometimes appear paradoxical. While the independent value system built by these cultural formations is extremely fragile, at least in the case of *La parrucca* the anti-establishment element is definitely there, though it takes the form of a moral opposition. What is striking is a worldly attitude and 'way of life' (praising, as it were, freedom in personal relationships) that appear somehow to anticipate the youth culture of the 1960s and 1970s. The 'cicisbeismo' noted by Giovanni Anceschi is indeed an undisputed presence and reveals a stance that will bring about consequences well beyond the literary sphere.

2.3 The discussion about the second group of periodicals is much more complicated. Without a doubt, all of them are *emergent* in nature, supporting very aggressive poetics.

With enough effort, one could find a meeting point between their seemingly distant positions, a common ground for outwardly conflicting voices. The ideas and practices of Concrete Art and those bordering on Art Informel or even figuration (the world of Dorfles and that of Baj) eventually converge. As a result, in both cases, the avant-garde cools down, becomes rationally codified, with an imbalance towards the graphic sign and the archetype.

Certain positions expressed by Gillo Dorfles already in the very first series of *Arte concreta* (1949), when it was still rather unclear whether this publication was a magazine in its own right, have a significant impact and certainly influence the Italian contemporary art scene. The focus is on the ability of art to create reified, objectified forms:

> Concrete Art […] does not stem from an attempt to disregard perceivable, physical, or metaphysical objects, but it is solely based on the realization and objectification of the artist's intentions, translated into concrete images of shape and colour, devoid of any symbolic meaning or formal abstraction, and exclusively aimed at capturing those rhythms, cadences, and chords so abundant in the world of colours.[40]

At the same time, it is not difficult to identify a parallel line of research looking to make figurative and symbolic elements *necessary* — for instance, as theorised by Roberto Sanesi in connection with Nuclear Art in the first issue of *Il gesto*:

40 Gillo Dorfles on Galliano Mazzon, *Arte concreta* (1949–50 [January 1949]), p. [6].

> In just a few years, Nuclear Art has slowly but steadily and positively developed towards a new use of figurative language, based on a sort of layering of elements that also include symbols standing for broader and higher meanings.[41]

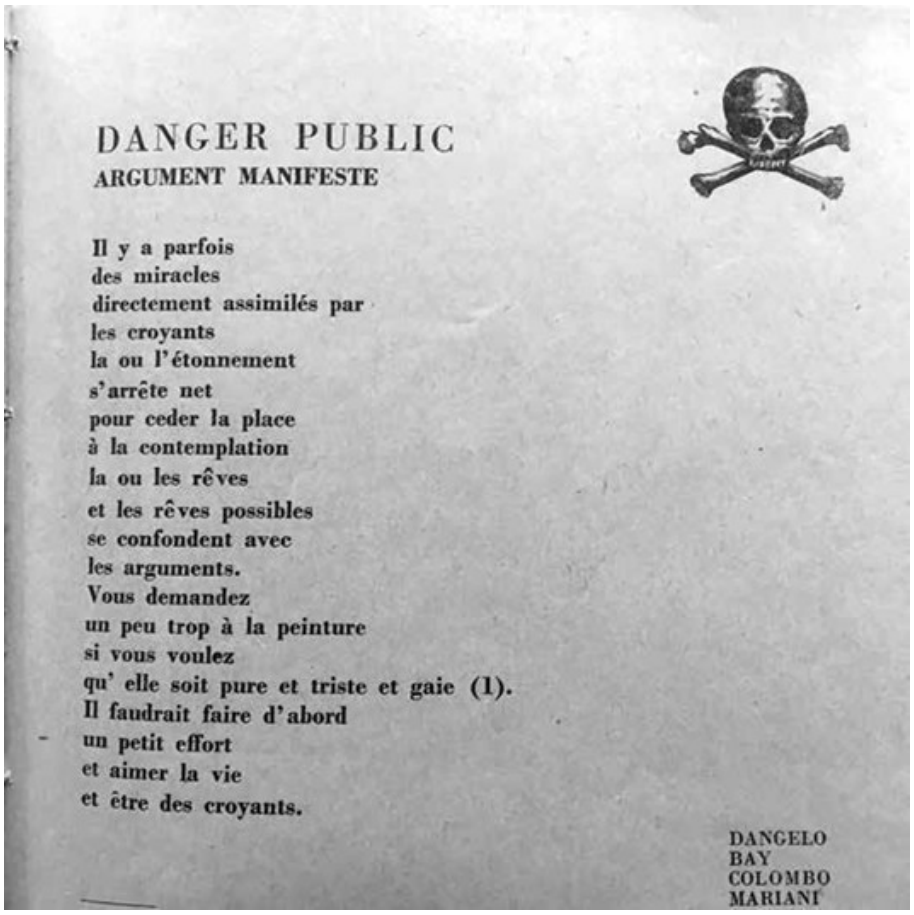
What Sanesi calls a *symbol* is obviously something similar to pure sign, an abstraction that takes invariant forms dense in meaning. French critic Edouard Jaguer, a passionate supporter of Enrico Baj, Sergio Dangelo, and Piero Manzoni's *Il gesto*, shifts the debate to the historical avant-gardes, and inevitably to Surrealism: 'Just like in 1922, creators are now looking for a new "avant-garde" […] to move forward on the great quest for the marvellous'.[42] Aside from considering a *neo*-avant-garde at least possible, all these positions share an awareness that all artistic endeavours are fleeting — this is what is new right here, right now. Dorfles reiterates this idea a number of times. In 1958, in a debate with Nuclear artists and surely referring to their peculiar idea of 'gesture', the theorist of Concrete Art insists on the importance of 'new gestures' ['gesti nuovi'] that are conscious of the passing nature of every artistic product:

> Today's speed of creation is not just a game or a whim, nor is it for convenience or indolence. We need to create fast in preparation for the speed at which what we create will be *consumed*. [Nowadays, art is] unstable, asymmetrical, certainly disappointed and disappointing, and yet such to meet that particular *taste for the ephemeral* that characterizes our age.[43]

The argument, reaffirmed the following year in *Azimuth*,[44] comes with an important clarification — the weakening of art is taking place within the context of *communication*. Communication allows 'the transfer, if not of rationalized concepts […], at least of images, feelings, embryonic forms'.

The fact that all of the above implies a renegotiation of the avant-garde can also be inferred from other evidence, the most blatant and obvious being the parody of the manifesto — a true emblem of *opposition* (to quote Williams) in the modern times. No. 10, published around January 1953,[45] is one of the most beautiful issues of *Arte concreta*. It includes no fewer than five manifestos, four of which, apparently written by Bruno Munari, are fake, or, in any case, parodies:[46] *Manifesto del macchinismo*, *Manifesto dell'arte totale* (*Totalismo*), [*Manifesto del*] *Disintegrismo*, and [*Manifesto dell'arte*] *Organica*. The fifth one is called *Danger public. Argument manifeste* and bears the signatures of Nuclear artists [Sergio] Dangelo, [Enrico] Baj, [Joe] Colombo, and [Leonardo] Mariani. This sort of poem in verses, written in French, rejects the significance of poetics itself as an intellectual act (Fig. 2): 'il faudrait faire d'abord / un petit effort / et aimer la vie / et être des croyants'. In brief, the authors have fun creating a series of manifestos 'with all the trimmings', the last one of which is professedly 'real', but lacks the typical content and basic structure of a publicly expressed stance. All the more so because the same issue of the magazine contains an unsigned piece reproducing the introduction to the exhibition where those manifestos were presented, in which art is dismissed as a specialised niche in a modern world where technology and other exhibition venues are

41 Roberto Sanesi, 'Scheda al nuclearismo', *Il gesto* (June 1955), p. [8].
42 Edouard Jaguer, 'Così come vi furono un tempo dei poeti maledetti…', *Il gesto*, 2, [1957,] pp. [14–15] (p. [15]).
43 Gillo Dorfles, 'Gesti nuovi', *Il gesto*, 3 (September 1958), p. [3].
44 See Gillo Dorfles, '"Comunicazione" e "consumo" dell'arte', *Azimuth*, ed. by Enrico Castellani and Piero Manzoni (1959), inside front cover.
45 The magazine itself reports that the manifestos at issue document an exhibition held in the Helicopter Room of Galleria dell'Annunciata in Milan, between 16 December 1952 and 6 January 1953.
46 See Meneguzzo, *Il MAC a Milano*, p. 56.



DANGER PUBLIC

ARGUMENT MANIFESTE

Il y a parfois
des miracles
directement assimilés par
les croyants
la ou l'étonnement
s'arrête net
pour ceder la place
à la contemplation
la ou les rêves
et les rêves possibles
se confondent avec
les arguments.
Vous demandez
un peu trop à la peinture
si vous voulez
qu' elle soit pure et triste et gaie (1).
Il faudrait faire d'abord
un petit effort
et aimer la vie
et être des croyants.

DANGELO
BAY
COLOMBO
MARIANI

Fig. 2 'Manifesto' published in issue no. 10 of *Arte concreta* (1953).

capable of fulfilling what in traditional contexts is left unfinished. With today's eyes, the argument seems to be informed by Walter Benjamin's ideas:

> How can we expect today's audience to still care for the problems of painting or sculpture when it is accustomed to finding everything already resolved in cinema, shiny advertising, huge scale models of International Trade Fairs, which use every possible means — the most modern, the newest ones — to implement and convey the latest advancements? Is art dead then, or has it changed its appearance, without most people noticing? […] Art is not dead — it has only changed its address, and one must look for it there. It does not answer at the old address anymore.[47]

A pataphysical tone in the broad sense characterises the ambiguous manifesto published in the fourth and last issue of *Il gesto*, dated September 1959 and edited by Enrico Baj alone. Here, an *Interplanetary art* is advocated. And the place and time are: 'From planet Earth, January 1959'.[48] Rather than a true parody, however, it is a humorous manipulation of the manifesto genre's stylistic features, incorporating a *real* criticism of the excesses

47 *Arte concreta*, 10, pp. [35 and 43] (p. [43]).

48 The manifesto is signed in the following order by Giovanni Anceschi, Sandro Bajini, Nanni Balestrini, Leo Paolazzi, Paolo Radaelli, Luca, Lucio Del Pezzo, Giuseppe Alfano, Dino Grieco, Guido Biasi, Mario Persico, Sergio Fergola, Bruno Di Bello, Angelo Verga, Ettore Sordini, Antonio Recalcati, Enrico Baj, and Farfa. It is printed on pages [4–5] in *Il gesto*, 4 (September 1959). The following quotes are from pages [5] and [4], respectively.

of Abstract and Concrete Art. While the world is threatened by an Apocalypse that 'has hovered above us for years now, and increasingly so, with its monstrous signs and darkened tombs, the rivals, the intellectuals of obesity and masturbation, the priests of self-harm continue to treat us like shallow fools'. The reference is, of course, to the champions of Abstract and Concrete Art, both of which lack true strength:

> It is now time to make known that gravity only oppresses fools, including the obese and abstract or concrete painters, as many of them like to call themselves, thus revealing their very concrete unfitness for art.

The aggressive intent and the defence of an art capable of breaking free from too much intellectual rigour through the grotesque are all too evident. But, at the same time, the whole issue is pervaded by a vein of the paradoxical and the humorous that should not be overlooked. The inspiration comes directly from Don Siegel's film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, released in Italian as *L'invasione degli ultracorpi* three years earlier. Fig. 3, *Ultracorpi all'assalto delle nostre donne*, exemplifies Baj's way of conveying this very peculiar cultural sentiment. While acknowledging the honesty of the artist's attempt in his critical review *Enrico Baj e la comica interplanetaria*, Edouard Jaguer also speaks of the 'thème passablement crétinisant de l'exploration interplanétaire'.[49] Ultimately, Baj places the manifesto and the themes of mass culture at the service of a humorous, yet programmatic act, sadistically manipulating the clichés and *topoi* of art and its consumption (think of the *détournement* of existing paintings through oleography: see Fig. 4).

All in all, it seems to me that most of these conflicts may be reconciled around a few keywords included in an untitled piece written by Michel Tapié and published in *Direzioni* in June 1959. Here, after a head-on attack on the practices of Art Informel and Action Painting (accused of producing 'un style immédiatement reconnaissable'), the author argues the need for a 'deflated', self-aware art:

> Passé le temps de l'expérience, nous souhaitons des œuvres élaborées en toute conscience à la puissance des nécessités autres, quelque froides, quelque hyper-complexes qu'elles puissent devenir.[50]

This is a recurring subject in *Direzioni*, epitomised by the concepts of 'sign' and 'matrix-sign' put forth by editor Fabrizio Mondadori, for example in an essay on Emilio Scanavino.[51]

Hence, whether by means of a reduction almost to the level of the archetype, and above all to that of a design product, or by humorously playing with shapes 'found' somewhere else and polemically reworked, between 1948 and 1959 the Milanese art magazines seem to gradually distance themselves from aggressive, head-on avant-gardism. They proceed in a less straightforward, more cautious way, well aware of the external forces that sometimes demote, sometimes relaunch art, depriving it of the possibility to see itself as truly 'absolute', an anti-value capable of turning the world upside down.

49 Edouard Jaguer, 'Enrico Baj e la comica interplanetaria / Enrico Baj et le comique interplanétaire', *Il gesto*, 4 (September 1959), pp. [10–13] (p. [10]).
50 Michel Tapié, in *Direzioni*, 3 (June 1959), p. 19.
51 Fabrizio Mondadori, 'Pittura di Emilio Scanavino', *Direzioni*, 3 (June 1959), pp. 6–7.

Fig. 3 Enrico Baj, 'Ultracorpi all'assalto delle nostre donne', *Il gesto*, 4 (1959).

Fig. 4 Enrico Baj, 'Ultracorpo in Svizzera', *Il gesto*, 4 (1959).

2.4 The poets deserve a different analysis altogether. I have already touch on this in connection with *Arte concreta* and the synergistic, if somewhat isolated work of Nino Tullier. I call it 'synergistic' not so much because it cuts across different groups (from MAC to Nuclear Art), but mostly because it gave rise to an experiment virtually never tried before the neo-avant-garde. I am referring to his 1955 booklet entitled *Enten Eller*, illustrated by Gianni Monnet[52] — the true soul of Italian Concrete Art —, in which the verbal and graphic signs seek to engage in a lively dialogue. Despite the poor condition of the only copy available in a public library, Fig. 5 exemplifies the virtuoso counterpoint between the syllabication, marked by a predominantly trochaic rhythm, and therefore often based on an octosyllabic pattern ('Nòna Thùle / nàno nò / ùno e trìno / Ònan àtto […]'), and Monnet's plain figuration that encloses, brackets, and articulates that fragmentation as if it were punctuation. With the exception of this author and a few other attempts, including an interesting series (in my humble opinion) of humorous pages by Bruno Munari, *Teoremi*, published in *AZ* in 1950,[53] the field is largely dominated by Luciano Anceschi and his choices. To some extent, this is also the case with *La parrucca*, at least as far as poetry is concerned. Having been introduced to the editorial staff by Nanni Balestrini, who had been a contributor since the fifth issue (no. 2 of 1954, year II),[54] between 1954 and 1956 Anceschi would attempt to influence the editorial line of Mossotti's magazine. But while Anceschi's infiltration into *La parrucca* seems capable of producing non-occasional cultural effects (think at least of the serial essay by Antonio Porta/Leo Paolazzi about the relationship between Pascoli and Campana),[55] the same cannot be said of *Arte concreta* and its appendix, *Documenti d'arte d'oggi*. This is especially striking because literature is virtually left out of these publications between 1948 and 1953. In the third issue (probably published in January 1954) of the last, more lacking series, a note specifies that the bulletin 'will feature, from now on, a literary section edited by Luciano Anceschi'.[56] The only exception before then had been a short contribution by Albino Galvano in issue no. 14 (April 1953), providing a clear analysis of the 'symbolist' value of D'Annunzio's work — in stark contrast to the coeval historical literary debate, which still classified D'Annunzio as strictly Decadent.[57]

The point is that Anceschi's choices between 1953 and 1958 are eclectic, and the poets he supports adhere to the values enshrined in the recent *Linea lombarda* anthology, plus some of the writers that will become part of the Novissimi group. When the literary section is inaugurated, between the late 1953 and the early 1954, the first poets to be published are four out of the six authors of the 1952 anthology. Namely: Giorgio Orelli,

52 See Antonino Tullier, Enten Eller. *Poesie*, illustrated by Gianni Monnet (A. Salto, 1955). The copy I am referring to is in the Biblioteca della Biennale di Venezia ASAC library, shelf number Rari Z 0265. The short collection was also included in the first volume of *Documenti d'arte d'oggi*, edited by MAC, GROUPE ESPACE Italian section, Galleria del Fiore, Milan (October 1954), pp. 111–24.

53 For example, this one is called *Inversamente proporzionale* (and is laid out like a poem, but written in prose): 'Riproduzione verista / della natura esteriore: / un milione di ammiratori. / Riproduzione impressionista: / centomila ammiratori. / Deformazione della natura: / diecimila amatori. / La natura usata come pretesto: / mille amatori. / Assenza della natura esteriore / invenzione / arte concreta: / cento amatori. / I cento amatori / capiscono anche l'arte verista, / il milione di ammiratori / nega con tutte le sue forze / l'arte concreta' (*AZ*, II, 2 [February 1950], p. 1).

54 Under the collective name of 'Quattro poeti' (four poets, the other three being Lorenzo Meda, Sergio Itolli, and Alfredo Amellone), Balestrini published a poem entitled *Verde-Azzurro* in *La parrucca*, 2.2 (20 March 1954), p. 3.

55 See Leo Paolazzi, 'Musica e colore in un rapporto Pascoli Campana', *La parrucca*, 5.1 (February 1957), pp. 221–22; and 5.2 (30 April 1957), pp. 248–52. Think also of issue no. 6 of 30 September 1955 (year III), which lines up an essay by Alfredo Giuliani on Anceschi's *Linea lombarda*, Pound's poems and quotes translated by Alfredo Giuliani and Giorgio Manganelli, and three poems by Nanni Balestrini.

56 'Notizie del MAC', *Arte concreta*[.] Bollettino del MAC e del sindacato nazionale arti non-figurative, [3,] p. 31; see also, at the same page, *Documenti d'arte d'oggi* (1954).

57 See Albino Galvano, 'Asterischi', *Arte concreta*, 12 (15 February 1953), pp. [71–72].

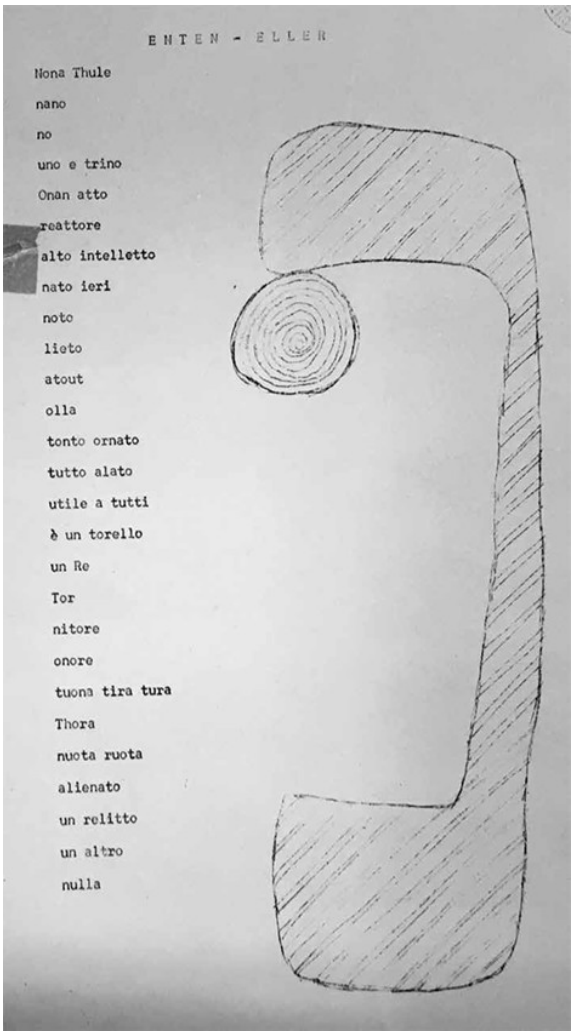



Fig. 5 Nino Tullier and Gianni Monnet, *Enten Eller* (detail) (1955).

Luciano Erba, Renzo Modesti, and Nelo Risi are covered, while Vittorio Sereni and Roberto Rebora are not included. And every issue only focuses on one poet. Oddly enough, however, while not presenting any literary work, issue no. [7] announces the publication of Tullier's *Enten Eller*, as though to emphasise the alternative between two different sets of artistic values, two 'avant-garde' poetics. Moreover, within a seemingly coherent programme, no. [8] contains a text (a passage from *Laborintus*, but laid out in prose)[58] by the same Sanguineti who, as Anceschi's collaborator in *Il Verri*, will go on to undermine the importance of both *Arte concreta* and Tullier.

The MAC's subsequent publications follow more or less the same pattern[59] — newcomers such as Balestrini, Pagliarani, Paolazzi (and Giuseppe Guglielmi) do not succeed in pushing out Simonotti Manacorda, Antonio and Paolo Radaelli, Rizzardi, Sanesi, even Giudici.[60] Let us read the following poem, *Terza marina*, by Alfredo

58 See Edoardo Sanguineti, 'Laszo Varga', *Arte concreta*[.] Bollettino del MAC e del sindacato nazionale arti non-figurative, [8,] [Summer 1954?,] n.p. (but *Documenti d'arte d'oggi* [1954], p. 75). This is section 20 of the short poem. I am not aware of any other prose versions of passages from *Laborintus*.

59 A curiosity worth mentioning in *Documenti d'arte d'oggi* (1954) is the independent publication *Arte nucleare*, dated 1954, which contains a collection of *Aforismi nucleari* by Beniamino Dal Fabbro and a far from avant-garde poem by Diego Valeri, entitled *Una rosa*.

60 In *Documenti d'arte d'oggi* (1956–57), edited by MAC/Espace (A. Salto, 1957), see Antonio Radaelli, 'Il

Rizzardi — a well-known Anglicist and brilliant translator — included in the *Documenti d'arte d'oggi* edition of 1956–57:

> Tormento degli ormeggi
> nella risacca. La banchina è vuota.
> In una rete poco cielo è chiuso
> smunto, piovorno. Come punge il vento
> sul molo che è più nudo dell'oceano![61]

Nothing ground-breaking here, I think we all agree. Of course, we know all too well that Anceschi's choices are also informed by his work for publisher Magenta, which notoriously released both *Linea lombarda* and *Laborintus* within the 'Oggetto e simbolo' series in those years. The point is that, while 'art documents' in the strict sense are often accompanied by very significant critical reviews which are not merely aimed at supporting the exhibitions or the artists being covered, this is not the case with poetry. As a matter of fact, while showcased from a perspective that tends to enhance figuration, and therefore the object (Fig. 6), no explicit information about poetics is provided. Nor is the definition of 'group' fitting for the assemblage of authors that Anceschi brings together — the only visible, albeit residual point of contact being *Linea lombarda*.

2.5 Let us sum up. If we look at the artists of the magazines under consideration here and we try to pinpoint the nature of the cultural formation they produce, we are faced with a somewhat obligatory internal pattern — a small group of intellectual artists capable of expressing values other than the 'dominant' ones. However, in the sphere of poetry, despite an apparent attempt to build on the legacy of the recent past, which is now on the verge of becoming hegemonic, no real group can be formed. Quite the opposite: Tullier, the only poet capable of working synergically with the artists (see Fig. 7), a nice detail from a visual poem he 'wrote' with Lucio Fontana), is marginalised.

But the real issue is the *external* impact, the effects that such self-sufficient dynamics have on the public sphere. In hindsight, the artists of MAC and even the Nuclear artists of *Il gesto* display an attitude that Williams would call 'specialising'. Provocation and opposition are virtually entirely missing (perhaps with the only exception of the last issue of *Il gesto*, characterised by a very *post*modern flair). Theirs is indeed an alternative way of understanding art and also literature, but one that does not break with tradition or cause public scandal. Everything is seen from the inner world of art galleries, at most of their international relations. If anything, the genuinely alternative interest these endeavours have is in applied arts and design, which, however, have already become something else, ultimately outside the realm of art.

If all this is true, then the (neo-)avant-garde dimension appears to be of little relevance, except in terms of a parody. The 'specificity' of the magazine ends up undermining its essence as an opposing cultural formation, leading either to rather vague publishing experiments — considering the immature and informal nature of these actual non-magazines — or to the tangibility of design, whose boundaries are, conversely, all too discernible and clear.

filo di ferro', p. 118, and Roberto Sanesi, 'Vestitur alba clamide', n.p.; in *Documenti d'arte d'oggi. MAC 1958*, see Giovanni Giudici, 'L'incursione sulla caserma', p. 26, and Paolo Radaelli, 'Hanno venduto ai mercanti', p. 126.

61 Alfredo Rizzardi, 'Terza marina', in *Documenti d'arte d'oggi* (1956–57), p. 128.

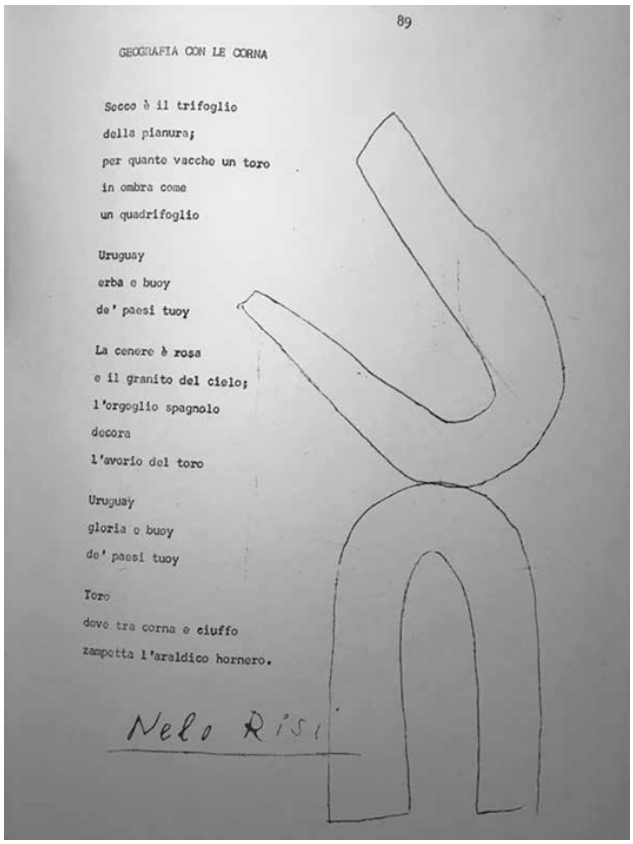



Fig. 6 Nelo Risi, 'Geografia con le corna', *Arte concreta*, [6,] (April? 1954).

Fig. 7 'Poesia di Antonino Tullier, composizione di Lucio Fontana' (detail), in *Documenti d'arte d'oggi* (1956–57).

2.6 The ways in which all of this culminates in *Il Verri* are yet to be ascertained. And, while a culmination is necessary from a number of perspectives, this does not mean it will coincide with that of our analysis so far. As already highlighted a couple of times, at the beginnings of *Il Verri*, Sanguineti distances himself from MAC in many respects. First, in issue no. 3 (Spring 1957), he notes a lack of critical reviews and an abundance of 'anthology' materials:

> the amount of *Arcadia* found in the issue is in itself a critical act and an urgent problem, and, while it only involves a few of the contributors, it nevertheless seems to stubbornly spread like a common and easily recognisable cloud.[62]

Then, in issue no. 4 (December 1958), while acknowledging the continuity (as it were) between Erba and Balestrini, he is unable to find a convincing definition for what will later be known as the neo-avant-garde — he speaks of neo-experimentalism (directly in relation to Pasolini) and neo-Baroque, considering this latter trend as absolutely necessary.[63]

One thing is for sure: Anceschi's qualitative leap is predominantly academic in nature. His preface to the first issue of *Il Verri*, under the title of *Discorso generale*, expressly refers to the reconciliation of the opposites: 'No opposition between militant culture and university culture'. And more:

> It seems increasingly clear that what is new no longer emerges in the form of a big rebellion, but with a discretion informed by the knowledge that continuity will soon be restored after every break, and indeed that continuity takes place through break.[64]

This approach, almost based on phenomenological definition, tends to avoid clear-cut positions and sees no real contradiction between 'discretion' and 'violence'. All in all, from Anceschi's peculiar perspective, the militant aspect seems to be understood merely as an opening to a poetry 'that is made', or to the dissemination of literary values. The selection of the Italian poets that write for *Il Verri* reflects the choices made in the past, with only a few additions and a certain tendency to retain what is old: Guglielmi, Erba, Cattafi, Giuliani, Orelli, Zanzotto, Sereni, Frezza, Balestrini, Risi, Sanguineti, Cacciatore, Paolazzi. Each of the first four issues includes an anthology of foreign poetry — North American (edited by Alfredo Rizzardi), French (edited by Luciano Erba), British (edited by Roberto Sanesi), and German (edited by Nanni Balestrini), respectively.

No dramatisation or problematisation of conflicts; instead, measured and reasoned opinions leaning towards the establishment. As you may be aware, *Il Verri* will express its disappointment in Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* through an overcautious review by René Wellek, accusing the great work on the representation of reality of a general lack of ideas, as well as of inadequately conceptualising the problem.[65]

I think that two of Alfredo Giuliani's reviews in particular will help clarify the picture. In issue no. 2 (Winter 1957), Giuliani voices his doubts about *Laborintus*, which he dismisses as 'a pathography, something before representation', which 'is not liberation yet', based on a criterion of value that he expressly refers to André Breton's work.[66] However, back in issue no. 1, Giuliani had extensively (and positively) reviewed

62 Edoardo Sanguineti, review of *Documenti d'arte d'oggi*, *Il Verri*, 3 (Spring 1957), p. 121.
63 See Edoardo Sanguineti, review of *Documenti d'arte d'oggi. MAC 1958*.
64 Both quotes from [Luciano Anceschi,] 'Discorso generale', *Il Verri*, 1 (Autumn 1956), pp. 3–7 (p. 6).
65 See René Wellek, 'Una singolare nozione di realismo', *Il Verri*, 2 (Winter 1957), pp. 13–24.
66 Alfredo Giuliani, review of Edoardo Sanguineti's *Laborintus*, *Il Verri*, 2 (Winter 1957), pp. 77–80

*La bufera*.[67] What is striking here is that, in commenting on the long verses of *Primavera hitleriana* and other poems, the critic introduces some of the arguments that will characterise, albeit in a completely different context, his 1961 essay *La forma del verso*, included in *I Novissimi*.[68] In Giuliani's own words, Montale's poetry is marked by a 'quantitative rhythm', and 'we had better keep an eye on his *narrative verses*'. The metrical theme of the long verse, later called 'atonal' and typical of the Novissimi avant-garde, would therefore be rooted in the mainstream-oriented formal choices of the greatest master of Italian modernism, which the neo-avant-garde could not help but oppose. It thus comes as no surprise that Montale is never mentioned in Giuliani's 1961 essay — an avant-garde argument that takes its cue from the poetry of a rival would have been totally unacceptable.

2.7 Looking at *these* periodicals produces an alienating effect; even the assumption that they would ultimately culminate in *Il Verri* appears questionable. Not only do Anceschi and company normalise the picture and resolve any conflicts by bringing them together under the umbrella of an alleged common purpose — a *coincidentia oppositorum*, so to speak. Most of all, they seem to overlook some of the most brilliant artistic achievements of the previous decade. Rather than grounding themselves in the works, they seek to immediately become a *dominant cultural force*, a group which is anything but militant, whose 'alternative' ambitions are dampened by its desire to become established before time.

The gap or discontinuity between non-magazines (or 'exo-magazines') and a well-structured publication is much too harsh. Not only that: the reference to neo-Baroque (firstly introduced by Sanguineti), which will later become the neo-avant-garde, originates from the dismissal or, in any case, a reconsideration of the very recent past. Paradoxically, with *Il Verri*, the non-opposing alternative morphs into a non-alternative opposition. From Anceschi's perspective, it seems as though the 'new' required a 'dominant' ideology to manifest itself, while Dorfles and Baj (as well as, to some extent, Ballocco), having realised that opposition can no longer be achieved through art, feel the need to push its limits (see, once again, the manifestos and the opening to design) in order to account for a world of artefacts they consider capable of expressing alternative values, and, for that reason, incredibly lively. In other words, Anceschi, Sanguineti, Giuliani etc. take an ideological stance towards an avant-garde whose true form they are not able to grasp yet. Conversely, Concrete and Nuclear artists strive (at times unsuccessfully) to support movements that, while still under construction, they know well. Too much 'poetics' and too much artistry clash with each other.

The fact remains that only one of the two stories is known. That of Milan's dishevelled non-magazines has yet to be fully told. But one thing is for sure — *Il Verri* does not legitimise those non-magazines; if anything, it calls them into question, uncovering their excessive eclecticism. The aesthetic implications of this are yet to be assessed, also with ideological tools that will need to be sharpened. But the idea that what lies beneath the surface might be referred to as 'postmodernism' deserves serious consideration.

(p. 80).

67 See Alfredo Giuliani, review of Eugenio Montale's *La bufera e altro*, *Il Verri*, 1 (Autumn 1956), pp. 93–97.

68 The essay was first published under the title of *Il verso secondo l'orecchio* in *Il Verri*, V, 1 (February 1961), pp. 43–52, and then under the title of *La forma del verso in I Novissimi. Poesie per gli anni '60*, ed. by Alfredo Giuliani (Einaudi, 1979), pp. 214–22.

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