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

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2	Garde Magazines of the 1940s	2
3	and 1950s*	3
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16	ABSTRACT	16
17		17
18	The essay discusses the characteristics of some small magazines (bordering on illustrated	18
19	leaflets) published in Milan in the 1950s that supported avant-garde art. MAC (Concrete	19
20	Art Movement), Spatialism, and Nuclear Art spread a lively, in-progress idea not only of	20
21	artistic practices but also of the link between art and literature, with particular attention	21
22	to the potential of concrete poetry. The birth of the magazine <i>Il Verri</i> in 1956 marks	22
23	a slowdown in this expansion and creates the conditions for the poetics of the Italian	23
24	Neo-Avant-Garde, with its 'political' loyalties and exclusions.	24
25		25
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27	KEYWORDS	27
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29	Italian literature in the 1950s, Italian avant-garde, Italian modernism, Italian small	29
30	reviews, art/poetry relationships	30
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47	* This essay is a translation by Elisa Maria Garattoni (Interlinguae Srl) of Paolo Giovannetti's essay	47
48	'Prima del Verri: riviste milanesi di avanguardia negli anni Quaranta-Cinquanta del Novecento',	48
49	originally published in <i>Periodici del Novecento e del Duemila fra avanguardie e postmoderno</i> , ed. by	49
50	Paolo Giovannetti (Mimesis, 2018), pp. 79–114. This translation was made possible thanks to the	50
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1 **1 Matters of Method** 1

2
3 The Milanese periodicals under consideration here — *Arte concreta* [*Concrete art*], with 3
4 its appendix *Documenti d'arte d'oggi* [*Documents of contemporary art*], *AZ*, *Azimuth*, *Il caffè* 4
5 (later *Il nuovo caffè*), *Direzioni* [*Directions*], *Il gesto* [*The gesture*], *La parrucca* [*The wig*], as 5
6 well as the first two years of *Il Verri*¹ — share two characteristics. The first is a general 6
7 flair for the avant-garde, or at least an aesthetic and/or social project that is critical of 7
8 Italian mainstream art (and beyond). Incidentally, the ‘moderate’ or even ‘very moderate’ 8
9 *Il caffè* and *La parrucca* owe a great deal to twentieth-century ‘giovanilismo’ — a cult of 9
10 youth that was typical of magazines such as *Leonardo* and *La voce* [*The voice*] — which, 10
11 contradictorily, makes them break away from the tradition while conforming to it at 11
12 the same time. The second characteristic is the relationship between these periodicals 12
13 and *Il Verri*, started in 1956 and still published to this day. In theory, this relationship 13
14 could be taken for granted. I mean that, in light of the (so to speak) official history of 14
15 the Italian avant-garde — or, more precisely, the neo-avant-garde — according to which 15
16 the Milanese *Il Verri* marked the beginning of a journey that would ultimately lead to 16
17 Gruppo 63, the Novissimi group, and beyond, one could be tempted to conclude that 17
18 all those magazines did was ‘lay the ground’ for Luciano Anceschi’s cultural product. 18

19 The point, however, is to test both of these assumptions in practice, first and 19
20 foremost via the customary tools of historical literary analysis. The far too obvious 20
21 connection between irregular, often odd magazines — which, as we shall see, are actually 21
22 ‘non-magazines’ — and the incredibly consistent *Il Verri* should be investigated in 22
23 depth, and perhaps questioned. The research method I would like to apply in order to 23
24 do so, however, is slightly different from that normally used by periodical scholars in 24
25 Italy. Starting at least from Eugenio Garin and the series published by Einaudi, *Cultura* 25
26 *italiana del '900 attraverso le riviste*, through the research of Alberto Abruzzese, Alberto 26
27 Asor Rosa, and Luisa Mangoni, up to the papers by Giuseppe Langella, Elisabetta 27

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39 1 *Arte concreta* was actually published in four series. The first is a collection of catalogues measuring 39
40 9.5x21 and issued between 1949 and 1950, although the first brochure covers the debut exhibition 40
41 of Movimento Arte Concreta, or MAC, which took place on 22 December 1948. The second, better 41
42 known series covers the years between 1951 and 1953 and is comprised of fifteen 17x17 issues. The 42
43 third series, covering the 1953–54 season, is made up of eight unnumbered and undated 22x32 issues 43
44 (in that period, the publication was called *Arte concreta. Bollettino del MAC e del sindacato nazionale arti* 44
45 *non-figurative*). Lastly, the fourth series, not a periodical in the strict sense, includes the four volumes 45
46 published between 1954 and 1958 under the title of *Documenti d'arte d'oggi* (it should be noted, 46
47 however, that the first of these gathers the materials already published in the 1953–54 ‘periodical’, 47
48 without a few documents but with some additions — one of them will be discussed in note 53, another 48
49 one in note 60). *AZ. Mensile d'arte* was published in twelve issues on an irregular basis from July 1949 49
50 to April–May 1952. *Azimuth* was released in only two issues in 1959–60. *Il caffè. Rassegna di libera* 50
51 *polemica artistico-letteraria* was published twice monthly from June–July 1949 to November–December 51
52 1950 (eight issues in total). As mentioned, with the July–August 1950 issue, the magazine changed 52
53 its name to *Il nuovo caffè. Rassegna di libera polemica artistico-letteraria*. The three issues of *Direzioni.* 53
54 *Rassegna d'arte e di poesia* were released between 1958 and 1959. *Il gesto. Rassegna internazionale delle* 54
55 *forme libere* was published once a year in four issues from 1955 to 1959 (the second issue in 1957, the 55
56 third in 1958). Lastly, *La parrucca. Giornale letterario* was published on a rather irregular basis between 56
57 1953 and 1963, with a hiatus from 1958 to 1962 (forty-two issues in total). 57

1 Mondello, Massimo Rizzante, Edoardo Esposito, and Franco Contorbia² — only to 1
 2 mention a few — one can definitely identify a ‘civil’ and ‘national’ common thread that 2
 3 runs through Italian periodical studies. The magazine is seen as a testing ground for 3
 4 collective (almost identity-defining), non-literary content, an ideal space for exploring 4
 5 ideology, politics even, and for a sociology of the country’s typical literary choices. And 5
 6 indeed, this is precisely what foreign observers notice in Italian modernist periodicals 6
 7 — the fact that, in so many cases, they serve the purpose of bringing together culture 7
 8 and political debate, or even politics as such.³ Generally speaking, while it might seem 8
 9 obvious to Italian scholars, the thread through the centuries that connects the Verri 9
 10 brothers’ *Il caffè* to *Il conciliatore* [*The conciliator*], to the Florentine magazines of the 10
 11 early 1900s, as well as to *Il politecnico* [*The polytechnic*], *Il menabò*, or *Quaderni Piacentini* 11
 12 [*Piacenza notebooks*], actually stems from placing more emphasis on certain themes and 12
 13 issues rather than on *others*. Rather than on ‘pure’ literary values, before anything else. 13

14 Well then, the aim of this study is to steer away a bit from that approach, using 14
 15 categories of analysis taken from the most recent developments in periodical studies. 15
 16 In particular, drawing on the remarkable *Modernist Magazines Project*⁴ of Andrew 16
 17 Thacker and his colleagues, as well as on the methodological guidance developed by 17
 18 ESPRit, notably in a recent paper by Evangelhia Stead,⁵ I would like to juxtapose our 18
 19 magazines with the ‘little reviews’ of modernism. At the same time, I shall try to capture 19
 20 the interrelation between the small and the large — the cultural dynamism implied 20
 21 in transitioning from a little, often self-made magazine, published by a loose group of 21
 22 intellectuals, to a formally established, or quasi-established, fully-fledged periodical. 22

23 More precisely, three steps will need to be taken in order to better identify and 23
 24 distinguish the factors at play. 24

25
 26 a. Ascertain whether the magazines under consideration here are indeed ‘little’ in 26
 27 nature, according to a model that can be referred to both Remy de Gourmont’s 27
 28 bibliographic and critical practice,⁶ and to Ezra Pound’s militant action. 28
 29 Incidentally, a well-known (at least abroad), ideologically charged quote of his 29

30
 31
 32
 33 2 Einaudi published the series entitled *Cultura italiana del '900 attraverso le riviste* in six volumes 33
 34 between 1960 and 1963. See also: *Eugenio Garin, Cronache di filosofia italiana 1900–1943* (Laterza, 34
 35 1955); Alberto Abruzzese, ‘Da Trieste a Firenze. Lavoro e tradizione letteraria’, in *La classe dei colti.* 35
 36 *Intellettuuali e società nel primo Novecento italiano*, ed. by Lucia Strappini, Claudia Micocci, and Alberto 36
 37 Abruzzese (Laterza, 1970), pp. 217–311; Luisa Mangoni, *L'interventismo della cultura. Intellettuuali e* 37
 38 *riviste del fascismo* (Laterza, 1974); Alberto Asor Rosa, ‘La cultura’, in *Storia d'Italia*, vol. IV, *Dall'Unità* 38
 39 *ad oggi*, t. II (Einaudi, 1975), pp. 821–1664; Giuseppe Langella, *Il secolo delle riviste. Lo statuto letterario* 39
 40 *dal «Baretti» a «Primato»* (Vita e pensiero, 1982); Elisabetta Mondello, *Gli anni delle riviste. Le riviste* 40
 41 *letterarie dal 1945 agli anni Ottanta* (Milella, 1985); *Le riviste dell'Europa letteraria*, ed. by Massimo 41
 42 Rizzante and Carla Gubert (Dipartimento di scienze filologiche storiche, 2002); *Le letterature straniere* 42
 43 *nell'Italia dell'entre-deux guerres. Le riviste di cultura. Spogli e studi*, ed. by Edoardo Esposito (Pensa 43
 44 MultiMedia, 2004); Franco Contorbia, *Giornalismo italiano* (Mondadori, 2007–09), 4 vols. 44

45 3 This is the argument that Sascha Bru makes in the introduction to the section about Italy in *The Oxford* 45
 46 *Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. III, *Europe 1880–1940*, ed. by Peter Brooker, 46
 47 Sascha Bru, Andrew Thacker, and Christian Weikop (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 439–44. 47

48 4 The first series, edited by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, is *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History* 48
 49 *of Modernist Magazines*, vol. I, *Britain and Ireland 1880–1955* (Oxford University Press, 2009); vol. 49
 50 II, *North America 1894–1960* (Oxford University Press, 2012); vol. III, *Europe 1880–1940* (Oxford 50
 51 University Press, 2013). The second series, edited by Eric Bulson and Andrew Thacker, is *The Oxford* 51
 52 *Critical and Cultural History of Global Modernist Magazines*. Extensive information on this topic is 52
 53 available in Italian in *I modernismi delle riviste. Tra Europa e Stati Uniti*, ed. by Caroline Patey and 53
 54 Edoardo Esposito (Ledizioni, 2017); especially in the essay by Andrew Thacker, ‘Verso una mappa 54
 55 delle riviste moderniste. Alcune considerazioni di metodo’, pp. 13–32. 55

56 5 See Evangelhia Stead, ‘Reconsidering “Little” versus “Big” Periodicals’, *Journal of European Periodical* 56
 57 *Studies*, 1.2 (Winter 2016), pp. 1–17. 57

58 6 See Remy de Gourmont, *Les petites revues. Essai de Bibliographie* (Mercure de France, 1900); 58
 59 anastatic reprint Ent’revue, 1992. 59

- 1 is perhaps worth mentioning, as it is revealing of Pound's radically modernist 1
 2 attitude: 2
 3 Honest literature experiment, however inclusive, however dismally it fail, is of 3
 4 infinitely more value to the intellectual life of a nation than exploitation (however 4
 5 glittering) of mental mush and otiose habit.⁷ 5
 6 6
 7 In other words, the little magazine is understood as an arena for literary exercises, which, 7
 8 while prone to failure, can lead to true artistic 'progress'. Taking his cue from Bourdieu, 8
 9 Thacker has gone so far as to suggest that we construct a 'periodical field'⁸ — that is, 9
 10 a system in which experimental journals, always on the verge of fading into silence, 10
 11 are contrasted with more established ones (the so-called 'big magazines'). Of course, 11
 12 the interplay of forces of interest to us concerns in particular the magazine towards 12
 13 which the others (supposedly) gravitate: *Il Verri*. It is no coincidence that I shall use it 13
 14 as a touchstone in most cases. However, our scope of analysis should be broadened to 14
 15 encompass other publications too, notably *Galleria* [*Gallery*], *Aut Aut*, *Il mulino* [*The*
 16 *mill*], Giambattista Vicari's *Il caffè*, *Nuova Corrente* [*New current*], and *Officina* [*Workshop*]
 17 (the 'pool' identified a few years ago by Giuseppe Langella and Giuseppe Lupo actually 17
 18 includes over twenty remarkable magazines issued between 1949 and 1956).⁹ 18
 19 19
 20 b. Then, using the categories devised by Raymond Williams¹⁰ (rather than those of 20
 21 Pierre Bourdieu or, if relevant, of Vittorio Spinazzola),¹¹ I shall try to pinpoint 21
 22 the *cultural forces* that characterize our magazines, the kind of *formations* they 22
 23 spawn in literature and art, especially in terms of their relations with the social 23
 24 system as a whole. What types of intellectual communities do they represent? 24
 25 Are there any novelties compared to tradition (also considering the legacy of 25
 26 modernism and the Italian avant-gardes)? In order to categorise the way in 26
 27 which the group behind each magazine works, Williams's tripartite model seems 27
 28 very useful indeed.¹² For example, based on that model, one could distinguish 28
 29 29
 30 30
 31 7 Ezra Pound, 'Small Magazines', *The English Journal*, XIX, 9 (November 1930), pp. 689–704 (p. 699). 31
 32 8 See Andrew Thacker, 'General Introduction. "Magazines, Magazines, Magazines!"', in *The Oxford*
 33 *Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. II, pp. 1–28 (p. 19). 33
 34 9 See *Il secolo dei manifesti. Programmi delle riviste del Novecento*, ed. by Giuseppe Lupo, introduction
 35 by Giuseppe Langella (Aragno, 2006). See, in particular, Giuseppe Langella, 'Introduzione', pp. XI–
 36 XXVIII. 35
 37 10 See Brooker and Thacker's remarks in 'General Introduction', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History*
 38 *of Modernist Magazines*, vol. I, pp. 1–26 (pp. 16–21). See also Luca Somigli, 'Dagli "uomini del 1914"
 39 alla "planetarietà". Quadri per una storia del concetto di modernismo', *Allegoria*, no. 63 (January–June
 40 2011 [but January 2012]), pp. 7–29 (pp. 21–22). Of Raymond Williams, I primarily considered Culture
 41 (Fontana, 1981), as well as the seminal *Allegoria*, Italian trans. *Marxismo e letteratura* (Laterza, 1979). 39
 42 11 Unsurprisingly, I am referring to Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*,
 43 Italian trans. *Le regole dell'arte. Genesi e struttura del campo letterario*, introduction by Anna Boschetti
 44 and Emanuele Bottaro (il Saggiatore, 2005), and to Vittorio Spinazzola, *La modernità letteraria* (il
 45 Saggiatore-Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori, 2001). The functionalist analysis conducted by
 46 the latter and specifically focusing on the layering of the literary audience proves especially useful in this
 47 type of research. 43
 48 12 Within what we call 'literary modernity', Raymond Williams (see note 10 above) draws a distinction
 49 between dominant, residual, and emergent 'cultural forces'. The first are the ruling forces that prevail
 50 within a given society; the second correspond to the legacy of tradition that tends to be superseded by
 51 current dominant positions; the last consist of attitudes that challenge dominant practices. Williams's
 52 categorisation, while clear, does not rule out the coexistence of all three forces within individual works
 53 or movements. As concerns 'cultural formations', what matters here is the external impact they have,
 54 that is, the type of work the groups carry out. This can be aimed at specialisation within a certain field or
 55 medium; aimed at an alternative, cross-disciplinary creative tension encompassing various arts; or even
 56 aimed at all of the above, as well as being imbued with an idealistic, utopian, and ultimately political
 57 opposing attitude. While the first approach usually defends art for art's sake, the second is typical of
 58 modernist groups, and the third characterises the avant-garde in the strict sense. On this matter, useful
 59 remarks are made in Somigli, 'Dagli "uomini del 1914"'. 51

1 between more specialised or narrower publications (think of *Arte concreta*), almost 1
 2 exclusively linked to the specific field of visual arts, and magazines that actively 2
 3 tend to incorporate alternative values by bringing together varied aesthetic 3
 4 competencies. 4
 5 c. Another thing that should be ascertained is whether and to what extent such 5
 6 methodological slant actually provides a framework suitable for discussing certain 6
 7 ideas that have been passed on to us. And I mean this both in light of the debate 7
 8 around the canon, and therefore around historical literary issues, and most of 8
 9 all in terms of the general understanding (i.e. methodological approach) of the 9
 10 relationship between ‘avant-garde’ magazines and artistic and literary practice. 10
 11 In brief: i. Can the linear, progressive development suggested by the majority of 11
 12 Italian literary studies be confirmed? ii. To what extent does the ‘specificity’ of a 12
 13 magazine qualify it as avant-garde, and to what extent, conversely, as modernist 13
 14 in general?¹³ iii. With reference to point a. above, is it really undisputed that the 14
 15 ‘obvious’ outcome of these dynamics and upheavals is a publication like *Il Verrì*? 15
 16 Would it not be possible for our little magazines to be the expression of forces 16
 17 aiming at something a bit (or very) different? 17
 18 18

19 2 Starting Points for an Analysis 19

20 2.1 I speak of ‘starting points’ because I do not wish to present a systematic, all- 20
 21 encompassing analysis, first and foremost due to space constraints (such a study would 21
 22 occupy an entire book), but also because I think that, in this way, I can focus more on 22
 23 the questions of principle. 23
 24 24

25 A first, necessary remark to be made concerns the *heterogeneous nature* of the material 25
 26 and the fact that the texts under consideration here are only partially comparable. On 26
 27 the one hand (*Il caffè*, *La parrucca*), we have collections influenced by early twentieth- 27
 28 century literature, *La voce*, and Giuseppe Prezzolini, which place a strong emphasis on 28
 29 ‘giovanilismo’ as well as on the aesthetic moderatism of Novecento Italiano understood 29
 30 in its broad sense. On the other, we find periodicals and bulletins that, while being the 30
 31 expression of ‘experimental’ artistic phenomena, strive to be open to literature, and most 31
 32 of all to distance themselves from mainstream press in order to go down a different, 32
 33 almost residual, and yet somewhat original route. 33
 34 34

35 2.1.1 For a start, and in spite of the variety of contributions, *La parrucca* had the 35
 36 audacity to publish its own manifesto, whose content, while undoubtedly unusual, is 36
 37 not in itself parodic (unlike other manifestos, as we shall see). *Manifesto parrucchista* 37
 38 was published on 30 November 1953.¹⁴ Without quoting the whole text, some of its 38
 39 points (twelve in total) are rather informative: 39
 40 40

41 1. 41
 42 Existentialism is dead — we have carved its tombstone. 42
 43 43

44 2. 44
 45 45

46 46
 47 47
 48 48
 49 49
 50 13 See the note above. 50

51 14 This can also be read in a photographic reproduction in Alvaro Strada, *Storia di una rivista inesistente. «La Parrucca» 1953–1965* (Vienneperre, 2005), p. 29. Although the bibliographic references it contains 51
 are unfortunately quite inaccurate, the book itself is very useful. 51

1	We are supportive of Futurism as far as its war on diplomatic prudence, pessimism,	1
2	and neutralism is concerned. We do not share the same hatred of tradition, books,	2
3	Libraries, and Museums.	3
4		4
5	We do not feel inclined to act like anarchists.	5
6		6
7	[...]	7
8		8
9	6.	9
10	Communists are yesterday's innovators. Today, the trend has changed and	10
11	Communists are no longer relevant. We hate the <i>masses</i> . Every man must be an	11
12	island in love with the universe.	12
13		13
14	7.	14
15	Love implies possession. We want to remain open to all experiences and test	15
16	ourselves in every possible way. We do not want to become attached to anyone,	16
17	so that we may have everyone.	17
18		18
19	[...]	19
20		20
21	10.	21
22	Love for the individual, intelligence, and culture. (Rediscovery of the European	22
23	culture — true culture and good taste are European).	23
24		24
25	Suppression of snobbery and rudeness.	25
26		26
27	Need to dress properly. Respect for the Authority. Quest for Beauty. Beauty is	27
28	necessary.	28
29		29
30	11.	30
31	Individualism and common sense. Clarity and simplicity. Realism.	31
32		32
33	[...]	33
34		34
35	Giovanni Anceschi, who frequented the circles of <i>La parrucca</i> , called that manifesto	35
36	'neocicisbeo' ¹⁵ — despite an impressive number of generic statements (concerning beauty,	36
37	common sense, realism) and conservative clichés (sympathy for the establishment, fear	37
38	of the masses), a truly original element lies in the emphasis on what we might call free	38
39	love, and on the need for elegance. Thus, the proclaimed death of existentialism paves	39
40	the way for unprecedented dandyish attitudes. I have referred to 'giovanilismo', and	40
41	not entirely out of context, considering that <i>La parrucca</i> was founded by an eccentric	41
42	twenty-three-year-old man, Alessandro Mossotti, and, above all, that it is usually cited	42
43	in connection with the authors who wrote for it, mostly beginners, who would go on	43
44	to become well-established writers in the second half of the 1900s — from Nanni	44
45	Balestrini to Vincenzo Consolo, from Giovanni Raboni to Antonio Porta, from Raffaele	45
46	Crovi to Alberto Arbasino. As a matter of fact, however, the manifesto does not seem	46
47	to express an <i>overtly</i> generational position. Conversely, a distinguishing feature of this	47
48	periodical — which was born under the aegis of Giuseppe Prezzolini and would publish	48
49		49
50		50
51	15 Giovanni Anceschi, in <i>Il Gruppo 63 quarant'anni dopo. Bologna, 8–11 maggio 2003. Atti del convegno</i>	51
	(Pendragon, 2005), p. 138.	

1 his work,¹⁶ as well as writings by Indro Montanelli¹⁷ — is precisely its retrospective 1
2 look at not-so-recent twentieth-century history. 2

3 Such coexistence of contradictory elements is a hallmark of the much more 3
4 unassuming *Il caffè* (renamed *Il nuovo caffè* after issue no. 4 of July–August 1950). Despite 4
5 a pervasive argumentative and resentful tone, this magazine is incredibly vague when 5
6 it comes to its programme. If we consider an editorial piece from issue no. 2 (1950), 6
7 *Nel nostro spirito la verità*, which includes a few excerpts from a draft manifesto (‘of 7
8 Realromantica’) originally published in no. 1 (1949), the following statements stand 8
9 out: ‘The world needs goodness, humanity needs to start believing in itself and its values 9
10 again; ‘In our spirit lies a force stronger than things, even stronger than fate itself’.¹⁸ 10
11 These would be the answers to the issues of the postwar period. All or most of the 11
12 periodical is marked by mediocrity, with pieces dominated by hatred of anything new 12
13 and by Catholic moralism, sometimes reaching unbelievable heights. One need only 13
14 think of editor-in-chief Resy Fiorani’s explicitly racist attack on Alberto Moravia, in 14
15 an essay whose title says it all: *Ebreo moralista lo scrittore Moravia?* (Writer Moravia, a 15
16 moralist Jew?). Among other things, the author claims: ‘The sentiments that are dearest 16
17 to our Latin soul do not resonate with him — affection between mother and child, 17
18 pure friendship, first love’.¹⁹ Speaking of *L’Agnese va a morire*, Luigi Orazi wrote: ‘On 18
19 the whole, despite a certain greatness, Agnese appears inhuman, cold-hearted and, all 19
20 in all, boring. The atmosphere is too reminiscent of certain political rallies filled with 20
21 faith and bombast’.²⁰ 21

22 The only positive note is perhaps the editorial staff’s alignment with the views, 22
23 now virtually forgotten, of ‘lyrical realism’ and the so-called Terza Corrente, championed 23
24 by Aldo Capasso and Lionello Fiumi in particular.²¹ Leaving aside any considerations 24
25 about the unimpressive outcomes of that cultural endeavour,²² what is of interest here 25
26 is the fact that the avant-garde was *aging*, literally. The name of Fiumi, who had played 26
27 a key role in the theoretical promotion of free verse in Italy,²³ is now dragged into an 27
28 argument against both the new lyricists’ ‘arcanism’ and the most recent trends in painting 28
29 (and Abstract Art in particular). But then again, the fact itself that an old-fashioned 29
30 academic like Alfredo Galletti adhered to Terza Corrente speaks volumes about the 30
31 degradation of certain content.²⁴ 31

32
33 2.1.2 Moving on to the other side under consideration here, we enter a completely 33
34 different world. The undisputed crisis of Italian modernism (modernism/avant-gardism, 34
35 as it were) is seen through the opposite lens of new, and even radically new values. The 35

36
37
38
39 16 A piece called *Le piaghe di New York*, 1.3 (30 November 1953), p. 4. 39

17 See his letter to Mossotti, 2.4 (22 June 1954), p. 2. 40

18 *Il caffè*, 2.2 (March–April 1950), pp. 1–2. The manifesto in question, *Principii per un manifesto della* 40
41 *“Realromantica”*, signed by Giuseppe Carlo Maini and Resy Fiorani, was featured in issue no. 1 (year I), 41
42 pp. 5–6. It affirms a very nebulous theory that seeks to reconcile personal ethics, of course ‘spiritualised’, 42
43 and historical pragmatism, for the sake of an art ‘capable of transubstantiating, with its otherworldly 43
44 breath, the contingency of existence by filtering the reality of nature through the soul, thus originating 44
45 intentional pursuit of a comforting balance’ (p. 6). 45

19 Resy Fiorani, ‘Ebreo moralista lo scrittore Moravia?’, *Il caffè*, 1.2 (August–September 1949), pp. 12–14 46
46 (p. 12). 46

20 Luigi Orazi, ‘L’Agnese è andata a morire a Viareggio’, *Il caffè*, 1.3 (15 October–15 December 1949), 47
47 pp. 7–9 (p. 9). 47

21 See, for example, Lionello Fiumi, ‘Realismo lirico o Terza corrente’, *Il caffè*, 2.3 (May–June 1950), 48
48 pp. 3–8. 49

22 On this, see, for example, Mario Landolfi, *Aldo Capasso e il realismo lirico* (SamniCaudium, 2014). 50

23 Reference is made, in particular, to Lionello Fiumi, ‘Appello neoliberista’, in *Polline* (Studio Editoriale 50
51 Lombardo, 1914), pp. 7–13. 51

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

1 first thing that catches the eye is the way in which certain magazines are produced in
 2 practice. Before visually inspecting these products (often simple leaflets or cyclostyled
 3 sheets, but sometimes actual fine art pages, each virtually one of a kind; Fig. 1), we
 4 should consider the words of Giuseppe Salto, whose gallery hosted the works of MAC
 5 (Movimento Arte Concreta) starting from 1948:

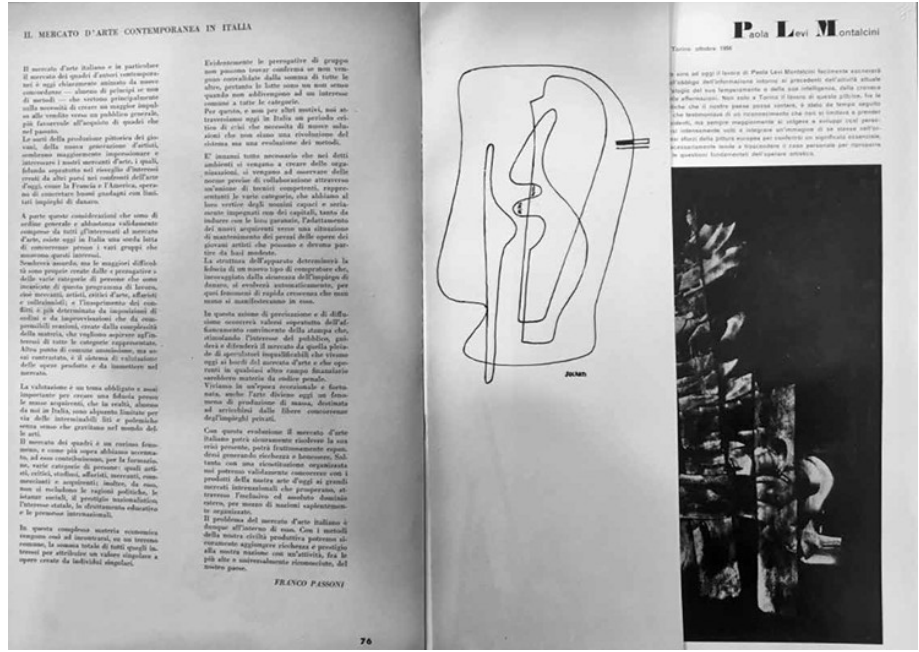


Fig. 1 Layering of materials in *Documenti d'arte d'oggi* (1956–57).

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

34 Even the exact date of the first issue of *Arte concreta* is uncertain — although the official
 35 year, the one for the libraries, is 1951, the activity of MAC is actually documented ever
 36 since its first exhibition (which opened on 22 December 1948) in magazine-like²⁶
 37 collections of flyers and invitations from 1948, 1949 and 1950. However, the fifteen
 38 issues dated between 1951 and 1953, on which our analysis will specifically focus, can
 39 be considered (so to speak) magazines in their own right.²⁷ On the other hand, from a
 40 strictly literary standpoint, the period immediately after that (1953–54), which saw the
 41 contribution of Luciano Anceschi (and the use of a bigger format, actually a series of
 42 cyclostyled pages stapled together with brochures and other materials), is of significant
 43 interest due to the presence of a certain number of poets, including Giorgio Orelli,
 44 Luciano Erba, Renzo Modesti, Nelo Risi, and Edoardo Sanguineti.

25 See Nicoletta Ossanna Cavadini, 'Le relazioni del Movimento Arte Concreta fra Milano e Ticino', in
 26 *Gillo Dorfles. Movimento Arte Concreta (1948–1958)* (Mazzotta, 2010), pp. 21–30 (p. 23).
 27 This is the choice of the Braidense National Library, where I conducted my research. See note 1.
 28 There is an anastatic reprint of this series, edited by Silvio Spriano (Galleria Spriano, 1981). Useful
 29 information about MAC can be found in *Esperimenti di sintesi delle arti. André Bloc e Gianni Monnet in
 30 un percorso fra esponenti dell'arte concreta* (Studio Dabbeni, 2016), a digital version of which is available
 31 on the gallery's website, <www.studiodabbeni.ch> [accessed 22 April 2018].

1 Something along these lines could be said of *Il gesto*, the first issue of which is 1
2 actually no. 2, according to the colophon itself: 2

3
4 This issue no. 2 of *Bollettino internazionale d'informazione del Bauhaus imaginista*, 4
5 published on the occasion of the exhibition *Il gesto* at Galleria Schettini, Milan, 5
6 June–July 1955, was printed by Arti Grafiche Fratelli Mascherpa on behalf of EPI 6
7 Editoriale Periodici Italiani. Milan, June 1955.²⁸ 7

8
9 Overall, readers find themselves immersed in a rather mysterious world of publishing 9
10 initiatives intertwined with one another, in which the same invitations may appear, and 10
11 the same contributors be involved, in different periodicals.²⁹ The very idea of verbal 11
12 text becomes problematic, the art of words and that of images constantly overlapping. 12
13 Now virtually forgotten, the poetry of Antonino Tullier (whose Futurist background 13
14 should not be neglected)³⁰ is perhaps the most fitting example of this type of attitude. 14
15 Harshly criticised by Edoardo Sanguineti,³¹ his *Poesia bilaterale*, published in MAC's 15
16 *Documenti d'arte d'oggi* in 1958,³² was printed on transparent paper and can be read on 16
17 both sides of the page. It begins as follows: 17

18
19 T T 19
20 A A 20
21 M T 21
22 O O 22
23
24 T T 23
25 I O 24
26 M T 25
27 O O 26
28
29 T T 28
30 O I 29
31 M T 30
32 O O 31

32
33
34
35
36 28 *Il gesto*, [1] (1955), colophon. 36

37 29 For example, issue no. [1] of *Arte concreta*, 1953–54 series, perhaps dated September 1953, includes 37
38 a contribution by Beniamino Dal Fabbro, *Definizione dei nucleari*, printed on the back of a leaflet 38
39 announcing the Nuclear Art exhibitions that would take place between June and September 1953 in 39
40 Milan and Brussels. Then, in June 1955, Dal Fabbro himself would write an editorial for *Il gesto*, [1,] 40
41 p. [1]. 41

42 30 A 1943 work by Tullier, *Manifesto dell'amore mediterraneo*, is included in *Canzoniere futurista amoroso* 42
43 *guerriero*, ed. by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Farfa, Giovanni Acquaviva, and Aldo Giuntini (Istituto 43
44 grafico Brizio, 1943), pp. [7–8] (see *Manifesti, proclami, interventi e documenti teorici del futurismo*, ed. 44
45 by Luciano Caruso [Spes-Salimbeni, 1980], no. 309). Among the poetry works of Antoni[n]o (Nino) 45
46 Tullier (1916–58), *Poesie 1942–1943* (All'insegna del pesce d'oro, 1945) (under the name of Nino 46
47 Tullier), and *Poesie*, illustrated by Aligi Sassu (Edizioni Fiumara, 1949) (under the name of Antonino 47
48 Tullier). The intertwining of this peculiar figure's literary production and art-critical work would 48
49 deserve thorough investigation. For an overview, see *Esperimenti di sintesi delle arti*, p. 62. 49

50 31 See Edoardo Sanguineti, review of *Documenti d'arte d'oggi. MAC 1958, Il Verri*, 2.3 (October 1958), 50
51 pp. 125–28 (p. 125). See, more generally, the very informative essay by Federico Fastelli, 'Dalla 51
52 prefigurazione alla nuova figurazione (1951–1963): Sanguineti, i Novissimi, le arti visive', in *Verba Picta.* 52
53 *Interrelazione tra testo e immagine nel patrimonio artistico e letterario della seconda metà del Novecento*, ed. 53
54 by Teresa Spignoli (ETS, 2018), pp. 211–234. 54

55 32 Nino Tullier, 'Poesia bilaterale', in *Documenti d'arte d'oggi. MAC 1958* (A. Salto, 1958), n.p. In fact, 55
56 the paratextual note to the volume — 'Contains a travel sculpture by Munari and a bilateral poem by 56
57 Tullier' — identifies the poem as an independent work of art. 57

1 In spite of the criticism, there is no doubt that experiments like this one have much 1
 2 more in common with Concrete or Nuclear Art than — say — certain verses by Giorgio 2
 3 Simonotti Manacorda included in the same volume: ‘L’aria colore di zolfo / risacca agli 3
 4 ultimi crinali, / la pianura è di là, lontana al torpido bivio d’acque, / svapora la città del 4
 5 borsalino. / I platani di Bonaparte / fanno un’onda leggera / al vento della gloria / nella 5
 6 piana calpestata di storia. / Le domestiche storie / di Maino il bandito / e di Bordino 6
 7 eroe / veleggiano nei mantelli di fumo / dentro ritmi di mosto’.³³ The fact remains that 7
 8 such very physical assortments of incoherent pages, which here we call ‘periodicals’, 8
 9 pose a number of problems that are far from easy to resolve. 9

10 Evidently, the definition of little magazine — or of magazine as such — does 10
 11 not fit well with *Arte concreta* (including its ‘non-periodical’ appendices) or *Il gesto*; 11
 12 nor, for that matter, is it appropriate for *Azimuth* and *Direzioni*, which have similar 12
 13 characteristics. In order to define these initiatives, we might have to use the term 13
 14 ‘esoeditoria’ instead.³⁴ Their financial struggles and tendency to form groups (as well 14
 15 as a certain inclination towards manifestos, which we shall discuss again later) are 15
 16 reminiscent of modernism and the avant-garde, but their appreciation for ‘forms’ such 16
 17 as the catalogue, the leaflet, the ephemeral brochure, and the design object shifts the 17
 18 emphasis to something rather different. The ‘bibliographic code’³⁵ they follow seems 18
 19 to demote them from the status of magazines tout court to that of potential or virtual 19
 20 works — almost as though they were *materials for* a magazine or, as the case may be, 20
 21 an exhibition or a performance. A ‘prelude to’, rather than a self-standing periodical 21
 22 issue. The topic is both crucial and sensitive (and I shall go back to it). According to 22
 23 Marco Meneguzzo, from an art criticism, if not an art history perspective, *Arte concreta* 23
 24 represents the ‘best expression’ of MAC, also because it was printed in ‘fifteen issues 24
 25 using an unprecedented square format’.³⁶ And one may well wonder how this is possible, 25
 26 considering the significant degree of unfinishedness involved. 26

27 The case of *AZ*, a purely art magazine, is somewhat different, and stands as a 27
 28 notable exception. Created by artist Mario Ballocco and gradually but steadily opening 28
 29 up to design and applied arts over time (in 1952, Ballocco was among the promoters 29
 30 of the first Exhibition of Industrial Arts and Aesthetics, held within the 30th Milan 30
 31 Trade Fair), *AZ*’s graphic choices appear to be more conventional, starting with its 31
 32 format, which is that of a regular 49x36 sheet. Most of all, *AZ* has an educational and 32
 33 encyclopaedic approach that emerges from the titles of its articles — such as *Epoche* 33
 34 and *Correnti* —, aiming to showcase the history of recent art and its movements. The 34
 35 uncompromising wing of Concrete Art³⁷ (so much so that it published a piece by Max 35
 36 Bill, one of the most consistent foreign concrete artists),³⁸ *AZ* established collaborations 36
 37 with personalities of the likes of Francesco Flora and Luigi Pestalozza (as well as a very 37
 38 38
 39 39

40 33 *Documenti d’arte d’oggi. MAC 1958* (A. Salto, 1958), p. [4]; the title of the poem is Monferrato. 40

41 34 This neologism, which literally translates as ‘exo-publishing’, was invented by Bruno Francisci in 1971 41
 42 and has been especially successful in the field of art. See Giorgio Maffei and Patrizio Peterlini, with 42
 43 Marco Bazzini, *Riviste d’arte d’avanguardia. Esoeditoria negli anni Sessanta e Settanta in Italia* (Bonnard, 43
 44 2005).

44 35 About the notion of ‘bibliographic code’, see Brooker and Thacker, ‘General Introduction’, p. 6, 44
 45 and the remarkable reinterpretation of Matthew Philpotts, *Defining the Thick Journal: Periodical 45*
 46 *Codes and Common Habitus*, Panel MLA 2013 <[https://seeeps.princeton.edu/wp-content/uploads/](https://seeeps.princeton.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/243/2015/03/mla2013_philpotts.pdf) 46
 47 [sites/243/2015/03/mla2013_philpotts.pdf](https://seeeps.princeton.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/243/2015/03/mla2013_philpotts.pdf)> [accessed 22 April 2018]. Note that the same webpage 47
 48 of Princeton University contains other useful bibliographic references: <[https://seeeps.princeton.edu/](https://seeeps.princeton.edu/sample-page/colloquium-readings/) 48
 49 [sample-page/colloquium-readings/](https://seeeps.princeton.edu/sample-page/colloquium-readings/)>.

49 36 Marco Meneguzzo, ‘Il MAC a Milano’, in *MAC/Espace. Arte concreta in Italia e in Francia*, ed. by 49
 50 Luciano Berni Canani and Giorgio Di Genova (Bora, 1999), pp. 55–59 (p. 56).

50 37 In Giorgio Di Genova’s words (Berni Canani and Di Genova, ‘L’arte concreta e l’utopia delle arti’, 50
 51 p. 23), in the early days of MAC, ‘Dorflès [...] was yet to break free from his past as a Surrealist painter, 51
 52 to which he sought to bend Concrete Art instead’.

52 38 See Max Bill, ‘Il pensiero matematico nell’arte contemporanea’, *AZ*, 3 (April 1951), pp. 1–2.

1 young Emilio Garroni).³⁹ Ultimately, it sought to reconcile the opposites of *La parrucca* 1
 2 and *Arte concreta*, as if to normalise the MAC's bulletin by adding contributions from 2
 3 modernism and Novecento Italiano. 3

4
 5 2.2 Leaving this last, incredibly interesting exception aside, the picture seems rather 5
 6 clear. On the one hand, the weary remnants of Novecento Italiano and avant-gardism, 6
 7 gradually losing appeal, and even combined with a widespread dislike for anything 7
 8 new — only the corny manifestos and, above all, the fervours of 'giovanilismo' are 8
 9 left. On the other, a confused background noise of impromptu initiatives lacking real 9
 10 planning, yet indicative of something striving for structure, for form. 10

11 Let us now try to apply Raymond Williams's categories. The magazines of the 11
 12 first type are expression of cultural forces that lie somewhere between the *residual* and 12
 13 the *emergent*. On the one hand, they have connections with a fading rebellious past; on 13
 14 the other, they are emergent in that they offer a chance for expression to young authors 14
 15 who will later be active on various fronts, between the dominant scene and more or 15
 16 less innovative practices. On the *external* front, however, the avant-garde or *alternative* 16
 17 element — the attack on the cultural establishment — is very weak, and virtually 17
 18 non-existent in *Il caffè*. This can sometimes appear paradoxical. While the independent 18
 19 value system built by these cultural formations is extremely fragile, at least in the case of 19
 20 *La parrucca* the anti-establishment element is definitely there, though it takes the form 20
 21 of a moral opposition. What is striking is a worldly attitude and 'way of life' (praising, 21
 22 as it were, freedom in personal relationships) that appear somehow to anticipate the 22
 23 youth culture of the 1960s and 1970s. The 'cicisbeismo' noted by Giovanni Anceschi is 23
 24 indeed an undisputed presence and reveals a stance that will bring about consequences 24
 25 well beyond the literary sphere. 25

26
 27 2.3 The discussion about the second group of periodicals is much more complicated. 27
 28 Without a doubt, all of them are *emergent* in nature, supporting very aggressive poetics. 28

29 With enough effort, one could find a meeting point between their seemingly 29
 30 distant positions, a common ground for outwardly conflicting voices. The ideas and 30
 31 practices of Concrete Art and those bordering on Art Informel or even figuration (the 31
 32 world of Dorflès and that of Baj) eventually converge. As a result, in both cases, the 32
 33 avant-garde cools down, becomes rationally codified, with an imbalance towards the 33
 34 graphic sign and the archetype. 34

35 Certain positions expressed by Gillo Dorflès already in the very first series of 35
 36 *Arte concreta* (1949), when it was still rather unclear whether this publication was a 36
 37 magazine in its own right, have a significant impact and certainly influence the Italian 37
 38 contemporary art scene. The focus is on the ability of art to create reified, objectified 38
 39 forms: 39

40
 41 Concrete Art [...] does not stem from an attempt to disregard perceivable, physical, 41
 42 or metaphysical objects, but it is solely based on the realization and objectification 42
 43 of the artist's intentions, translated into concrete images of shape and colour, devoid 43
 44 of any symbolic meaning or formal abstraction, and exclusively aimed at capturing 44
 45 those rhythms, cadences, and chords so abundant in the world of colours.⁴⁰ 45

46
 47
 48
 49
 50 39 See Francesco Flora, 'L'arte e la parola', *AZ*, 1 (July 1949), p. 2; Luigi Pestalozza, 'Espressionismo 50
 51 dodecafonico', *AZ*, 1 (December 1949), p. 1; Emilio Garroni, 'Arte astratta e concreta a Valle Giulia', 51
AZ, 3 (April 1951), p. 3.

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

1 At the same time, it is not difficult to identify a parallel line of research looking to 1
2 make figurative and symbolic elements *necessary* — for instance, as theorised by Roberto 2
3 Sanesi in connection with Nuclear Art in the first issue of *Il gesto*: 3
4 4
5 In just a few years, Nuclear Art has slowly but steadily and positively developed 5
6 towards a new use of figurative language, based on a sort of layering of elements 6
7 that also include symbols standing for broader and higher meanings.⁴¹ 7
8 8
9 What Sanesi calls a *symbol* is obviously something similar to pure sign, an abstraction 9
10 that takes invariant forms dense in meaning. French critic Edouard Jaguer, a passionate 10
11 supporter of Enrico Baj, Sergio Dangelo, and Piero Manzoni's *Il gesto*, shifts the debate 11
12 to the historical avant-gardes, and inevitably to Surrealism: 'Just like in 1922, creators 12
13 are now looking for a new "avant-garde" [...] to move forward on the great quest for 13
14 the marvellous'.⁴² Aside from considering a *neo-avant-garde* at least possible, all these 14
15 positions share an awareness that all artistic endeavours are fleeting — this is what is 15
16 new right here, right now. Dorflès reiterates this idea a number of times. In 1958, in a 16
17 debate with Nuclear artists and surely referring to their peculiar idea of 'gesture', the 17
18 theorist of Concrete Art insists on the importance of 'new gestures' ['gesti nuovi'] that 18
19 are conscious of the passing nature of every artistic product: 19
20 20
21 Today's speed of creation is not just a game or a whim, nor is it for convenience 21
22 or indolence. We need to create fast in preparation for the speed at which what 22
23 we create will be *consumed*. [Nowadays, art is] unstable, asymmetrical, certainly 23
24 disappointed and disappointing, and yet such to meet that particular *taste for the* 24
25 *ephemeral* that characterizes our age.⁴³ 25
26 26
27 The argument, reaffirmed the following year in *Azimuth*,⁴⁴ comes with an important 27
28 clarification — the weakening of art is taking place within the context of *communication*. 28
29 Communication allows 'the transfer, if not of rationalized concepts [...], at least of 29
30 images, feelings, embryonic forms'. 30
31 The fact that all of the above implies a renegotiation of the avant-garde can also 31
32 be inferred from other evidence, the most blatant and obvious being the parody of the 32
33 manifesto — a true emblem of *opposition* (to quote Williams) in the modern times. No. 33
34 10, published around January 1953,⁴⁵ is one of the most beautiful issues of *Arte concreta*. 34
35 It includes no fewer than five manifestos, four of which, apparently written by Bruno 35
36 Munari, are fake, or, in any case, parodies:⁴⁶ *Manifesto del macchinismo*, *Manifesto dell'arte* 36
37 *totale (Totalismo)*, [*Manifesto del*] *Disintegrismo*, and [*Manifesto dell'arte*] *Organica*. The 37
38 fifth one is called *Danger public. Argument manifeste* and bears the signatures of Nuclear 38
39 artists [Sergio] Dangelo, [Enrico] Baj, [Joe] Colombo, and [Leonardo] Mariani. This 39
40 sort of poem in verses, written in French, rejects the significance of poetics itself as an 40
41 intellectual act (Fig. 2): 'il faudrait faire d'abord / un petit effort / et aimer la vie / et 41
42 être des croyants'. In brief, the authors have fun creating a series of manifestos 'with all 42
43 the trimmings', the last one of which is professedly 'real', but lacks the typical content 43
44 44
45 45
46 41 Roberto Sanesi, 'Scheda al nuclearismo', *Il gesto* (June 1955), p. [8]. 46
47 42 Edouard Jaguer, 'Così come vi furono un tempo dei poeti maledetti...', *Il gesto*, 2, [1957.] pp. [14–15] 47
48 (p. [15]). 48
49 43 Gillo Dorflès, 'Gesti nuovi', *Il gesto*, 3 (September 1958), p. [3]. 49
50 44 See Gillo Dorflès, "Comunicazione" e "consumo" dell'arte', *Azimuth*, ed. by Enrico Castellani and Piero 50
51 Manzoni (1959), inside front cover. 51
52 45 The magazine itself reports that the manifestos at issue document an exhibition held in the Helicopter 52
53 Room of Galleria dell'Annunciata in Milan, between 16 December 1952 and 6 January 1953. 53
54 46 See Meneguzzo, *Il MAC a Milano*, p. 56. 54

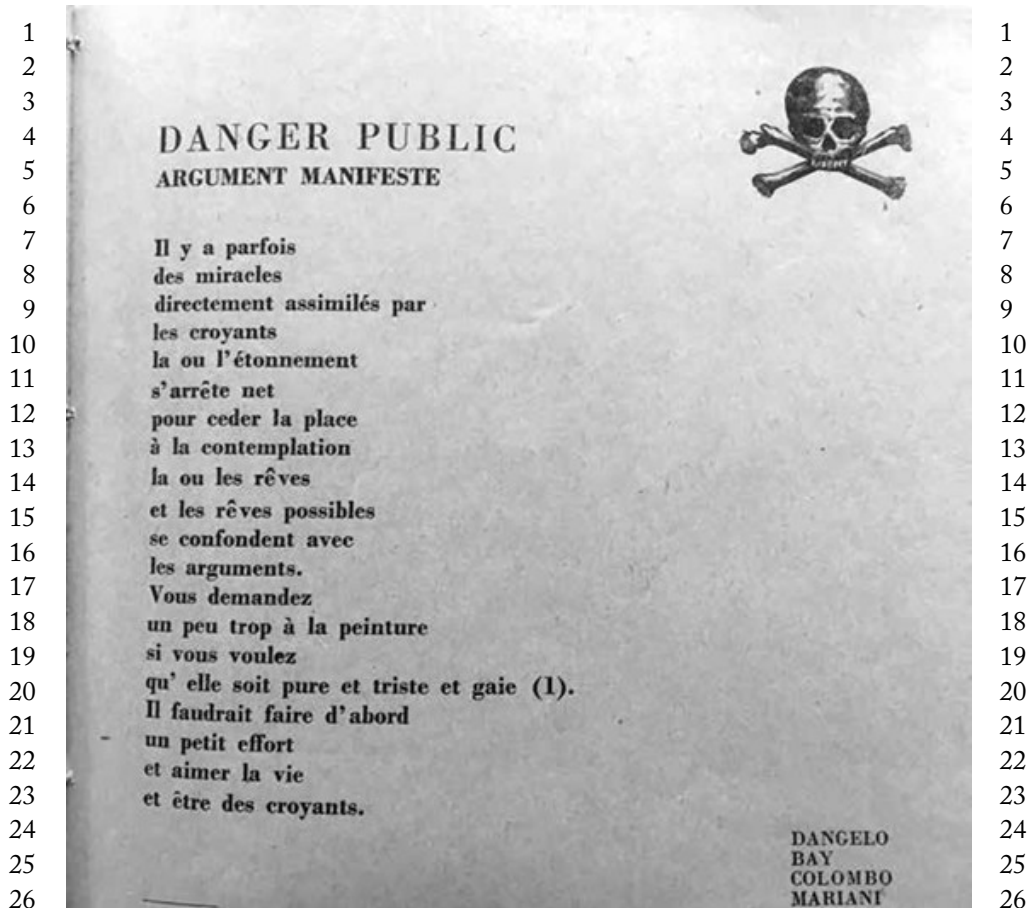


Fig. 2 'Manifesto' published in issue no. 10 of *Arte concreta* (1953).

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 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

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

1 Earth, January 1959'.⁴⁸ Rather than a true parody, however, it is a humorous manipulation 1
 2 of the manifesto genre's stylistic features, incorporating a *real* criticism of the excesses 2
 3 of Abstract and Concrete Art. While the world is threatened by an Apocalypse that 3
 4 'has hovered above us for years now, and increasingly so, with its monstrous signs and 4
 5 darkened tombs, the rivals, the intellectuals of obesity and masturbation, the priests 5
 6 of self-harm continue to treat us like shallow fools'. The reference is, of course, to the 6
 7 champions of Abstract and Concrete Art, both of which lack true strength: 7
 8

9 It is now time to make known that gravity only oppresses fools, including the 9
 10 obese and abstract or concrete painters, as many of them like to call themselves, 10
 11 thus revealing their very concrete unfitness for art. 11
 12

13 The aggressive intent and the defence of an art capable of breaking free from too much 13
 14 intellectual rigour through the grotesque are all too evident. But, at the same time, the 14
 15 whole issue is pervaded by a vein of the paradoxical and the humorous that should not 15
 16 be overlooked. The inspiration comes directly from Don Siegel's film *Invasion of the* 16
 17 *Body Snatchers*, released in Italian as *L'invasione degli ultracorpi* three years earlier. Fig. 17
 18 3, *Ultracorpi all'assalto delle nostre donne*, exemplifies Baj's way of conveying this very 18
 19 peculiar cultural sentiment. While acknowledging the honesty of the artist's attempt 19
 20 in his critical review *Enrico Baj e la comica interplanetaria*, Edouard Jaguer also speaks 20
 21 of the 'thème passablement crétinissant de l'exploration interplanétaire'.⁴⁹ Ultimately, 21
 22 Baj places the manifesto and the themes of mass culture at the service of a humorous, 22
 23 yet programmatic act, sadistically manipulating the clichés and *topoi* of art and its 23
 24 consumption (think of the *détournement* of existing paintings through oleography: see 24
 25 Fig. 4). 25

26 All in all, it seems to me that most of these conflicts may be reconciled around a 26
 27 few keywords included in an untitled piece written by Michel Tapié and published in 27
 28 *Direzioni* in June 1959. Here, after a head-on attack on the practices of Art Informel 28
 29 and Action Painting (accused of producing 'un style immédiatement reconnaissable'), 29
 30 the author argues the need for a 'deflated', self-aware art: 30
 31

32 Passé le temps de l'expérience, nous souhaitons des œuvres élaborées en toute 32
 33 conscience à la puissance des nécessités autres, quelque froides, quelque hyper- 33
 34 complexes qu'elles puissent devenir.⁵⁰ 34
 35

36 This is a recurring subject in *Direzioni*, epitomised by the concepts of 'sign' and 'matrix- 36
 37 sign' put forth by editor Fabrizio Mondadori, for example in an essay on Emilio 37
 38 Scanavino.⁵¹ 38

39 Hence, whether by means of a reduction almost to the level of the archetype, 39
 40 and above all to that of a design product, or by humorously playing with shapes 'found' 40
 41 somewhere else and polemically reworked, between 1948 and 1959 the Milanese art 41
 42 magazines seem to gradually distance themselves from aggressive, head-on avant- 42
 43 gardism. They proceed in a less straightforward, more cautious way, well aware of the 43
 44

46 48 The manifesto is signed in the following order by Giovanni Anceschi, Sandro Bajini, Nanni Balestrini, 46
 47 Leo Paolazzi, Paolo Radaelli, Luca, Lucio Del Pezzo, Giuseppe Alfano, Dino Grieco, Guido Biasi, 47
 48 Mario Persico, Sergio Fergola, Bruno Di Bello, Angelo Verga, Ettore Sordini, Antonio Recalcati, 48
 49 Enrico Baj, and Farfa. It is printed on pages [4–5] in *Il gesto*, 4 (September 1959). The following quotes 49
 are from pages [5] and [4], respectively.

50 49 Edouard Jaguer, 'Enrico Baj e la comica interplanetaria / Enrico Baj et le comique interplanétaire', *Il* 50
gesto, 4 (September 1959), pp. [10–13] (p. [10]).

51 50 Michel Tapié, in *Direzioni*, 3 (June 1959), p. 19. 51

51 Fabrizio Mondadori, 'Pittura di Emilio Scanavino', *Direzioni*, 3 (June 1959), pp. 6–7.

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



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

- 1 external forces that sometimes demote, sometimes relaunch art, depriving it of the
 2 possibility to see itself as truly 'absolute', an anti-value capable of turning the world
 3 upside down. 3
- 4
- 5 2.4 The poets deserve a different analysis altogether. I have already touch on this in
 6 connection with *Arte concreta* and the synergistic, if somewhat isolated work of Nino
 7 Tullier. I call it 'synergistic' not so much because it cuts across different groups (from
 8 MAC to Nuclear Art), but mostly because it gave rise to an experiment virtually never
 9 tried before the neo-avant-garde. I am referring to his 1955 booklet entitled *Enten*
 10 *Eller*, illustrated by Gianni Monnet⁵² — the true soul of Italian Concrete Art —, in
 11 which the verbal and graphic signs seek to engage in a lively dialogue. Despite the poor
 12 condition of the only copy available in a public library, Fig. 5 exemplifies the virtuoso
 13 counterpoint between the syllabication, marked by a predominantly trochaic rhythm,
 14 and therefore often based on an octosyllabic pattern ('Nòna Thùle / nàno nò / ùno e
 15 trino / Ònan àtto [...]), and Monnet's plain figuration that encloses, brackets, and
 16 articulates that fragmentation as if it were punctuation. With the exception of this
 17 author and a few other attempts, including an interesting series (in my humble opinion)
 18 of humorous pages by Bruno Munari, *Teoremi*, published in *AZ* in 1950,⁵³ the field is
 19 largely dominated by Luciano Anceschi and his choices. To some extent, this is also
 20 the case with *La parrucca*, at least as far as poetry is concerned. Having been introduced
 21 to the editorial staff by Nanni Balestrini, who had been a contributor since the fifth
 22 issue (no. 2 of 1954, year II),⁵⁴ between 1954 and 1956 Anceschi would attempt to
 23 influence the editorial line of Mossotti's magazine. But while Anceschi's infiltration
 24 into *La parrucca* seems capable of producing non-occasional cultural effects (think at
 25 least of the serial essay by Antonio Porta/Leo Paolazzi about the relationship between
 26 Pascoli and Campana),⁵⁵ the same cannot be said of *Arte concreta* and its appendix,
 27 *Documenti d'arte d'oggi*. This is especially striking because literature is virtually left out
 28 of these publications between 1948 and 1953. In the third issue (probably published
 29 in January 1954) of the last, more lacking series, a note specifies that the bulletin 'will
 30 feature, from now on, a literary section edited by Luciano Anceschi'.⁵⁶ The only exception
 31 before then had been a short contribution by Albino Galvano in issue no. 14 (April
 32 1953), providing a clear analysis of the 'symbolist' value of D'Annunzio's work — in
 33
 34
 35
 36
 37
 38
 39 52 See Antonino Tullier, *Enten Eller*. *Poesie*, illustrated by Gianni Monnet (A. Salto, 1955). The copy I
 40 am referring to is in the Biblioteca della Biennale di Venezia ASAC library, shelf number Rari Z 0265.
 41 The short collection was also included in the first volume of *Documenti d'arte d'oggi*, edited by MAC,
 42 GROUPE ESPACE Italian section, Galleria del Fiore, Milan (October 1954), pp. 111–24.
 43 53 For example, this one is called *Inversamente proporzionale* (and is laid out like a poem, but written
 44 in prose): 'Riproduzione verista / della natura esteriore: / un milione di ammiratori. / Riproduzione
 45 impressionista: / centomila ammiratori. / Deformazione della natura: / diecimila amatori. / La natura
 46 usata come pretesto: / mille amatori. / Assenza della natura esteriore / invenzione / arte concreta: /
 47 cento amatori. / I cento amatori / capiscono anche l'arte verista, / il milione di ammiratori / nega con
 48 tutte le sue forze / l'arte concreta' (*AZ*, II, 2 [February 1950], p. 1).
 49 54 Under the collective name of 'Quattro poeti' (four poets, the other three being Lorenzo Meda, Sergio
 50 Itolli, and Alfredo Amellone), Balestrini published a poem entitled *Verde-Azzurro* in *La parrucca*, 2.2
 51 (20 March 1954), p. 3.
 52 55 See Leo Paolazzi, 'Musica e colore in un rapporto Pascoli Campana', *La parrucca*, 5.1 (February 1957),
 53 pp. 221–22; and 5.2 (30 April 1957), pp. 248–52. Think also of issue no. 6 of 30 September 1955 (year
 54 III), which lines up an essay by Alfredo Giuliani on Anceschi's *Linea lombarda*, Pound's poems and
 55 quotes translated by Alfredo Giuliani and Giorgio Manganelli, and three poems by Nanni Balestrini.
 56 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).

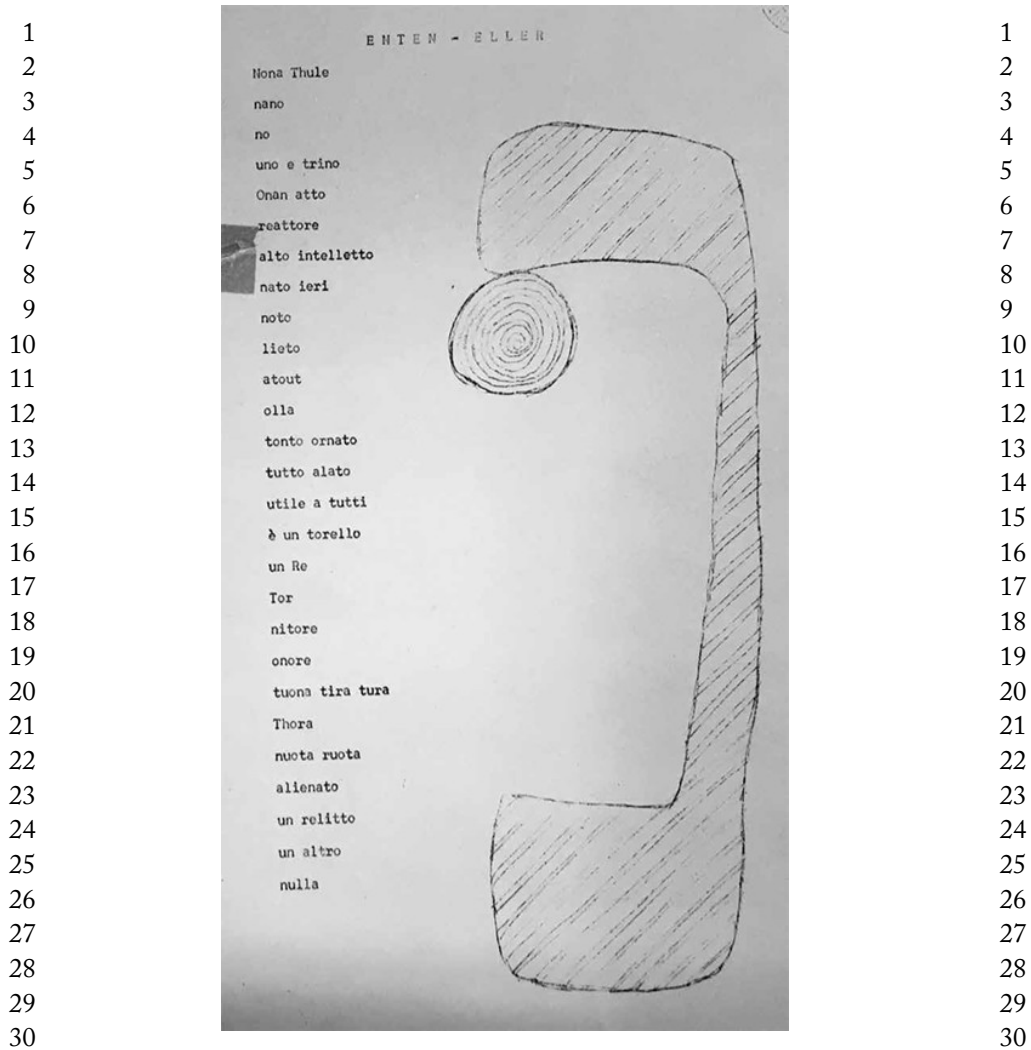


Fig. 5 Nino Tullier and Gianni Monnet, *Enten Eller* (detail) (1955).

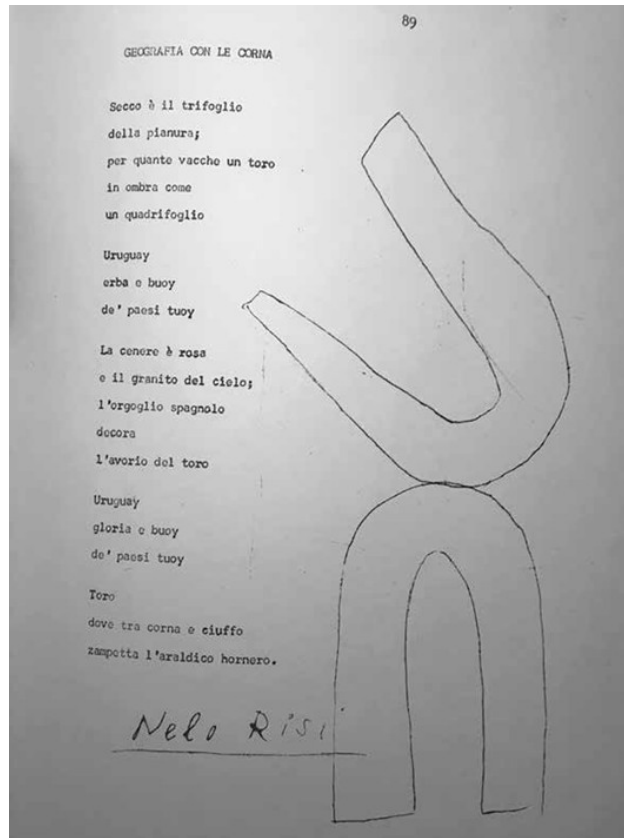
stark contrast to the coeval historical literary debate, which still classified D'Annunzio as strictly Decadent.⁵⁷

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, 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

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

1 prose)⁵⁸ by the same Sanguineti who, as Anceschi's collaborator in *Il Verri*, will go on 1
2 to undermine the importance of both *Arte concreta* and Tullier. 2
3 The MAC's subsequent publications follow more or less the same pattern⁵⁹ — 3
4 newcomers such as Balestrini, Pagliarani, Paolazzi (and Giuseppe Guglielmi) do not 4
5 succeed in pushing out Simonotti Manacorda, Antonio and Paolo Radaelli, Rizzardi, 5
6 Sanesi, even Giudici.⁶⁰ Let us read the following poem, *Terza marina*, by Alfredo 6
7 Rizzardi — a well-known Anglicist and brilliant translator — included in the *Documenti* 7
8 *d'arte d'oggi* edition of 1956–57: 8
9
10 Tormento degli ormeggi 10
11 nella risacca. La banchina è vuota. 11
12 In una rete poco cielo è chiuso 12
13 smunto, piovorno. Come punge il vento 13
14 sul molo che è più nudo dell'oceano!⁶¹ 14
15
16 Nothing ground-breaking here, I think we all agree. Of course, we know all too well 16
17 that Anceschi's choices are also informed by his work for publisher Magenta, which 17
18 notoriously released both *Linea lombarda* and *Laborintus* within the 'Oggetto e simbolo' 18
19 series in those years. The point is that, while 'art documents' in the strict sense are 19
20 often accompanied by very significant critical reviews which are not merely aimed at 20
21 supporting the exhibitions or the artists being covered, this is not the case with poetry. 21
22 As a matter of fact, while showcased from a perspective that tends to enhance figuration, 22
23 and therefore the object (Fig. 6), no explicit information about poetics is provided. Nor 23
24 is the definition of 'group' fitting for the assemblage of authors that Anceschi brings 24
25 together — the only visible, albeit residual point of contact being *Linea lombarda*. 25
26
27 2.5 Let us sum up. If we look at the artists of the magazines under consideration here 27
28 and we try to pinpoint the nature of the cultural formation they produce, we are faced 28
29 with a somewhat obligatory internal pattern — a small group of intellectual artists 29
30 capable of expressing values other than the 'dominant' ones. However, in the sphere 30
31 of poetry, despite an apparent attempt to build on the legacy of the recent past, which 31
32 is now on the verge of becoming hegemonic, no real group can be formed. Quite the 32
33 opposite: Tullier, the only poet capable of working synergically with the artists (see Fig. 33
34 7), a nice detail from a visual poem he 'wrote' with Lucio Fontana), is marginalised. 34
35 But the real issue is the *external* impact, the effects that such self-sufficient 35
36 dynamics have on the public sphere. In hindsight, the artists of MAC and even the 36
37 Nuclear artists of *Il gesto* display an attitude that Williams would call 'specialising'. 37
38 Provocation and opposition are virtually entirely missing (perhaps with the only 38
39 exception of the last issue of *Il gesto*, characterised by a very *postmodern* flair). Theirs 39
40 is indeed an alternative way of understanding art and also literature, but one that does 40
41 not break with tradition or cause public scandal. Everything is seen from the inner 41
42
43
44
45 58 See Edoardo Sanguineti, 'Laszo Varga', *Arte concreta* [...] Bollettino del MAC e del sindacato nazionale 45
46 arti non-figurative, [8,] [Summer 1954?], n.p. (but *Documenti d'arte d'oggi* [1954], p. 75). This is section 46
47 20 of the short poem. I am not aware of any other prose versions of passages from *Laborintus*. 47
48 59 A curiosity worth mentioning in *Documenti d'arte d'oggi* (1954) is the independent publication *Arte* 48
49 nucleare, dated 1954, which contains a collection of *Aforismi nucleari* by Beniamino Dal Fabbro and a 49
50 far from avant-garde poem by Diego Valeri, entitled *Una rosa*. 50
51 60 In *Documenti d'arte d'oggi* (1956–57), edited by MAC/Espace (A. Salto, 1957), see Antonio Radaelli, 'Il 51
52 filo di ferro', p. 118, and Roberto Sanesi, 'Vestitur alba clamide', n.p.; in *Documenti d'arte d'oggi. MAC* 52
53 *1958*, see Giovanni Giudici, 'L'incursione sulla caserma', p. 26, and Paolo Radaelli, 'Hanno venduto ai 53
54 mercanti', p. 126. 54
55 61 Alfredo Rizzardi, 'Terza marina', in *Documenti d'arte d'oggi* (1956–57), p. 128. 55

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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).

1 world of art galleries, at most of their international relations. If anything, the genuinely 1
 2 alternative interest these endeavours have is in applied arts and design, which, however, 2
 3 have already become something else, ultimately outside the realm of art. 3
 4 If all this is true, then the (neo-)avant-garde dimension appears to be of 4
 5 little relevance, except in terms of a parody. The ‘specificity’ of the magazine ends up 5
 6 undermining its essence as an opposing cultural formation, leading either to rather 6
 7 vague publishing experiments — considering the immature and informal nature of 7
 8 these actual non-magazines — or to the tangibility of design, whose boundaries are, 8
 9 conversely, all too discernible and clear. 9
 10
 11 2.6 The ways in which all of this culminates in *Il Verri* are yet to be ascertained. And, 11
 12 while a culmination is necessary from a number of perspectives, this does not mean it 12
 13 will coincide with that of our analysis so far. As already highlighted a couple of times, 13
 14 at the beginnings of *Il Verri*, Sanguineti distances himself from MAC in many respects. 14
 15 First, in issue no. 3 (Spring 1957), he notes a lack of critical reviews and an abundance 15
 16 of ‘anthology’ materials: 16
 17
 18 the amount of *Arcadia* found in the issue is in itself a critical act and an urgent 18
 19 problem, and, while it only involves a few of the contributors, it nevertheless seems 19
 20 to stubbornly spread like a common and easily recognisable cloud.⁶² 20
 21
 22 Then, in issue no. 4 (December 1958), while acknowledging the continuity (as it were) 22
 23 between Erba and Balestrini, he is unable to find a convincing definition for what will 23
 24 later be known as the neo-avant-garde — he speaks of neo-experimentalism (directly 24
 25 in relation to Pasolini) and neo-Baroque, considering this latter trend as absolutely 25
 26 necessary.⁶³ 26
 27 One thing is for sure: Anceschi’s qualitative leap is predominantly academic 27
 28 in nature. His preface to the first issue of *Il Verri*, under the title of *Discorso generale*, 28
 29 expressly refers to the reconciliation of the opposites: ‘No opposition between militant 29
 30 culture and university culture’. And more: 30
 31
 32 It seems increasingly clear that what is new no longer emerges in the form of a 32
 33 big rebellion, but with a discretion informed by the knowledge that continuity 33
 34 will soon be restored after every break, and indeed that continuity takes place 34
 35 through break.⁶⁴ 35
 36
 37 This approach, almost based on phenomenological definition, tends to avoid clear-cut 37
 38 positions and sees no real contradiction between ‘discretion’ and ‘violence’. All in all, 38
 39 from Anceschi’s peculiar perspective, the militant aspect seems to be understood merely 39
 40 as an opening to a poetry ‘that is made’, or to the dissemination of literary values. The 40
 41 selection of the Italian poets that write for *Il Verri* reflects the choices made in the past, 41
 42 with only a few additions and a certain tendency to retain what is old: Guglielmi, Erba, 42
 43 Cattafi, Giuliani, Orelli, Zanzotto, Sereni, Frezza, Balestrini, Risi, Sanguineti, Cacciatore, 43
 44 Paolazzi. Each of the first four issues includes an anthology of foreign poetry — North 44
 45 American (edited by Alfredo Rizzardi), French (edited by Luciano Erba), British (edited 45
 46 by Roberto Sanesi), and German (edited by Nanni Balestrini), respectively. 46
 47
 48
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 50
 51

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).

1 No dramatisation or problematisation of conflicts; instead, measured and reasoned 1
 2 opinions leaning towards the establishment. As you may be aware, *Il Verri* will express 2
 3 its disappointment in Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* through an overcautious review by 3
 4 René Wellek, accusing the great work on the representation of reality of a general lack 4
 5 of ideas, as well as of inadequately conceptualising the problem.⁶⁵ 5

6 I think that two of Alfredo Giuliani's reviews in particular will help clarify the 6
 7 picture. In issue no. 2 (Winter 1957), Giuliani voices his doubts about *Laborintus*, 7
 8 which he dismisses as 'a pathography, something before representation', which 'is not 8
 9 liberation yet', based on a criterion of value that he expressly refers to André Breton's 9
 10 work.⁶⁶ However, back in issue no. 1, Giuliani had extensively (and positively) reviewed 10
 11 *La bufera*.⁶⁷ What is striking here is that, in commenting on the long verses of *Primavera* 11
 12 *hitleriana* and other poems, the critic introduces some of the arguments that will 12
 13 characterise, albeit in a completely different context, his 1961 essay *La forma del verso*, 13
 14 included in *I Novissimi*.⁶⁸ In Giuliani's own words, Montale's poetry is marked by a 14
 15 'quantitative rhythm', and 'we had better keep an eye on his *narrative verses*'. The metrical 15
 16 theme of the long verse, later called 'atonal' and typical of the Novissimi avant-garde, 16
 17 would therefore be rooted in the mainstream-oriented formal choices of the greatest 17
 18 master of Italian modernism, which the neo-avant-garde could not help but oppose. 18
 19 It thus comes as no surprise that Montale is never mentioned in Giuliani's 1961 essay 19
 20 — an avant-garde argument that takes its cue from the poetry of a rival would have 20
 21 been totally unacceptable. 21

22
 23 2.7 Looking at *these* periodicals produces an alienating effect; even the assumption that 23
 24 they would ultimately culminate in *Il Verri* appears questionable. Not only do Anceschi 24
 25 and company normalise the picture and resolve any conflicts by bringing them together 25
 26 under the umbrella of an alleged common purpose — a *coincidentia oppositorum*, so to 26
 27 speak. Most of all, they seem to overlook some of the most brilliant artistic achievements 27
 28 of the previous decade. Rather than grounding themselves in the works, they seek to 28
 29 immediately become a *dominant cultural force*, a group which is anything but militant, 29
 30 whose 'alternative' ambitions are dampened by its desire to become established before 30
 31 time. 31

32 The gap or discontinuity between non-magazines (or 'exo-magazines') and a well- 32
 33 structured publication is much too harsh. Not only that: the reference to neo-Baroque 33
 34 (firstly introduced by Sanguineti), which will later become the neo-avant-garde, originates 34
 35 from the dismissal or, in any case, a reconsideration of the very recent past. Paradoxically, 35
 36 with *Il Verri*, the non-opposing alternative morphs into a non-alternative opposition. 36
 37 From Anceschi's perspective, it seems as though the 'new' required a 'dominant' ideology 37
 38 to manifest itself, while Dorfles and Baj (as well as, to some extent, Ballocco), having 38
 39 realised that opposition can no longer be achieved through art, feel the need to push its 39
 40 limits (see, once again, the manifestos and the opening to design) in order to account 40
 41 for a world of artefacts they consider capable of expressing alternative values, and, for 41
 42 that reason, incredibly lively. In other words, Anceschi, Sanguineti, Giuliani etc. take an 42
 43 ideological stance towards an avant-garde whose true form they are not able to grasp 43

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 45
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47 65 See René Wellek, 'Una singolare nozione di realismo', *Il Verri*, 2 (Winter 1957), pp. 13–24. 47

48 66 Alfredo Giuliani, review of Edoardo Sanguineti's *Laborintus*, *Il Verri*, 2 (Winter 1957), pp. 77–80 48
 (p. 80).

49 67 See Alfredo Giuliani, review of Eugenio Montale's *La bufera e altro*, *Il Verri*, 1 (Autumn 1956), pp. 93– 49
 97.

50 68 The essay was first published under the title of *Il verso secondo l'orecchio* in *Il Verri*, V, 1 (February 1961), 50
 51 pp. 43–52, and then under the title of *La forma del verso* in *I Novissimi. Poesie per gli anni '60*, ed. by 51
 Alfredo Giuliani (Einaudi, 1979), pp. 214–22.

1 yet. Conversely, Concrete and Nuclear artists strive (at times unsuccessfully) to support 1
 2 movements that, while still under construction, they know well. Too much ‘poetics’ and 2
 3 too much artistry clash with each other. 3
 4 The fact remains that only one of the two stories is known. That of Milan’s 4
 5 dishevelled non-magazines has yet to be fully told. But one thing is for sure — *Il* 5
 6 *Vetri* does not legitimise those non-magazines; if anything, it calls them into question, 6
 7 uncovering their excessive eclecticism. The aesthetic implications of this are yet to be 7
 8 assessed, also with ideological tools that will need to be sharpened. But the idea that 8
 9 what lies beneath the surface might be referred to as ‘postmodernism’ deserves serious 9
 10 consideration. 10
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 12
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