

Piero Manzoni Writings on Art

Piero Manzoni

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Edited by Gaspare Luigi Marcone

With a foreword by Rosalia Pasqualino di Marineo
and essays by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and
Gaspare Luigi Marcone

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In artistic circles Piero Manzoni is known all over the world; his reputation was already established during his lifetime, and it continued to grow immediately following his early death due to an unexpected heart attack in 1963. It is no coincidence that most museums, both in Italy and abroad, have works by Manzoni in their collections, with acquisitions beginning in the 1970s; moreover, many have put on retrospectives, even abroad, starting fifty years ago and continuing until today. At the same time, it is remarkable that few international studies examine his works and that Manzoni's fortune has often been simplified in critical reception outside of Italy—perhaps due to the fact that there is less awareness about the specifics of the historic development of Italian art in this period. These studies have examined Manzoni's work in the context of political and materialistic discourse and superficially juxtaposed his development with that of contemporary figures.

Now, international scholars can break new ground, since—in addition to a rich body of works—Manzoni also left a trove of writings that suggest the way to a more correct poetic and philosophical interpretation of his work. These writings demonstrate how uniquely independent his journey was and underscore Manzoni's strong roots in Italy's extraordinary and ancient culture. This is the first compendium of English translations of all of Manzoni's writings on art, even though fragments of the more famous ones can be found in the

catalogues of numerous exhibitions. This new accessibility to these materials will serve to create more understanding and a deeper interpretation of Manzoni's life and work.

With this book, one of the many jewels forged with competence, passion, and style by Hauser & Wirth Publishers in collaboration with the Piero Manzoni Foundation and meticulously edited by Gaspare Luigi Marccone, we hope to open new fruitful ways, putting the ideas and thoughts of one of the greatest artists of the last century at the disposal of a broad audience of scholars and art lovers.

Rosalia Pasqualino di Marineo
Director of the Fondazione Piero Manzoni

Piero Manzoni and Writing:
First Notes (Expansions)

Gaspare Luigi Marccone

In his dazzling career—between 1956 and 1963—Piero Manzoni (Soncino 1933–Milan 1963) was to produce a notable body of theoretical texts and programmatic writings, some of which were published and translated in his lifetime in various foreign languages. These documents testify to the evolution of his work and his international outlook.

Taking up a position within the tradition of the historical avant-garde movements, he attempted to spread his ideas through manifestos and magazines, at times establishing temporary links with groups of various kinds; he joined the Movimento Arte Nucleare (Nuclear Art Movement) and also edited, with Enrico Baj and Sergio Dangelo, the third issue of their official periodical *Il Gesto* (1957–58). With Enrico Castellani he founded and cocurated the magazine *Azimuth* (1959–60), an experience that along with the contemporary and almost homonymous gallery *Azimut* was to revitalize the Italian art scene. He also contributed to the ZERO group and periodical in Düsseldorf and established contacts with the Japanese publishers of *The Geijutsu-Shincho* (1960). These episodes are indicative of his urgency and desire to be “involved” (or be there, as in Heidegger's term *Dasein*) to make his voice heard, and to publish his work, at times in a more effective choral manner. This being involved, this desire to leave traces, was always to be one of his principal objectives, even during his sporadic appearances in other settings such as, for

example, the publication of his material with the Movimento Arte Concreta (Concrete Art Movement, 1958) or in lesser-known new periodicals such as *Evoluzione delle lettere e delle arti* (1963).¹ While undertaken with genuine and sincere intentions, these situations were always to be too restrictive for Manzoni's *modus vivendi et operandi*. His career, in particular from 1960–61, was substantially to be independent and solitary, constellated with radical works, syntheses of poetry and irony displaying a taste for paradox and conceptual rigor. These provided true critical points of reference for the research of the following decades.

In the space of the nearly seven years from his exhibition debut in August 1956 to his last solo show in January–February 1963, Manzoni participated in around eighty solo and group shows, half of them abroad, including museum exhibitions as well as solo and group shows in established art galleries and in new, artist-run or alternative spaces. Manzoni sought to be involved and on many of these occasions he published manifestos or pamphlets, grasping the opportunities most congenial to him to spread his Word. We should not therefore be surprised by the discovery, even in recent years, of “new” texts generally forgotten or buried by time, in particular certain situations such as independent spaces or sparsely distributed or neglected periodicals, or galleries that do not currently have an archive or an heir to preserve and transmit their history and memory.²

Manzoni's interest in writing was deeply rooted. In 1951, for example, the year he graduated from the Istituto Leone XIII classical high school in Milan, he published an article in the school magazine *Giovinezza Nostra*, a travelogue already steeped in his ironic and paradoxical spirit.³

Another precious document is his youthful diary, kept between 1954 and 1955, in the period from when he was twenty to twenty-two years old, during which Manzoni was still a law student at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, in Milan, testimony to both an “exercise in writing” and his personal turmoil regarding decisions about his future.⁴ On several pages he declares that he is undecided whether to devote himself to art or writing, to become a painter or a writer: “However, it may be that writing is actually my path. I would though prefer to both write and paint” (May 1, 1954), and “Then again, if I want to write I can only write about past things, imaginary things or theoretical treatises” (April 17, 1954).⁵ The diary also reveals the numerous readings, journeys, and experiences that enriched, day by day, Manzoni's variegated cultural baggage: his knowledge of Existentialism, drawn from analysis of the philosopher of Catholic extraction Pietro Prini, the notes on the “brilliant” and “fundamental” aesthetics of Benedetto Croce, and numerous novels, plays, and films that informed his imaginary.⁶ That interest in philosophy—which was already shifting Manzoni's outlook toward the plane of “thought”—led the young aristocrat to enroll for a degree in philosophy at the Università di Roma (1955), where he was to attend courses in Italian literature, the history of philosophy, psychology, and pedagogy. One of Manzoni's particular characteristics was an ability to shake up heterogeneous hypotheses from various disciplines in a remarkable and unique synthesis: dismantling and reassembling, devouring and digesting to create new personal proposals. With “lightness” and “nonchalance” he was an artist who always had a clear vision of the concept of “history”—of ideas and forms—and even when he was in the grip of total experimentation he never forgot his “classical”

substrate, perhaps aware of one's destiny to become a classic after having established something new.⁷

In the workshop of this diary, where there are even a few immature poems, leafing through the pages with their wealth of quotidian reporting and notes of various kinds—not without a degree of naivety and confusion—we can find fragments of the greatest interest that the artist was to develop over the following years combined with a desire for continuous research and freedom guided by a strong moral sense: “. . . myth embraces us. We live in myth” (May 15, 1954); “*Vivere necesse est* (to live is necessary). This is the foundation” (May 20, 1954); “What is important in life is to live in an essential manner” (December 6, 1954); “Life is a religious ritual” (December 20, 1954); “One needs to know and then sacrifice oneself” (January 3, 1955); “There is no soul and body. There is only one—a single entity, man” (April 20, 1955).⁸ Myth, essentiality, life, being, rituality, sacrifice, morality.

This, in extreme synthesis, is the *humus* in which the young artist developed prior to his exhibition debut with the group show at Castello Sforzesco in Soncino (August 11, 1956) and his first theoretical writing with the publication of the brief manifesto “For the Discovery of a Zone of Images” (December 9, 1956), which opens: “Without myth there is no art. The work of art draws its opportunity from an unconscious impulse . . .” He also refers to the picture as an “area of freedom.”⁹

In the texts from 1957, when Manzoni was also close to the research of the Nuclearist artists, a number of primary concepts have already been formulated: origins, magic, organicity, the sacred, corporeality, and an extreme subjectivism, designed to coincide with universality. There is also significant use of terms such as *arcai* in both the psychological and (pre-Socratic) philosophical fields and the verb *monadize*,

from *monad*, another pre-Socratic term later taken up in the systems of Giordano Bruno and Gottfried W. Leibniz; these indicate Manzoni's search for points of departure and foundations as well as primigenial entities.¹⁰

This thinking takes flesh, for example, in the material works or those populated by anthropomorphic figures, “homunculi-hominids,” indicative of the “individual mythology where it comes to identify with the universal mythology,” or that “process of self-analysis” with which we “reconnect with our origins,” and the “humanly achievable original is made manifest, taking the form of images . . . prime images, our totems.”¹¹ Manzoni writes that the canvas has to be “living flesh, direct, burning, and unaltered version of the artist's most intimate dynamic”¹² to discover and reveal to ourselves “the intimate structures, the fecundating germs of our organic existence”¹³; remembering, moreover, that “art has always had a religious value, from the first shaman-artist to the pagan myth, the Christian myth.”¹⁴ While from a theoretical point of view the formulae cited have a certain degree of originality, the objective concreteness of his works was still developing. On certain points at least, however, Manzoni already seems confident in his reflections; it is no coincidence that entire sentences were repeated and reprinted, in almost identical form, in various writings with diverse destinations and titles. *Repetita iuvant* (repeating helps).

The year 1957 was important in at least three major ways: at the current state of the research this was the richest year for published texts and typescript drafts, in part because this was the moment of Manzoni's debut on the art scene and a period of frenetic attempts to clarify and to clarify himself—as well as understand and introduce—his guiding principles, it was the period in which he brought into

focus the problem of “being,” and thirdly, it was the year of the creation of the first “white works,” subsequently defined as *Achromes*. The text known as “Today the Concept of the Picture . . .” or “Prolegomena,” published in December 1957, is significant for both its introduction, “Today the concept of the picture, of painting, of poetry in the usual sense of the word can no longer have any meaning for us,” and conclusion, “The space-surface of the painting is of interest to the self-analytical process only in as much as it is a space of freedom that we can explore . . . Here the image takes form in its vital function: it cannot be valid for that which it recalls, explains, or expresses (if anything the question is to found) nor can it aspire to be or to be explained as an allegory of a physical process: it is valid only in that it is: being.”¹⁵

It was probably also due to his constant practice of writing that Manzoni, continually annotating and cancelling his ideas, succeeding in clarifying and discovering new principles that he was to explore over the years. A reading of the typescripts allows us to examine the artist’s protean mind, his *labor limae*, and his search for essentiality. On occasion those parts that were not destined to go into print—frequently clarifying passages published in a briefer form—are useful and are open to various legitimate hypotheses: rethinkings, blind alleys, avoiding problems with misunderstandings but also simple and obscure questions of graphical-editorial layout with spacings and lengths to be respected, especially for articles destined for magazines.

When, toward the end of 1957, Manzoni had identified more clearly the concept of “being” that takes “shape” in the white (or rather “neutral” or “colorless”) of the *Achrome*, there was to be a different rhythm to his output of writings. These were the months of intensive production of works, of

the weaving of international relations, of the first and then evermore numerous exhibitions around Europe; writing was the protagonist in the artist’s epistolary contacts.

For the texts from 1957 and 1958 there are also new reflections and analyses of new discoveries to be made. As mentioned, Manzoni was a well-read artist who loved to assemble, dismantle, and reformulate heterogeneous concepts to arrive at his own personal vision. He used what was almost a collage technique. In a number of texts it is possible to trace references to the great writer Cesare Pavese. The opening of the first manifesto “For a Discovery of a Zone of Images” (1956) reads: “Without myth there is no art”; in 1950 Pavese wrote “Without myth—as we have already repeated—there is no poetry.” In a number of essays that were published in the year of Pavese’s death we can read reflections on “myth” that will not have escaped Manzoni, for example: “What does the poet do if not torment himself regarding these myths only to resolve them in clear image and discourse accessible to his fellow man?”¹⁶; and “In memory we celebrate the repeatability of these myths, their ever-renewed uniqueness. . . . Creating poetry signifies shedding light on and conducting to fantastic maturity a mythical germ.”¹⁷

Cesare Pavese, famous for works such as *Lavorare stanca* (Hard Labor, 1936), *Paesi tuoi* (Your Villages, 1941), *Dialoghi con Leucò* (Dialogues with Leucò, 1947), *La luna e i falò* (The Moon and the Bonfires, 1950) was, as is well-known, also a great Americanist and translator of authors such as Herman Melville, John Dos Passos, John Steinbeck, William Faulkner, Daniel Defoe, and Gertrude Stein. His diary, entitled *Il mestiere di vivere* (This Business of Living), was published in Italian in 1952, two years after he committed suicide. Manzoni indirectly cites the work of Pavese in his own diary

in May 1955 (“learn to be men. . . . Learn the business of living”).¹⁸ Pavese, who worked for the Einaudi publishing company, was also one of the promoters of the famous “violet series” of books specializing in religion, ethnology, and psychology, with authors such as Károly Kerényi, Vladimir J. Propp, Bronislaw Malinowski, James G. Frazer, Mircea Eliade, and Carl Gustav Jung. In 1948, in fact, Einaudi published *Prolegomeni allo studio scientifico della mitologia* (Essays on a Science of Mythology) by Jung and Kerényi; Manzoni avidly “ransacked” the work, in certain cases replacing particular terms. Jung wrote: “The more archaic, more ‘profound,’ that is to say the more *physiological* a symbol, the more it is collective, universal, and ‘material,’”¹⁹ while Manzoni in a letter to Baj reformulated the concept as: “The more physiological, organic, profound a sign is, the more it is universal, collective, material. An organicistic conception is the only one that allows us to adhere to the continual mutation of the archetypes, the only one that therefore involves the necessity of a continual stylistic revolution.” The artist replaced the symbol with the sign. Just a few years later, his signs were to be lines on paper or fingerprints.

Another aspect to which critics have paid little attention concerns the relationships between Manzoni and the work of Arturo Schwarz, or rather that which a large book of “militant criticism” could offer a young artist. Schwarz, under the pseudonym Tristan Sauvage, printed in December 1957 the voluminous *Pittura italiana del dopoguerra*, which may be seen as a rich resource for Manzoni’s avid and attentive spirit. The book, which was in any case of notable importance in terms of its historical-critical reading of the Italian art of the day, was the first to reference and take into consideration—albeit marginally—Manzoni’s work. For the young artist it was a positive development that placed him within the

historical-critical debate. Schwarz’s book contains the five collective manifestos published between 1956 and 1957: “For the Discovery of a Zone of Images,” “Manifesto of Manzoni, Sordini, Verga” (that is, “Art Is Not True Creation . . .”), “For an Organic Painting,” “Albisola Marina,” and “Against Style.”²⁰ The young Manzoni, already well-informed about the contemporary situation—but always hungry for information—essentially found himself in possession of a book of over five hundred pages, divided into an initial introductory essay, a second part composed of documents, manifestos, and artist’s writings, and a final section composed of the responses to a “survey” conducted by Schwarz among around fifty artists. The text deserves a systematic examination. On this occasion mention has to be made of certain fundamental points: firstly, regarding the idea and the term *achromia* Schwarz’s passage concerning Fontana—“spiritual and experimental” father of the new generations and in particular harmony with Manzoni—will hardly have passed unnoticed: “When Lucio Fontana, twenty-five years later, pierced a canvas, he was only reprising the dialogue, shifting it from the three dimensions of sculpture to the two dimensions of painting. In fact, he entrusted to light all that which is usually demanded of color: the first paintings were therefore achromatic, or on backgrounds of a uniform black, yellow, or white. . . . From this initial period of ascetic essentiality, Fontana has now moved on to a joyous embellishment of the material of his paintings with the most disparate elements.”²¹ Achromaticism, light, and essentiality were to be guidelines for Manzoni in his imminent works in gesso and then kaolin. Manzoni could reflect, with the calmness that a volume for “private reading” may give, on other writings too—many of which were perhaps already known to the young artist—such as the various manifestos

of the Movimento Spaziale (Spatial Movement), as well as those by his Nuclearist companions and those of the Movimento Arte Concreta. Schwarz—who was already running his bookshop in Milan, which later included a gallery—published seven manifestos on Spatialism and no less than ten on the Concrete movement; of these last, some will have been of interest to Manzoni, including the “Manifesto dell’arte totale” (Manifesto of Total Art, 1952), which spoke of “an art of objects that will therefore be: plastic, colored, sonic, odorous, et cetera . . . they will have different weights and materials, they may be instable and in movement. Hence the ‘total’ objects will be to be looked at, touched, smelled, and listened to. From today, finally, along with the spirit, the body and the senses of the non-artist man may participate directly in the artistic emotion. With this formidable and complete vehicle, we shall propagate art and distribute it in a ‘total’ manner.”²² Taking into account the differences, we cannot ignore—along with the “totality” declared by Manzoni in his 1957 texts but fully formed in “Free Dimension” from 1960—a number of “nuclei” of works, many of which are “corporeal”: the hard-boiled eggs with the artist’s fingerprints he had the public eat on July 21, 1960, during the event *Consumazione dell’arte / Dinamica del pubblico / Divorare l’arte* (Consumption of Art / Dynamic of the Public / Devour Art), or the “active” participatory role of the observer who can—or must—inflate the balloon conserved in the boxes of the *Corpi d’aria* (Bodies of Air, 1959–60) to create the inflatable or pneumatic sculpture. Another “totality” was to be achieved with the *Socle du monde* (Base of the World) from 1961, which transformed the Earth, including the whole of nature, all culture, and all living or inanimate entities into a work of art. Similarly, reading certain passages from the “Manifesto del macchinismo” (Manifesto of

Machinism, 1952), we discover other “affinities,” for example, “The artists must interest themselves in machines, abandon romantic brushes . . . create works of art with those machines . . . The machine must become a work of art!”²³ In fact, as is well-known, and as Manzoni wrote, a number of his *Achromes* from 1959 were “machine sewn.” Manzoni’s “mechanical animal” from 1960 survives only as an announced project.²⁴ It was no coincidence that a work by Jean Tinguely realized by machine (*Méta-Matic*) was added as a loose leaf to the first issue of *Azimuth*. As a final example, although the passages to be cited could be multiplied, we can mention a further Concretist manifesto “Disintegralismo” (Disintegralism, again from 1952): “The work may also be projected all around. The sculptures will correspond to large models that one may enter. The old painting presented us with a landscape seen from the window, today we open that window and enter into the landscape,”²⁵ with this new idea of the “work” clearly having something in common with Manzoni’s *Placentarium*. Behind the publication of the Concretist manifestos of 1952 (which were not signed) there was the playful direction—particularly congenial to Manzoni—of the “most perfect” Bruno Munari who, with Fontana, was one of the undisputed pioneers and total experimenters of Italian art of the period.²⁶

Manzoni was reluctant to define himself as belonging to a movement (if we exclude certain moments of his Nuclearist period); the interview published in *Il Travaso* in which he claims to be “Dadaist” is complicated because it plays on the irony and the paradoxes typical of a satirical magazine.²⁷ In fact, with the articles of 1959 taking Burri, Fontana, Picasso, and Pollock as references, he clarifies that their teaching concerned only “the will, the strength to make art: the freedom of invention”²⁸; this was in fact the period of the

Linee (Lines) and the *Corpi d'aria*, the first three-dimensional works that looked to a new aesthetic, as well as that of the foundation of *Azimuth* and *Azimut*, months which led to 1960 when he signed further crucial pieces. These were the texts of the twenty-seven-year-old artist who conceived the most radical works, discoveries, and ideas deserving of critical examination and diffusion. The concepts sown in 1957 flowered after around three years of reflection and intensive work with *Fiato d'artista* (Artist's Breath), *Linea di lunghezza infinita* (Line of Infinite Length), the *Corpo di luce assoluto* (Absolute Body of Light), and the *Uova* (Eggs) signed with his fingerprint, sacrificed and eaten in the collective ritual *Consumazione dell'arte / Dinamica del pubblico / Divorare l'arte*. These works and operations opened the way for the works of 1961: the *Sculture viventi* (Living Sculptures), the *Basi magiche* (Magic Bases) including the *Socle du monde*, the inverted "pedestal" on which the Earth itself rested along with every human being, a total and totalizing work of art. If art was also a "scientific procedure of foundation,"²⁹ the "tribute" to Galileo Galilei was by no means casual, in part because "barriers are a challenge, physical for the scientist and mental for the artist."³⁰

In 1960, ever more aware of his choices, Manzoni performed an act of "self-purification." In "Free Dimension"—emblematic in its very title—he declared: "modifications are not enough: the transformation must be complete"; and with regard to the analysis of the object-painting: "Why not liberate this surface? Why not attempt to discover the limitless significance of a total space, of a pure and absolute light?," also emphasizing the true "emergence" from the painting departing from the object itself, from the *Achrome* created almost three years earlier as the corporeal form of "being," as well as the correlative of "absolute of freedom," "original" entity, "prime

image," "area of freedom," and "authentic and virgin zone": "This undefined (and uniquely living) surface, which in the material contingency of the work cannot be infinite, can on the other hand be infinitable, infinitely repeatable, without a solution of continuity; this appears even more clearly in the *Linee* (Lines); here there is not even the possible ambiguity of the picture; the line develops only in length, it stretches infinitely; its only dimension is time."³¹

In the "Manifesto against Nothing for the International Exposition of Nothing," the "nothing-nothingness" already present in the youthful anxieties and philosophical readings as something to be managed and to react to, is exorcised with a vein of irony from the Dadaist tradition; those who reflect on "being" are, sooner or later, almost obliged to tackle "nothingness." Being and nothingness are dialectically incorporated into the totality of life, as previously expressed in "Free Dimension," in the *Achrome*—the umpteenth tabula rasa but "vital"—as in "undefined (an uniquely living) surface" and in the "total being (and total being is pure becoming)"—phrases that moreover announce the phosphorescent *Achromes* and those with cobalt chloride that change color on the basis of the atmospheric agents (1960–61)—remembering that the *Corpi d'aria* are also reducible and extendible "from nothing to infinity," through to the now famous conclusion: "There is nothing to be said: there is only to be, there is only to live."

The artist's "monograph," planned with Jes Petersen from 1961 but published posthumously, *Piero Manzoni: Life and Works*, consisted of totally transparent pages and took up a phrase from the "Manifesto against Nothing": "In this catalogue nothing is reproduced."³²

The "being" of the work is in itself; essence and appearance, object and idea, material and immaterial coinciding

originally—a “single entity.” After having overcome the problem of painting, using in the earliest *Achromes* unorthodox materials—gesso, kaolin, and sewn canvas—the reflection on “being” as a philosophical and existential category also concerns the “essence” and the “making” of the work-object and therefore of artistic status. The work neither illustrates nor represents. Certain parts of the typescript “L’unica dimensione” (The Only Dimension) are interesting in this respect: “no artistic activity can be representation, not of a fact, not of an object, not of a problem, not of an idea: a painting is, a white is.” Immediately afterwards comes a dazzling manuscript phrase: “only the whole is essential!”³³ which could itself be an excellent introduction to both *Socle du monde* and the totality of the real that was to take form in the future *Achromes* (synthetic fibers, stones, bread rolls).

The opening of the manifesto “The ‘New Artistic Conception’” is striking: “The ‘new artistic conception’ is essentially research and stands outside any schematizable trend.”³⁴ In 1960 Manzoni no longer had any need for preestablished theories as he had by then succeeded in synthesizing many stimuli, readings, reflections, experiences—“distinguishing the essential”—in an absolutely independent poetic and creative action. Reading the texts drafted from 1960 onwards, the “theoretical justifications” diminish, while the lists, descriptions, and hypotheses of works increase in a frenetic, paratactic rhythm, as in “Immediate Projects”: a creative-vital flow.

The role of “writing”—understood as an anthropological macro-category containing works, letters, and signs—becomes all the more important if we look at certain series of works from a radically more conceptual point of view.

Alphabetic letters were already present in works from 1958, taking up that “alphabet of prime images”³⁵ announced in 1956. The fingerprint is an extremely subjective “signature” in that it is “unique”—a uniqueness that is such for all human beings—a corporeal writing, a linear structure impressed on paper and eggs. A graphical-linear matrix is determinant in certain works conceived as books or artistic portfolios.³⁶

Manzoni declared that he considered the *Linea* to be his fundamental discovery.³⁷ As well as objectifying space-time, the line is also ontology of the sign, “essence” and “origin,” basic, primary element of writing and drawing. The first *Linee* produced in the spring of 1959 were traced on rectangular sheets of paper to be displayed on the wall: in the paper “page” split horizontally by the black sign, Manzoni perhaps satisfied his youthful desire to paint and write contemporaneously. Painting, drawing, and writing combined in a single work with a single mental and material action. However, these were transitional works, still bound to a reassuring two-dimensionality of the object-painting. Over the following months he was to take a further step: the lines were to be traced on long strips of paper that were then rolled up and enclosed in cylinders of various kinds and sizes, with a label—or inscription—summarizing the dimensions and characteristics of the work. The writing of the label is part of the work and represents the means by which it is “explained”; in the face of a “hidden” work, the observer has to trust in that which he reads and which references the very essence of the line. Then again, as he had already outlined in the typescripts from 1957, “comprehending a picture, or in any case a work of art, does not mean understanding the subject but rather assuming the meaning.”³⁸ In the *Linea di lunghezza infinita*, a simple cylinder of

black-painted wood, it is the inscription in a new act of faith, that “in-forms” about the “in-finite.”³⁹ It is a similar procedure with *Merda d’artista* (Artist’s Shit) and with the aforementioned transparent monograph *Piero Manzoni: Life and Works*. It is with writing that Manzoni signs and renders people works of art, transforming them into *Sculture viventi*, accompanied by a certificate of authenticity compiled and signed by the artist-demiurge. Works unthinkable and inconceivable without writing. A “legal” practice also emerges (perhaps a vestige of Manzoni’s university years) in the “certification,” ranging from manuscripts in the “declarations of authenticity” for the *Sculture viventi*, and corporeal-physiological “stamps” in the form of the fingerprints to the “labels” for the *Linee* and the *Merda d’artista* or the drafting of statements and texts with a dry, formal style. The artist works with the “omnipotent” power of the word: the word that takes form in the manifestos, in the theoretical texts, in the correspondence and, of course, in the works; labeled works, certificates, and dedications that thanks to the word can take form.

For Manzoni, writing was a means of self-analysis, divulgation, and knowledge; over time writing became art.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was made flesh.

- 1 Aside from the brief notes accompanying the individual texts and the biographical details in this book that by their very nature have no claim to completeness, there is a need for new specific research into the relationships between Manzoni and the publishing culture pertinent to his contributions, ranging from editorial staff and magazines to typographers and publishers, including Antonio Maschera and Vanni Scheiwiller, not to mention the role played in these areas by poets and intellectuals in contact with Manzoni. Useful contributions in this respect: Giorgio Zanchetti, “La neoavanguardia milanese, Agnelli e Manzoni,” in *I due Scheiwiller: Editoria e cultura nella Milano del Novecento*, ed. Alberto Cadioli, Andrea Kerbaker, and Antonello Negri, Università degli Studi di Milano (Geneva-Milan: Skira, 2009), 209–18; Francesca Pola, “Piero Manzoni amidst Azimuth and Azimut: An International Creative Adventure,” in *Manzoni: Azimut* (n.p.: Gagosian Gallery London, in collaboration with Fondazione Piero Manzoni, 2011). In general see *Le carte di Piero Manzoni*, ed. Flaminio Gualdoni (Soncino: Rocca Sforzesca; Milan: Charta, 1995). Regarding Manzoni’s career, the texts by Germano Celant, written between 1969 and 2004 continue to be useful, now collected in the two volumes by Celant, *Piero Manzoni: Catalogo generale* (Geneva-Milan: Skira, 2004), XVI–CXIX. For an updated biography see Flaminio Gualdoni, *Piero Manzoni: Vita d’artista* (Monza: Johan & Levi Editore, 2013). More recent research and various critical contributions are to be found in the two volumes entitled *Piero Manzoni: Materials of His Time* and *Piero Manzoni: Lines*, ed. Rosalia Pasqualino di Marineo (Zurich: Hauser & Wirth Publishers, 2019), published, in a slip cover, on the occasion of the exhibitions of the same titles in Los Angeles and New York.
- 2 For example, currently, we have yet to find the heirs or the archives of Galleria Pater and Galleria Montenapoleone in Milan, by no means secondary places in Manzoni’s career.
- 3 Piero Manzoni, “La Congregazione Mariana a Pila (Aosta),” *Giovinazza Nostra* (Istituto Leone XIII, Milan), no. 3 (January–February 1951): 8–9.
- 4 See the first Italian complete edition: Piero Manzoni, *Diario*, ed. Gaspare Luigi Marcone (Milan: Electa, 2013); the introduction and the curator’s notes contain the first analyses relating to Manzoni’s cultural and philosophical notes including those relating to the writings on art published by the artist from 1956.
- 5 Manzoni, *Diario*, 99 and 71.

- 6 For the references to Prini and Croce cf. Manzoni, *Diario*, 61 and 129 with relative notes.
- 7 See in this regard the correspondence from 1960 between Manzoni and Juan-Eduardo Cirlot now in Juan-Eduardo Cirlot, *De la crítica a la filosofía del arte*, ed. Lourdes Cirlot (Barcelona: Quaderns Crema, 1997), 105–24.
- 8 Manzoni, *Diario*, 129, 133, 154, 155 (December 20, 1954, and January 3, 1955), 165. The phrases “myth embraces us” and “to live in an essential manner” are underlined in Manzoni’s original manuscript.
- 9 “For the Discovery of a Zone of Images” (1956), 33–34 in this book. A reading in a Jungian key of Manzoni’s early career can be found in Anna Costantini, “Da zero a niente: Piero Manzoni a confronto,” in *Piero Manzoni*, ed. Germano Celant (Naples: Museo MADRE; Milan: Electa, 2007), 54–77; in the same volume see also the article by Elio Grazioli, “Piero Manzoni: l’artista e l’essere,” 88–99.
- 10 *Arcai* (from the ancient Greek *arché*, meaning beginning, origin, source of action) was already used in the typescript drafts from around 1957 included with modifications in “For the Discovery of a Zone of Images” (1958), 99–104 in this book; “to distinguish the essential from the gratuitous and monadize it with absolute precision” in “For an Organic Painting” (1957), 47–48 in this book. A significant curiosity: the entry “monad” (from the ancient Greek *monas*, meaning united, indivisible, single) in the *Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani* (vol. 23, 1934) was written by Guido Calogero, a philosopher whose course in the History of Ancient Philosophy Manzoni attended at the Università di Roma in 1955 (see Manzoni, *Diario*, 158, fig. 78, and 209, note 235).
- 11 For the four citations see “Art is Not True Creation . . .,” text published in May 1957, 39–41 in this book; although also signed by Ettore Sordini and Angelo Verga, many parts are almost identical to “Today the Concept of the Picture . . . [Prolegomena],” signed and edited by Manzoni alone in December 1957, 75–80 in this book, which together with the typescripts with manuscript additions by Manzoni (from around 1957) would appear to suggest his principal authorship.
- 12 “Albisola Marina” (1957), 53–55 in this book.
- 13 “For an Organic Painting” (1957), 47–48 in this book.

- 14 “For the Discovery of a Zone of Images” (1958), 99–104 in this book; and in the typescripts from around 1957, “Per la scoperta di una zona di immagini” (For the Discovery of a Zone of Images) and “Metodo di scoperta” (Method of Discovery) published in Italian in Piero Manzoni, *Scritti sull’arte*, ed. Gaspare Luigi Marccone (Milan: Abscondita, 2013), 66–68 and 69–71.
- 15 “Today the Concept of the Picture . . . [Prolegomena]” (1957), 75–80 in this book.
- 16 Cesare Pavese, “Il mito,” in *Cultura e realtà* (Rome), no. 1 (May–June 1950): 8.
- 17 Pavese, “Il mito,” 9–10.
- 18 Manzoni, *Diario*, 165–66 and also the relative note 252 on page 211.
- 19 For the Jungian citation see C. G. Jung and K. Kerényi, *Essays on a Science of Mythology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 92; other examples are listed in the comments on the texts “For an Organic Painting” (1957), 47–48 in this book; “Today the Concept of the Picture . . . [Prolegomena]” (1957), 75–80 in this book. The examples could however be multiplied taking into consideration concepts such as “vital function,” “totality” and “homunculi.”
- 20 Tristan Sauvage, *Pittura italiana del dopoguerra (1945–1957)* (Milan: Schwarz Editore, 1957), 293–99.
- 21 Sauvage, *Pittura italiana del dopoguerra*, 143.
- 22 Sauvage, *Pittura italiana del dopoguerra*, 240.
- 23 Sauvage, *Pittura italiana del dopoguerra*, 241.
- 24 See “Immediate Projects” (1961), 199–202 in this book.
- 25 Sauvage, *Pittura italiana del dopoguerra*, 239.
- 26 Manzoni died prematurely at twenty-nine years of age; perhaps, after the examples cited, we might hypothesize an interest in cybernetics as a further field of investigation after having explored the “corporeal” and the “organic.” However, these reflections will probably never be answered.
- 27 “Eight Questions to the Painter Manzoni” (1959), 129–32 in this book.
- 28 “From Milan” (1959), 137–39 in this book.
- 29 “Today the Concept of the Picture . . . [Prolegomena]” (1957), 75–80 in this book.

Gaspare Luigi Marccone

- 30 See the brief text for Dadamaino, 191–93 in this book. The complete inscription on the *Socle du monde* (Base of the World), as written in block capitals on the work is: “Socle du monde / Socle magic no. 3 de / Piero Manzoni—1961— / Hommage à Galileo.”
- 31 “Free Dimension” (1960), 155–61 in this book.
- 32 “Manifesto against Nothing for the International Exposition of Nothing” (1960), 175–76 in this book.
- 33 *L'unica dimensione* (The Only Dimension; 1959–60), in Italian in Manzoni, *Scritti sull'arte*, 76–79.
- 34 “Editorial [The New Artistic Conception]” (1960), 147–48 in this book.
- 35 “For the Discovery of a Zone of Images” (1956), 33–34 in this book.
- 36 For example, the *8 Tavole di accertamento*, preface by V. Agnetti (Milan: Edizioni di Vanni Scheiwiller, 1962) (some prepared from 1958) are composed of lines, fingerprints, letters of the alphabet, and maps.
- 37 See for example Manzoni’s letter dated August 17, 1960, in Cirlot, *De la crítica a la filosofía del arte*, 109–12 (in particular 111). See also the declaration to Franco Serra, in *Settimana INCOM Illustrata*, 215–32 in this book .
- 38 “Dear Vergani, We Often Hear . . .” (1958), 87–92 in this book.
- 39 For further research on these issues see *Piero Manzoni Achromes: Linea Infinita*, ed. Gaspare Luigi Marccone (London: Mazzoleni; Poggibonsi: Carlo Cambi Editore, 2016).

This is the first time that Piero Manzoni's comprehensive writings on art are published in English. The selection of texts is based on the 2013 publication *Scritti sull'arte*, edited by Gaspare Luigi Marcone (Abscondita, Milan), which became the only access point to Manzoni's writings on art. While this publication does not contain the various manuscripts and drafts of the texts that were eventually published, it does include a number of additional texts by Manzoni that were published between 1956 and 1963 during his lifetime. The comments and the editor's essay have been significantly extended. For some texts published in English in the 1950s and 1960s—such as “Against Style” (1957), “Free Dimension” (1960), and “Immediate Projects” (1961)—we have opted for new translations to capture Italian nuances or difficult phrasing for contemporary readers. This corpus of manifestos, theoretical writings, and articles includes two extensive interviews with the artist as well as articles about the artist that were published in popular magazines at the time, introducing Manzoni and his work to a wider audience. These texts also serve as fascinating documents of contemporary Italian culture.

Each section begins with a reproduction of the original publication or manuscript by Manzoni from the artist's archive in Milan. Manzoni's texts were translated by Neil Davenport in close cooperation with the editor. Each text is followed by a commentary including additional reference illustrations to provide context.

If not otherwise indicated, the archive documents cited were consulted in the original or in copied form at the Fondazione Piero Manzoni in Milan.

Hauser & Wirth Publishers and the editor would like to thank the Fondazione Piero Manzoni for their enthusiastic support of this project and providing us with an abundance of rare archival material to illustrate this edition.

Per la scoperta di una zona di immagini

Senza mito non si dà arte.

L'opera d'arte trae la sua occasione da un impulso inconscio, origine e morte di un substrato collettivo, ma il fatto artistico sta nella consapevolezza del gesto; consapevolezza intuitiva, poichè tecnica propria dell'attività artistica è la chiarificazione intuitiva (*inventio*).

Consumato il gesto, l'opera diventa dunque documento dell'avvenimento di un fatto artistico.

Con la scoperta nasce la chiara coscienza dello sviluppo storico dell'opera d'arte.

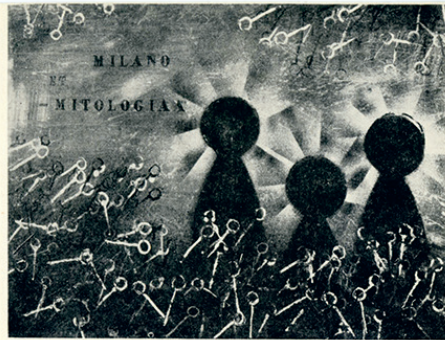
Intendiamo dunque l'arte come scoperta (*inventio*) in continuo divenire storico di zone autentiche e vergini.

Il nostro modo è un alfabeto di immagini prime.

Il quadro è la nostra area di libertà; è in questo spazio che noi andiamo alla scoperta, all'invenzione delle immagini; immagini vergini e giustificate solo da se stesse, la cui validità è determinata solo dalla quantità di GIOIA DI VITA che contengono.

Camillo Corvi-Mora
Piero Manzoni
Ettore Sordini
Giuseppe Zecca

Milano, 9 dicembre 1956



PIERO MANZONI: « Milano et Mitologia »



ETTORE SORDINI: « Nascita »



GIUSEPPE ZECCA: « Fiori per il cielo »

For the Discovery of a Zone of Images 1956

Without myth there is no art.

The work of art draws its opportunity from an unconscious impulse, origin and death of a collective substrate, but the artistic fact lies in the awareness of the gesture; an intuitive awareness, as the technique of artistic activity is intuitive clarification (*inventio*).

Once the gesture has been made, the work becomes a document of the occurrence of an artistic fact.

This discovery leads to a clear awareness of the historical development of the work of art.

We therefore understand art as the continuous historical discovery (*inventio*) of authentic and virgin zones.

Our approach is an alphabet of prime images. The picture is our

“Per la scoperta di una zona di immagini”
(For the Discovery of a Zone of Images)

Text signed by Camillo Corvi-Mora, Piero Manzoni, Ettore Sordini, and Giuseppe Zecca, and dated December 9, 1956. Pamphlet, white with black characters, ca. 18.7 × 25.4 cm open, ca. 18.7 × 12.7 cm closed. Inside, along with the text on the left, three contemporary works by the artists are reproduced in black and white: *Nascita* (Birth) by Sordini, *Fiori per il cielo* (Flowers for the Sky) by Zecca, and *Milano et Mitologia* (Milan and Mythology), by Manzoni.

area of freedom; it is in this space that we explore, that we invent images; virgin images, justified only by themselves, the validity of which is determined solely by the quantity of the JOY OF LIFE they contain.

Camillo Corvi-Mora, Piero Manzoni,
Ettore Sordini, Giuseppe Zecca

Milan, December 9, 1956

This text was later published by Arturo Schwarz under the pseudonym Tristan Sauvage in the book *Pittura italiana del dopoguerra* in 1957.¹ The manifesto's opening line references a phrase by the famous Italian writer Cesare Pavese: "Without myth—we have already repeated—there is no poetry."² As an artist with a heterogeneous cultural background that reflected his classical schooling with the Jesuits (Istituto Leone XIII, Milan) and his studies of law (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan, 1951–54) and philosophy (Università di Roma, 1954–55), Manzoni frequently combined diverse stimuli. In this period he came into contact with the Movimento Arte Nucleare (Nuclear Art Movement) that had been founded by Enrico Baj and Sergio Dangelo in Brussels and Milan between 1951 and 1952. In a letter to Giuseppe Zecca, dated December 25 (1956) and relating to "For the Discovery of a Zone of Images," Manzoni wrote to his fellow signatory: "I have sent around thirty manifestos abroad: I am looking for other useful addresses; it is arousing great interest among young people; Fontana wanted ten or so copies. I am now trying to write an article that explains our manifesto well."³ The text that Manzoni was "trying to write" to explain their brief first manifesto is probably to be found in



Milano et mitologia,
1956, oil and wax on
wood, 95 × 130 cm

the various versions of the typescripts with handwritten notes and corrections that share the subject of “image research” or the “zone of images.”⁴ Some of this material led to the final versions published and printed between 1957 and 1958 as “Art Is Not True Creation . . .,” published in 1957 with Ettore Sordini and Angelo Verga (see pages 39–41), and the article signed by Manzoni alone as a letter to the editor of the periodical *Il Bastardo* in the early months of 1958 (see pages 87–92).

The pamphlet was published a few months after Manzoni’s first exhibition held from August 11 to 16, 1956, at the fourth *Fiera mercato: Mostra d’Arte Contemporanea*, at Castello Sforzesco in Soncino, the artist’s hometown, which was to be followed by the group show *Premio di Pittura San Fedele 1956* at Galleria San Fedele in Milan from November 5 to 15, 1956. The Premio San Fedele brochure mentions just one work by the artist, *Wildflower* (1956), which is stylistically close to the *Milano et Mitologia* that is illustrated in “For the Discovery of a Zone of Images.” These two works show strange anthropomorphic figures, hominid-homunculi in black that emerge from the background, complemented both by prints of keys and by the titles written in dark capital letters on the picture surface.

- 1 Tristan Sauvage [Arturo Schwarz], *Pittura italiana del dopoguerra (1945–1957)* (Milan: Schwarz Editore, 1957), 293.
- 2 Cesare Pavese, “Raccontare è monotono,” *Cultura e realtà* (Rome) 2 (July–August 1950): 9. The Italian original is “Senza mito—l’abbiamo già ripetuto—non si dà poesia.”
- 3 The letter is in a private collection.
- 4 A number of these typescripts have been transcribed in Italian in the second part of the book Piero Manzoni, *Scritti sull’arte*, ed. Gaspare Luigi Marccone (Milan: Abscondita, 2013).

Seguo da tempo l'attività, le ricerche, l'inquietudine di questi tre giovani artisti, ed anzi alcuni loro lavori fanno parte della mia piccola collezione d'arte moderna. Sono convinto che le loro recenti opere abbiano una parte importante nel campo della giovane pittura, perciò è con tutta stima ed entusiasmo che mi sento di appadrinare questa loro mostra.

LUCIO FONTANA

L'arte non è vera creazione e fondazione che in quanto crea e fonda là dove le mitologie hanno il proprio ultimo fondamento e la propria origine.

Per poter assumere il significato della propria epoca il punto è dunque raggiungere la propria mitologia individuale là dove essa giunge a identificarsi con la mitologia universale.

La difficoltà sta nel liberarsi dai fatti estranei, dai gesti inutili; fatti e gesti che inquinano l'arte consueta dei nostri giorni, e che talora anzi vengono evidenziati a tal punto da diventar insegne di modi artistici. Il crivello che ci permette questa separazione dell'autentico dalle scorie, che ci porta a scoprire in una sequela incomprensibile ed irrazionale di immagini un complesso di significati coerente e ordinato, è un processo di autoanalisi.

E' con esso che noi ci ricollochiamo alle nostre origini, eliminando tutti i gesti inutili, tutto quello che vi è in noi di personale e di letterario nel senso peggiore della parola: ricordi nebulosi d'infanzia, sentimentismi, impressioni, costruzioni volute, preoccupazioni pittoriche, simboliche o descrittive, false angosce, fatti inconsci non consapevolizzati, l'illuminarsi d'immenso il sabato sera, il continuo ripetere in senso edonistico scoperte esaurite, tutto ciò dev'essere escluso.

Attraverso questo processo di eliminazione l'originario umanamente raggiungibile viene a manifestarsi, assumendo la forma di immagini. Immagini che sono le immagini prime, i nostri totem, nostri e degli autori e degli spettatori, poichè sono le variazioni storicamente determinate dei mitologemi primordiali (mitologia individuale e mitologia universale si identificano).

Tutto va sacrificato a questa possibilità di scoperta, a questa necessità di assumere i propri gesti.

La stessa concezione consueta di quadro va abbandonata; lo spazio-superficie interessa il processo autoanalitico solo in quanto « spazio di libertà ». E neppure ci può preoccupare la coerenza stilistica, perchè unica nostra preoccupazione può esser solo la continua ricerca, la continua autoanalisi con cui soltanto possiamo arrivare a fondare morfomi « riconoscibili » da tutti nell'ambito della nostra civiltà.

PIERO MANZONI
ETTORE SORDINI
ANGELO VERGA

Art Is Not True Creation ... 1957

Art is not true creation and foundation if it does not create and found where mythologies have their ultimate foundation and their origin.

In order to take on the meaning of one's own era, the point is therefore to achieve one's own individual mythology where it comes to identify with the universal mythology.

The difficulty lies in freeing oneself from extraneous facts, from futile gestures: facts and gestures that pollute the usual art of our times, and that at times are even highlighted to the point that they become insignia of artistic trends.

The sieve that allows us to make this separation of the authentic from the dross, that leads us to discover in an incomprehensible and irrational sequence of images an

“L'arte non è vera creazione ...”
(Art Is Not True Creation ...)

Untitled text, signed by Piero Manzoni, Ettore Sordini, and Angelo Verga (undated [1957]); black characters on a red ground, ca. 20.5 × 9.7 cm. In the exhibition brochure *Manzoni, Sordini, Verga*, Galleria Pater, Milan, 1957.

array of coherent and ordered meanings, is a process of self-analysis.

This is how we reconnect with our origins, eliminating all superfluous gestures, all that which is personal and literary in us in the worst sense of the term: nebulous recollections of infancy, sentimentalism, impressions, deliberate constructions, pictorial, symbolic, or descriptive preoccupations, false anxieties, unconscious, unprocessed facts, the illumination of ourselves with immensity on a Saturday evening, the continual repetition in a hedonistic sense of exhausted discoveries, all that must be excluded.

Through this process of elimination, the humanly achievable original is made manifest, taking the form of images. Images that are the prime images, our totems, ours and those of the authors and the spectators, as they are the historically determined variations of the

primordial mythologems (individual mythology and universal mythology identify themselves).

Everything is to be sacrificed to this possibility of discovery, to this need to assume our own gestures.

The usual idea of the picture is to be abandoned: the space-surface is of interest to the self-analytical process only as a "space of freedom." Nor should stylistic consistency concern us, as our sole preoccupation can only be continued research, the continued self-analysis only through which we can arrive at founding morphemes "recognizable" by all within the ambit of our civilization.

Piero Manzoni, Ettore Sordini,
Angelo Verga



Exhibition brochure
*Manzoni, Sordini,
Verga*, Galleria
Pater, Milan, 1957

This text very probably accompanied as a loose sheet the invitation/pamphlet published on the occasion of the group show *Manzoni, Sordini, Verga*, which opened at Galleria Pater, Milan, on May 29, 1957.

Along with information about the exhibition, the pamphlet also contained a very brief text by Lucio Fontana: “For some time I have followed the activities, the research, the restlessness of these three young artists, and in fact a number of their works are part of my small collection of modern art. I am convinced that their recent works are significant in the field of young painting, and it is therefore with respect and enthusiasm that I feel I can sponsor their exhibition.” In one of the rare photographs of the three-person exhibition on Via Borgonovo we can clearly recognize Manzoni’s work *Paradoxus Smith* (1957).

The text was reprinted by Schwarz in the book *Pittura italiana del dopoguerra* published the same year.⁵ It was released a few months after Manzoni’s first (group) show abroad, at Galerie 17 in Munich, where for the first time he was



Partial view of the exhibition *Manzoni, Sordini, Verga*, Galleria Pater, Milan, 1957

compared with artists of earlier generations such as Lucio Fontana, Bruno Munari, and Enrico Baj, who were fundamental to the development of Manzoni's career.⁶ Many concepts were further developed or rewritten in the subsequent texts Manzoni was to publish in the months and years to come. In the phrase "the illumination of ourselves with immensity on a Saturday evening" there is an ironic reference to Giuseppe Ungaretti's poem "Morning / I am illuminated / with immensity" (1917).⁷ In the last phrase the probable typographical mistake "morfomi" has been corrected to "morfemi" (morphemes) and less probably "morfonemi" (morphonemes).



Paradoxus Smith, 1957, oil on wood, 100 x 130 cm

5 *Sauvage, Pittura italiana del dopoguerra*, 294.
 6 See *Baj, Dangelo, D'Arena, Fontana, Gracco, Manzoni, Munari, Orsenigo, Pomodoro*, exh. cat. January 15–31, 1957, with texts by E. Geitlinger, W. Gaudnek, F. Roh, W. Hess, and H. Hailmeier (Munich: Galerie 17, 1957).
 7 The Italian original reads "Mattina / M'illumino / d'immenso."

DISTRIBUITO A CURA DEL MOVIMENTO ARTE NUCLEARE VIA TEULIE 1 MILANO GIUGNO 1957

PER UNA PITTURA ORGANICA

Noi vogliamo organicizzare la disintegrazione.

In un mondo disintegrato noi vogliamo arrivare a scoprire e rivelare a noi stessi le intime strutture, i germi fecondanti la nostra esistenza organica.

Vogliamo stabilire inequivocabilmente queste presenze.

Al di fuori di ogni edonismo di superficie, di ogni impressione, di ogni ricordo, disintegramo i fenomeni e i gesti per scoprirne i più intimi moti, per sceverare l'essenziale dal gratuito e monadizzarlo in assoluta precisione, in modo da evidenziare ciascuno nel suo più autentico germe.

Il quadro è il nostro spazio di libertà in cui noi reinventiamo continuamente la pittura nella continua ricerca delle nostre immagini prime.

POUR UNE PEINTURE ORGANIQUE

Nous voulons rendre la désintégration organique; dans un monde désintégré nous voulons découvrir et nous révéler les structures intimes, les germes qui fécondent notre existence organique.

Et nous voulons, sans equivoque, établir ces présences.

En dehors de tout édonisme superficiel, de toute impression, de tout souvenir, nous désintégrons les phénomènes et les gestes pour découvrir les mouvements les plus intimes, pour faire ressortir l'essentiel du gratuit et le monadiser avec une exactitude absolue de façon à mettre l'évidence de chacun dans son germe le plus intime.

Le tableau est notre espace de liberté par lequel nous réinventons continuellement la peinture dans la continuelle recherche et mort de nos images premières.

GUIDO BIASI MARIO COLUCCI PIERO MANZONI ETTORE SORDINI ANGELO VERGA

For an Organic Painting 1957

We want to organicize disintegration.

In a disintegrated world we want to arrive at the discovery and revelation to ourselves of the intimate structures, the fecundating germs of our organic existence.

We want to unequivocally establish these presences.

Above and beyond every superficial hedonism, every impression, every memory, we disintegrate phenomena and gestures to expose their most intimate impulses, to distinguish the essential from the gratuitous and monadize it with absolute precision, so as to highlight each in its most authentic germ.

The picture is our space of freedom in which we continuously

“Per una pittura organica / Pour une peinture organique”
(For an Organic Painting)

Text in Italian and French, signed by Guido Biasi, Mario Colucci, Piero Manzoni, Ettore Sordini, and Angelo Verga, and dated June 1957. Creamy light-brown sheet with red characters, ca. 33.3 × 22.7 cm. At top, in block capitals: “Distributed by the Nuclear Art Movement, Via Teulie 1, Milan, June 1957.”

reinvent painting in a continual search for our prime images.

Guido Biasi, Mario Colucci,
Piero Manzoni, Ettore Sordini,
Angelo Verga

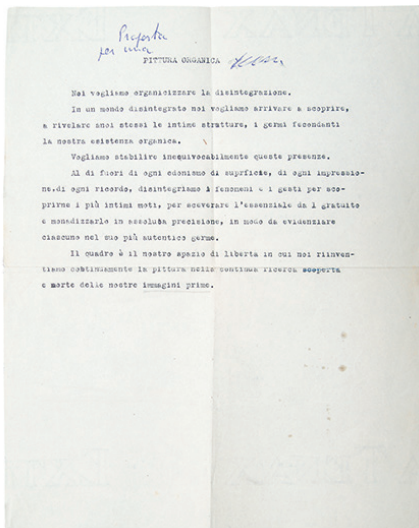


Cover of the exhibition catalogue *Arte Nucleare 1957*, Galleria San Fedele, Milan, October 12–30, 1957

A typescript of this text exists in Italian, with a handwritten addition to the title: “Proposal for an Organic Painting.”⁸ It also contains a further variation in the final phrase: “The picture is our space of freedom in which we continuously reinvent painting in a continual search for *discovery and death* for our prime images”; the phrase “discovery and death,” italicized here by the curator of this volume, was eliminated in the published manifesto. In the typescript “discovery” appears to have been crossed out in pen, while “prime images” has been underlined.

This manifesto is the first in Manzoni’s career that makes explicit reference to ties with the Movimento Arte Nucleare (Nuclear Art Movement). It was also published by Arturo Schwarz both in *Pittura italiana del dopoguerra* and then in *Arte Nucleare*, a book from 1962 that reconstructed the genesis and poetic of the movement.⁹

In a letter to Baj in the summer of 1957,¹⁰ Manzoni clarifies the meaning of the term “organic” (and similar): “Our

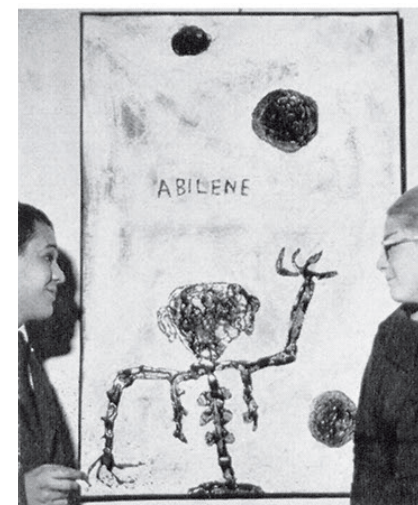


Typescript of
“Proposta per una
pittura organica”
(Proposal for an
Organic Painting),
1957

organicity is understood as a term opposing any abstract value, it is understood as physiologicity. (The more physiological, organic, profound a sign is, the more it is universal, collective, material). An organicistic conception is the only one that allows us to adhere to the continual mutation of the archetypes, the only one that therefore involves the necessity of a continual stylistic revolution. I met Biasi; he’s a smart guy, full of enthusiasm. All of us will have an exhibition together at Albisola on August 1.” In this letter to Baj, the young Manzoni paraphrases the words of Carl Gustav Jung in the book *Essays on a Science of Mythology*, published in Italian under the title *Prolegomeni allo studio scientifico della mitologia* (1948): “The more archaic, more ‘profound,’ that is to say the more *physiological* a symbol, the more it is collective, universal, and ‘material.’”¹¹ The primary importance of Jung’s book to the artist’s ideas can be seen from the title *Prolegomeni* (Prolegomena; see pages 75–80 and 237–41).

Among the signatories of “For an Organic Painting,” along with his contemporaries Sordini and Verga, with whom

Manzoni had already worked on other projects, there were no historical members of the Movimento Arte Nucleare from the Milan area (for example, Baj, Dangelo or Joe Colombo), but there were two exponents from Naples, Guido Biasi and Mario Colucci, who were already in contact with Enrico Baj and soon thereafter were protagonists of the Gruppo 58 and the periodicals *Documento Sud* and *Linea Sud*. The five artists were again to join together to sign another manifesto, *Albisola Marina*, August 1–15, 1957 (see pages 53–55).



Piero Manzoni
at the exhibition
Arte Nucleare 1957,
Galleria San
Fedele, Milan,
October 12–30,
1957

- 8 The typescript is in a private collection.
- 9 See Sauvage, *Pittura italiana del dopoguerra*, 296, and Sauvage [Schwarz], *Arte Nucleare* (Milan: Schwarz Editore, Milan, 1962), 208.
- 10 The letter is conserved in the Fondo Enrico Baj, MART, Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto (currently being reorganized).
- 11 C. G. Jung and K. Kerényi, *Prolegomeni allo studio scientifico della mitologia*, transl. A. Brelich (Turin: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1948), 138. Published in English as *Essays on a Science of Mythology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 92.

1-15 agosto 1957

Albisola Marina

BIASI Guido

COLUCCI Mario

MANZONI Piero

SORDINI Ettore

VERGA Angelo

A dispetto di ogni irrealità, il nostro lavoro denuncia la consapevolezza più lucida della nostra vita fisica. Contrariamente a ogni astrazione e ad ogni vano decorativismo, noi realizziamo non una visione ideale ma una specie di traduzione plastica delle emozioni più intime della nostra coscienza: l'arte ha così modo di diventare una continuazione naturale e spontanea dei nostri processi psico-biologici, una propaggine della nostra stessa vita organica che si organizza tramite la verifica attenta della coscienza e lo stupore immacolato dei sensi.

L'unico nostro ideale è dunque una Realtà.

La tela non sarà più un'arida invenzione priva di senso, l'utopia di un ordine estetico, armonia di rapporti d'uno stile, la follia d'un idealismo puro senza un'origine concreta e umana, o un impersonale programma la cui sola e squallida speranza è riposta nella creazione di un gusto; ma sarà carne viva, versione diretta, scottante e inalterata della più intima dinamica dell'artista, delle sue emozioni più segrete.

Cerchi concentrici, originati dalle più intime necessità dell'Io, si allargheranno per raggiungere una apertura totale; sarà la nascita di un linguaggio legittimato da un nuovo senso morale.

Il dettato della nostra coscienza, l'attenzione dei nostri sensi nella loro vibrazione vitale, il tentativo di organizzare una poetica di pura esaltazione e non irretita nei limiti di una estetica preordinata permetteranno l'apertura di mondi così vasti quanto quell'assoluto di libertà che noi sentiamo di poter raggiungere.

Attualmente ogni caos cerca un senso che lo giustifichi; la macchia di colore anonima e impreveduta chiede la dignità di un nome, di uno scopo, di un significato, chiede che venga legalizzata la sua azione libera e violenta: tutto ci induce a credere che le nostre esperienze, pur nelle loro diverse direzioni, annuncino le possibilità di creazione di un nuovo organismo morale.

Albisola Marina 1957

In spite of all its irreality, our work denounces the most lucid awareness of our physical life. Contrary to every abstraction and every vain decorativism, we create not an ideal vision but a kind of plastic translation of the most intimate emotions of our consciousness: art therefore has a means of becoming a natural and spontaneous continuation of our psychobiological processes, an extension of our own organic life that organizes itself through the careful verification of consciousness and the immaculate wonder of the senses.

Our only ideal is therefore a Reality.

The canvas will no longer be an arid invention lacking meaning, the utopia of an aesthetic order, the harmony of the ratios of a style, the folly

“Albisola Marina”

Text signed by Guido Biasi, Mario Colucci, Piero Manzoni, Ettore Sordini, and Angelo Verga, and dated August 1–15, 1957. Gray-blue sheet with darker blue characters, ca. 32.6 × 22.8 cm.

of a pure idealism with no concrete and human origin, or an impersonal program, the sole squalid hope for which lies in the creation of a taste; rather it will be living flesh, direct, burning, and unaltered version of the artist's most intimate dynamic, of his most secret emotions. Concentric circles, originating from the most intimate needs of the psyche, will expand to achieve an absolute aperture; it will be the birth of a language legitimized by a new moral sense.

The dictate of our conscience, the attention of our senses in their vital vibration, the attempt to organize a poetic of pure exaltation, one not ensnared by the restraints of a preordained aesthetic will permit the opening of worlds as vast as that absolute freedom that we feel we can reach.

Currently, every chaos searches for a meaning that justifies it: the anonymous and unforeseen patch of

color asks for the dignity of a name, of a purpose, of a meaning, asks for the legalization of its free and violent action: everything leads us to believe that our experiences, in all their diverse directions, announce the possibilities of creating a new moral organism.

Guido Biasi, Mario Colucci,
Piero Manzoni, Ettore Sordini,
Angelo Verga

Albisola Marina



Postcard from
Angelo Verga and
Piero Manzoni
to Pino Pomé, 1957



This text was probably published for a group show by the same artists at Trattoria La Lalla at Albisola Marina in August of the same year. It was reprinted by Arturo Schwarz in the books *Pittura italiana del dopoguerra* and *Arte Nucleare*.¹² According to Schwarz, the text *Albisola Marina* was principally edited by the Neapolitan artist Guido Biasi even though, thanks to a letter by Valeria Meroni Manzoni, the artist's mother, we know that Manzoni was at Ischia (near Naples) in July 1957. As is well-known, Manzoni had frequented the Ligurian town of Albisola since his childhood, spending summer holidays there with his family.¹³ Ever since the Futurist period, Albisola had been a meeting place and a place of work for many Italian and

foreign artists, celebrated for the production of ceramics, and in the 1950s Liguria was famous as a gathering place for artists. The Internationale Situationniste was founded here, for example, in Cosio di Arroscia on July 28, 1957.



Piero Manzoni
and Angelo Verga
with a friend at
Pozzo Garitta,
Albisola Marina,
August 1957

12 *Sauvage, Pittura italiana del dopoguerra, 297, and Arte Nucleare, 208-09.*

13 For further investigation see Francesca Pola, *Una visione internazionale: Piero Manzoni e Albisola* (Milan: Electa, 2013). It should be noted that Albisola is often spelled Albissola. We have chosen to follow Manzoni's spelling.

CONTRO LO STILE

NEL FEBBRAIO 1952 IL PRIMO MANIFESTO NUCLEARE AFFERMAVA LA NOSTRA VOLONTÀ DI VOLERE COMBATTERE OGNI CONCESSIONE A QUALUNQUE SORTA DI ACCADEMICISMO. COSÌ SI ESPRIMEVA LA NOSTRA RIVOLTA CONTRO IL DOMINIO DELL'ANGOLO DIRITTO, DELL'ANGONAGGIO, DELLA MACCHINA, CONTRO LA ASTRAZIONE FREDDA E GEOMETRICA.

DA ALORA ABBIAMO PROSEGUITO NELLA SPERIMENTAZIONE DI OGNI POSSIBILE RISORSA TECNICA, DALL'AUTO-MATISMO «TACHISTE» O OGGETTIVO A QUELLO SOGGETTIVO, AL GRAYISMO, ALLA «ACTION PAINTING», AL CRISTO, AL CALLIGRAFISMO, ALLE EMULSIONI, FLOTTAGES, POLY-MATERIISMO, SINO ALLE «ACCUE» PÉSANTS DI BAJ E BERTINI (1957).

ALCUNE SPERIMENTAZIONI FRANCESI SI ACCOMPAGNARONO, PER VLENDOVOLI SUGGERZIONI, NUOVI LINGUAGGI, DAGLI SPAZI IMMAGINARI (CFR. PIERRE RESTANY) E «STILI DELLA MATERIA» DEL 1951 (BAJ E DANGELO), ALLE «PREFIGUREZZIONI» DEL 1953 (BAJ, DANGELO, COLOMBO E MARIANI), ANCHE ALLE «NUOVE FIORE» (DANGELO) E «PERSONAGGI, ANIMALI E FAVOLE» (BAJ E JOHN) DEL 1955, SINO ALLE «SITUAZIONI ATOMIZZATE» DEL 1957 (BAJ E POMODORO). MA OGNI INVENZIONE RISCHIA ORA DI DIVENIRE OGGETTO DI RIPETIZIONI STEREOPIE, A PURO CARATTERE MERCANTILE. E QUINDI URGENTE INTRAPRENDERE UNA VIGOROSA AZIONE ANTISTILISTICA. PER: UN'ARTE CHE, MA, SEMPRE

«AUTRE» (CFR. MICHEL TAPPEL).

«DE STILL» E MORTE E SEPOLTO ED È AL SUO CONTRARIO — L'ANTI-STILE — CHE SPETTA ORA DI ABILITARE LE ULTIME BARRIERE DELLA CONVENZIONE E DEL LUOGO COMUNE. LE ULTIME CHE LA STUPIDITÀ EFFICACE POSSA ANCORA IMPEDIRE ALLA DEFINITIVA LIBERAZIONE DELL'ARTE.

GLI E IMPRESSIONISMO LIBERO LA PITTURA DAI SOGGETTI CONVENZIONALI, CURSISMO E FUTURISMO A LORO VITA TOSSIDA L'IMPRONTA DELLA BRILLIANTISSIMA OGGETTIVA E VIANNE. POI L'ASTRAZIONE PER DISSIPARE OGNI RESIDUA ORIBIA DI UN'ILLUSORIA NECESSITÀ DI RAPPRESENTAZIONE. L'ULTIMO ANELLO DI QUESTA CATENA STA PER ESSERE OGGI ROTTO: NOI NUCLEARI RENUNCIAMO OGGI L'ULTIMA DELLE CONVENZIONI — LO STILE.

NOI AMMETTIAMO COME ULTIME POSSIBILI FORME DI STILIZZAZIONE LE «PROPOSIZIONI MONOCROME» DI YVES KLEIN (1954-1957). SOPO DI CIO NON RESTA CHE LA «TABACCA KASKA» O I ROTOLI DI TAPPESERIA DI CAPOROSSI.

TAPPESERIE O PITTORI? RISIGNA SCEGLIERE. PITTORI DI UNA VISIONE NEMERE, NUOVA E IRRETTORIBILE. PER I QUALI LA PELA E' OGNI VOLTA LA SCENA MUTUOVI DI UNA IMPREVEDIBILE «COMEDIA» DELL'ARTE.

NOI AFFEZIAMO L'«EFFECTIBILITÀ» DELL'OPERA D'ARTE E CHE L'ESSENZA DELLA STESSA SI FONDA COME «PRESENZA MODIFICANTE» IN UN MONDO CHE NON NECESSITA PIÙ DI RAPPRESENTAZIONI CELEBRATIVE MA DI PRESENZE.

Milano, Settembre 1957.

CONTRE LE STYLE

DÈS FÉVRIER 1952, LE PREMIER MANIFESTE NUCLEARE AFFIRMAIT NOTRE VOLONTÉ DE COMBATTRE TOUTE CONCESSION A QUELQUE ACADEMIQUE QUI SE SOIT OUSÉ S'ÉPRIMER. NOTAMMENT, NOTRE RÉVOLTE CONTRE LE RÉGNE DE L'ANGLE DROIT, DE L'ENCRIGNAGE ET DE LA MACHINE, CONTRE L'ABSTRACTION FROIDE ET GEOMETRIQUE.

DEPUIS, NOUS AVONS POURSUIVI L'EXPÉRIMENTATION DE TOUTES LES RESSOURCES TECHNIQUES, DE L'AUTOMATISME OBJECTIF, TACHISTE, JUSQU'À L'AUTOMATISME SUBJECTIF, GRAPHISME, ACTION PAINTING, GRIS, CALLIGRAPHISME, EMULSIONS, FLOTTAGES, POLYMATÉRIASME — POUR ARRIVER EN JANVIER 1957 AUX «AUX» LOURDES» DE BAJ ET BERTINI.

CES EXPÉRIMENTATIONS TECHNIQUES DEVAIENT CRÉER NATURELLEMENT LEUR LANGAGE DEPUIS LES «ESPACES IMAGINAIRES» (CFR. PIERRE RESTANY) ET «ÉTATS DE LA MATIÈRE» (BAJ ET DANGELO 1951) JUSQU'ÀUX «PREFIGURATIONS» (BAJ, DANGELO, COLOMBO ET MARIANI 1953), AUX «NOUVELLES FLORES» (DANGELO, AUX «POUPES, ANIMAUX ET FABLES» (BAJ ET JOHN 1955), ET AUX «SITUATIONS AGISSÉES» DE 1957 (BAJ ET POMODORO). MAIS TOUTE INVENTION, CELA EST ÉVIDENT, FAIT LOBET DE RÉPÉTITIONS, STÉROTIYPES À DES FINS PUREMENT MÉRCHANTILES: IL NOUS PARAIT DONC URGENT D'ENTREPRENDRE UNE VIGORÉUSE ACTION ANTISTYLISTIQUE, POUR UN ART TOUJOURS «AUTRE» (CFR. MICHEL TAPPEL).

«DE STILL» EST MORT, ENSEVELI ENTERRE, ET C'EST À SON CONTRAIRE — A L'ANTI-STYLE — QUI APPARTIENT À PRÉSENT D'ABATRE LES BARRIÈRES DES CONVENTIONS ET DES LIEUX COMMUNS, LES DERNIÈRES QUE LA STUPIDITÉ OFFICIELLE PUISSE OPPOSER ENCORE À LA LIBÉRATION DE L'ART, DÉFINITIVE ENFIN.

JADIS, L'IMPRESSIONNISME LIBÉRA LA PENSÉE DES SUJETS CONVENTIONNELS, LE CURSISME ET LE FUTURISME, À LEUR TOUR, LEVÈRENT L'IMPRONTA DE LA RÉPRODUCTION CRÉATIVE, ET L'ABSTRACTION VINT ENFIN DISSIPER LA DERNIÈRE OMBRE DE ILLUSION NÉCESSAIRE DE REPRÉSENTATION, UN NOUVEAU MAILLON, LE DERNIER, ACHÈVE AUJOURD'HUI CETTE CHAÎNE. NOUS, NUCLEAIRES, DÉNONÇONS, POUR LA DERNIÈRE FOIS, LA CONVENTION, LE STYLE.

NOUS RECONNAISSONS COMME DONNÉE DERNIÈRE DE STYLISATION LES MONOCHROMES D'YVES KLEIN (1954-1957). IL NE PEUT RESTER APRÈS ELLES QUE LA TABLE BARE OU LES ROLLEAUX DE TAPPESERIE DE CAPOROSSI.

TAPPESERIE OU PEINTRE? IL FAUT CHOISIR. PEINTRE DUNE CRÉATION TOUJOURS NEUVE ET CHAQUE FOIS UNIQUE, POUR QUI LA TOILE VIGÈRE EST LA SCÈNE TOUJOURS RENOUVÉE D'UNE IMPREVEDIBLE «COMÉDIE» DE L'ARTE.

NOUS AFFRONS QUE L'OUVRE D'ART SE RECONNAÎT À SON CARACTÈRE D'UNICITÉ ET À L'INFLUENCE MODIFIANTE DE SON APPARITION PARMI LES HOMMES, DANS UN MONDE QUI RECUSE LES ARTIFICES DE LA CÉLÉBRATION POUR LA RÉALITÉ ACTIVE DE LA SEULE PRÉSENCE.

Milano, Septembre 1957.

THE END OF STYLE

IN FEBRUARY 1952 THE FIRST NUCLEAR MANIFESTO STATED OUR INTENTION OF DOING AWAY WITH THE LAST REMAINING CONCESSIONS TO ACADEMICISM. OUR REVOLT AGAINST THE REIGN OF THE RIGHT ANGLE, AGAINST THE DOMINION OF THE MACHINE, AND AGAINST THE GLACIAL GEOMETRY OF ABSTRACTION HAD FOUND ITS VOICE.

AND IN OUR EXPERIMENTATIONS SINCE, THEN WE HAVE USED EVERY TECHNICAL RESOURCE — GOING FROM THE TACHISME OF OBJECTIVE AUTOMATISM TO THE GRAPHISME, ACTION PAINTING, CALLIGRAPHYING, EMULSIFYING, POLY-MATERIALISM AND FLOTTAGES OF SUBJECTIVE AUTOMATISM — TO FINALLY ARRIVE AT THE «HEAVY WATER» COLORS OF BAJ AND BERTINI IN JANUARY 1957.

THESE TECHNICAL EXPERIMENTATIONS HAVE NATURALLY BROUGHT THEIR OWN VOCABULARY WITH THEM WE HAVE GONE FROM «IMAGINARY SPACES» (CF. PIERRE RESTANY) AND «STATES OF MATTER» (BAJ AND DANGELO, 1951) TO «PREFIGURATIONS» (BAJ, DANGELO, COLOMBO AND MARIANI, 1953), «NEW FLORES» (DANGELO), «FETTER, ANIMALS AND FABLES» (BAJ AND JOHN, 1955) AND «ATOMISED SITUATIONS» (BAJ AND POMODORO, 1957). BUT EVERY INVENTION TURNS INTO CONVENTION: IT GETS IMITATED AND COPIED FOR PURELY COMMERCIAL REASONS. THAT IS WHY WE MUST BEGIN A VIGOROUS ANTY-STYLE ACTION IN THE CAUSE OF AN ETERNALLY «OTHER» ART (CF. MICHEL TAPPEL).

«DE STILL» IS DEAD AND BURIED, AND IT IS NOW UP TO ITS OPPOSITE — ANTY-STYLE — TO BREAK DOWN THE LAST REMAINING BARRIERS OF CLICHE-BIDDEN CONVENTION THAT OFFICIAL, STUPIDITY, STILL BARRS, TO OPPOSE AGAINST THIS LIBERATION — THAT HAS FINALLY DISCOVERED ITS VERBAL DEFINITION — OF ART.

ONCE UPON A TIME IMPRESSIONISM HELPED PAINTING GET RID OF CONVENTIONAL SUBJECT MATTER, CURSISM AND FUTURISM LATER GOT RID OF THE NEED FOR THE REALISTIC REPRODUCTION OF OBJECTS, AND ABSTRACTION FINALLY REMOVED THE LAST TRACES OF REPRESENTATIONAL ILLUSION. A NEW — AND FINAL — LINK TODAY COMPLETES THIS CHAIN: WE, NUCLEAR PAINTERS, DENOUNCE, IN ORDER TO DESTROY, THE FINAL CONVENTION, STYLE.

THE LAST STYLISTIC WORKS THAT WE RECOGNISE ARE THE «MONOCHROMES» OF YVES KLEIN (1954-1957). ONLY THE BARE BOARDS — OR CAPOROSSI'S ROLLS OF TEXTILE — CAN FOLLOW THEM.

DECORATORS OR PAINTERS? WE HAVE TO CHOOSE, AND WE CHOOSE TO BE PAINTERS, CREATING SOMETHING NEW AND UNIQUE IN EVERY TIME: PAINTERS FOR THE VIRGIN CANVAS IS THE CONSTANTLY SELF-RENEWING SCENE FOR AN UNPREDICTABLE «COMEDIA» DELL'ARTE.

WE STATE THAT IN A WORLD IN WHICH THE ARTIFICES OF CÉLÉBRATION ARE REJECTED, A WORK OF ART SHOULD BE KNOWN BY THE UNITY OF ITS CHARACTER, BY THE EFFECTIVE EXISTENCE OF ITS APPEARANCE, AND FOR THE SIMPLE REALITY OF ITS LIVING PRESENCE.

Milano, September 1957.

Signatary: Arman, Enrico Baj, Bemporad, Gianni Bertini, Jacques Calonne, Stanley Chapman, Mario Colucci, Daniele Coluche, Enrico Clivio, Francesco De Seta, Wout Hoebor, Hundertwasser, Yves Klein, Théodore Koenig, Piero Manzoni, Nando, Angelo Pomodoro, Aldo Pomodoro, Gio Pomodoro, Piero Restany, Saura, Ettore Sordini, Serge Vandercam, Angelo Verga.

Signatary: Arman, Enrico Baj, Bemporad, Gianni Bertini, Jacques Calonne, Stanley Chapman, Mario Colucci, Daniele Coluche, Enrico Clivio, Francesco De Seta, Wout Hoebor, Hundertwasser, Yves Klein, Théodore Koenig, Piero Manzoni, Nando, Angelo Pomodoro, Aldo Pomodoro, Gio Pomodoro, Piero Restany, Saura, Ettore Sordini, Serge Vandercam, Angelo Verga.

Against Style 1957

In February 1952 the first nuclear manifesto stated our will to fight every concession to any form of academicism. We thus expressed our revolt against the dominion of the right angle, of the gear, of the machine, against cold and geometric abstraction.

Since then we have continued to experiment with every possible technical resource, from *tachiste*, or objective, to subjective automatism, to graphism, to Action Painting, to gesture, to calligraphism, to emulsions, to *flottage*, polymaterialism, and through to the heavy waters of Baj and Bertini (1957).

The technical experiments have been accompanied, through mutual suggestions, by new languages: from the imaginary spaces (see Pierre Restany) and the “states

“Contro lo stile / Contre le style / The End of Style”

Text in Italian, French, and English, signed by Arman, Enrico Baj, Franco Bemporad, Gianni Bertini, Jacques Calonne, Stanley Chapman, Mario Colucci, Sergio Dangelo, Enrico De Miceli, Reinhoud D’Haese, Wout Hoebor, Friedensreich Hundertwasser, Yves Klein, Théodore Koenig, Piero Manzoni, Nando, Joseph Noiret, Arnaldo Pomodoro, Giò Pomodoro, Pierre Restany, Antonio Saura, Ettore Sordini, Serge Vandercam, and Angelo Verga, and dated September 1957. The pamphlet is divided into three parts, one for each language, with two folds; each text is reproduced twice, on either side of the sheet; the recto is gray-blue with black characters, the verso black with yellow characters; ca. 30.8 × 51.6 cm open; ca. 30.8 × 17.2 cm closed. At bottom: “Nuclear Art Movement, Via Teulié 1, Milan.” All texts in block capitals, apart from the place, date, and signatories.

of matter” of 1951 (Baj and Dangelo), to the “prefigurations” of 1953 (Baj, Dangelo, Colombo, and Mariani), to the “new floras” (Dangelo) and “characters, animals, and fables” (Baj and Jorn) of 1956, through to the “atomized situations” of 1957 (Baj and Pomodoro).

But every invention now risks becoming the object of stereotypical repetitions of a purely commercial nature: a vigorous antistylistic action is therefore urgently needed for an art that is always *autre* (see Michel Tapié).

De Stijl is dead and buried and the last barriers of convention and cliché, the last that official stupidity may put in the way of the definitive liberation of art, are to be flattened by its opposite—antistyle.

Impressionism once freed painting from conventional subjects; Cubism and Futurism in their turn removed the imperative of

objective imitation and then came abstraction to dissipate any residual shadow of an illusory need for representation. The final link in this chain is about to be broken: we Nuclearists today denounce the last of the conventions—style.

We accept the “monochromatic propositions” of Yves Klein (1956–57) as the last possible forms of stylization: after which all that remains is *tabula rasa* or Capogrossi’s rolls of wallpaper.

Decorators or painters: we have to choose. Painters of a vision that is always new and unrepeatable, for which the canvas is every time the changing setting for an unpredictable *commedia dell’arte*.

We affirm the unrepeatability of the work of art: and that the essence of that work stands as a “modifying presence” in a world that no longer needs celebrative representations but rather presences.

Milan, September 1957

Signatories:

Arman, Enrico Baj, Bemporad,
Gianni Bertini, Jacques Calonne,
Stanley Chapman, Mario Colucci,
Dangelo, Enrico De Miceli,
Reinhout D'Haese, Wout Hoeboer,
Hundertwasser, Yves Klein,
Théodore Koenig, Piero Manzoni,
Nando, Joseph Noiret,
Arnaldo Pomodoro, Giò Pomodoro,
Pierre Restany, Saura,
Ettore Sordini, Serge Vandercam,
Angelo Verga

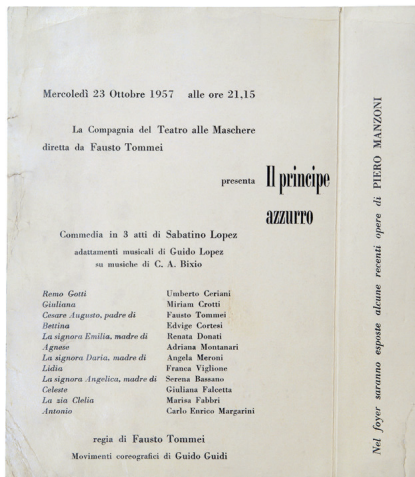


Cover of the pamphlet
“Contro lo stile /
Contre le style /
The End of Style,”
September 1957

This is the first manifesto signed by Manzoni with Baj and Dangelo, the founders of the Movimento Arte Nucleare (Nuclear Art Movement), whose earlier theoretical, publishing, and exhibition activities he already knew. This text was also published by Schwarz in the two volumes *Pittura italiana del dopoguerra* and *Arte Nucleare*.¹⁴

The pamphlet was accompanied by a slip cover in light blue, semitransparent tissue paper, with the title in three languages and a phrase by Gianni Bertini in French and Italian: “I love the proposals the artist succeeds in projecting beyond the sclerotic exercise of style.” The list of signatories contains the names as in the Italian version of the manifesto with a number of misspellings corrected.

The Nuclear document, edited principally by Baj, anticipates and in a sense introduces the subsequent group show, *Arte Nucleare 1957*, at Galleria San Fedele in Milan, held from October 12 to 30, 1957, which featured Baj,



Brochure of the Piero Manzoni exhibition, foyer of the Teatro alle Maschere, Milan, October 1957

Bemporad, Bertini, Dangelo, Klein, Manzoni, the Pomodoro brothers, Rossello, Sordini, Verga, Jorn, and Vandercam—a significant number of the signatories of *Against Style*. The exhibition catalogue contained a text by Édouard Jaguer, a presentation by Giorgio Kaiserlian, and a note by Umberto Boccioni. A number of photographs of the exhibition show



Untitled, ca. 1957, oil on canvas, 49.9 × 39.9 cm

that Manzoni presented *Abilene* (1957), a rare work in iconographical terms that has parallels in perhaps only another pair of known works, exhibited the following month at Bar Jamaica in Milan (see pages 69–70): *L'invincibile Jean* (Invincible Jean, 1957) and a recently rediscovered work *Untitled* (1957), clearly visible in other contemporary photographs.

Given the number and diverse nature of the signees, many of them Francophones, this manifesto placed the young Manzoni within a European context. Thanks in part to these projects, Manzoni was able to follow his calling for overcoming boundaries of a geographical, cultural, and experimental nature; if we consider the young artist's later output, such as the *Linee* (Lines) or *Merda d'artista* (Artist's Shit), we can see that the rejection of "style" declared in this manifesto was particularly congenial to his way of working.

In the original English version from 1957, the title was translated as "The End of Style."

MOSTRA DI GIOVANI PITTORI AL BAR GIAMAICA

via brera, 32 - milano

Attualmente, a Milano, il Premio S. Fedele è l'unica Rassegna che si dice pensosa di promuovere e segnalare l'attività dei giovani pittori. Ma in realtà il Premio S. Fedele esclude e respinge le nuove posizioni e tendenze della giovane pittura italiana, e ripiega piuttosto sui frutti di uno squalido artigianato tradizionalista, privo di interesse e consistenza. Si presenta così ai critici un panorama falsato, per ragioni che trasparentemente nulla hanno a che fare con l'arte, e restringe il campo alla produzione più conformista.

Sono da giustificare quindi i critici che hanno scritto, forse in buona fede, sulla decadenza delle forme di pittura non descrittiva e sull'assoluta mancanza di pittura d'avanguardia.

Noi esponiamo in un Bar, ma non per questo la nostra Mostra è meno valida. Con essa e con questo manifesto noi vogliamo affermare la nostra inequivocabile presenza nel Mondo dell'Arte e della Cultura, contro tutti coloro che intendono soffocarla in certe falsate e poco culturali Rassegne d'arte.

guido BIASI
aldo CALVI
piero MANZONI
silvio PASOTTI
antonio RECALCATI
ettore SORDINI
angelo VERGA
alberto ZILOCCHI

milano, 9 novembre 1957

F. Ghezzi - Milano

Exhibition of Young Painters at Bar Jamaica 1957

Currently in Milan, the Premio San Fedele is the only exposition that is said to be interested in promoting and reporting the work of young painters. In reality, however, the Premio San Fedele excludes and rejects the new positions and trends of young Italian painting and instead falls back on the fruits of squalid traditionalist craftsmanship, devoid of interest and substance. The critics are therefore presented with a distorted panorama, for motives that clearly have nothing to do with art, with the field restricted to the most conformist production.

There is therefore some justification for those critics who have written, perhaps in good faith, about the decadence of the forms of non-descriptive painting and the

“Mostra di giovani pittori al Bar Giamaica”
(Exhibition of Young Painters at Bar Jamaica)

Text signed by Guido Biasi, Aldo Calvi, Piero Manzoni, Silvio Pasotti, Antonio Recalcati, Ettore Sordini, Angelo Verga, and Alberto Zilocchi, and dated November 9, 1957. Beige-cream sheet with black characters, ca. 33.5 × 24.5 cm. At the top: “Via Brera 32—Milan.” At the bottom left: “F. Ghezzi—Milan.”

complete absence of avant-garde painting.

We are exhibiting in a Bar, but this does not make our Exhibition any less valid. With it and with this manifesto we want to assert our unequivocal presence in the World of Art and Culture, against all those who intend to suffocate it in certain distorted artistic Reviews of little culture.

Guido Biasi, Aldo Calvi,
Piero Manzoni , Silvio Pasotti,
Antonio Recalcati, Ettore Sordini,
Angelo Verga, Alberto Zilocchi

Milan, November 9, 1957



L'invincibile Jean
(Invincible Jean),
1957, oil and tar on
canvas, 60 × 50 cm,
Pomé Collection,
Milan

This manifesto was published for the group show of the same title at Bar Jamaica, a well-known meeting place for artists and intellectuals in Milan. The show was a “counter-exhibition” in reaction to the exclusion of these artists from the Milan exhibition *Premio di Pittura San Fedele 1957*. Manzoni had participated in the exhibition for the recipients of the Premio San Fedele in 1956, and he had many other occasions to exhibit with the members of this loose group assembled in protest against the prize in a number of major group shows at the gallery Azimut founded in Milan by Manzoni and Enrico Castellani in December 1959. At Bar Jamaica the artists succeeded in papering several walls with multiple copies of their manifesto, as can be seen in a number of photographs. Given the polemical tone of the event, the young Manzoni’s decision to exhibit works similar to *Abilene* presented at Galleria San Fedele a few weeks earlier for the exhibition *Arte Nucleare 1957* was by no means casual. The artist, who had studied

Exhibition of Young Painters at Bar Jamaica

at the Istituto Leone XIII with the Jesuits who were also responsible for running the Centro Culturale San Fedele, had already frequented the gallery and the center during his university years.



An employee of Liceo Parini in the exhibition at Bar Jamaica, Milan, 1957



The painter Antonio Recalcati (left) and Piero Manzoni at Bar Jamaica, Milan, 1957

Oggi il concetto di quadro, di pittura, di poesia nel senso consueto della parola non possono più aver senso per noi: e così tutto un bagaglio critico che trae le sue origini da un mondo che già fu; giudizi di qualità, di intime emozioni, di senso pittorico, di sensibilità espressiva; tutto ciò insomma che nasce da certi aspetti gratuiti di certa arte.

Il momento artistico non sta in fatti edonistici, ma nel portare in luce, ridurre ad immagine i miti universali precoscienti. L'arte non è un fenomeno descrittivo, ma un procedimento scientifico di fondazione.

Infatti l'opera d'arte trae la sua origine dall'inconscio, che noi intendiamo come una psiche impersonale comune a tutti gli uomini, anche se si manifesta attraverso una coscienza personale (da qui la possibilità del rapporto autore-opera-spettatore).

Ciascun uomo trae l'elemento umano di sé da questa base senza rendersene conto, in modo elementare ed immediato.

Per l'artista si tratta di una immersione cosciente in sé stesso per cui superato ciò che è individuale e contingente, egli affonda fino a giungere al vivo germe della umana totalità.

E' ovvio infatti ciò che a prima vista può sembrare paradossale: cioè che quanto più ci immergiamo in noi stessi, tanto più ci apriamo, perchè quanto più siamo vicini al germe della nostra totalità, tanto più siamo vicini al germe della totalità di tutti gli uomini.

L'arte dunque non è vera creazione e fondazione che in quanto crea e fonda là dove le mitologie hanno il proprio ultimo fondamento e la propria origine: la base archetipica.

Per poter assumere il significato della propria epoca, il punto è dunque raggiungere la propria mitologia individuale là dove giunge a identificarsi con la mitologia universale.

La difficoltà sta nel liberarsi dai fatti estranei, dai gesti inutili; fatti e gesti che inquinano l'arte consueta dei nostri giorni, e che talora anzi vengono evidenziati a tal punto da diventare insegne di modi artistici.

Il crivello che ci permette questa separazione dell'autentico dalle scorie, che ci porta a scoprire in una sequela incomprensibile ed irrazionale di immagini formate da un caso generale un complesso di significati coerente e ordinato, è un processo di autoanalisi.

E' con esso che noi ci ricollochiamo alle nostre origini, eliminando tutti i gesti inutili, tutto quello che vi è in noi di personale e letterario nel senso deterioro della parola: ricordi nebulosi d'infanzia, sentimentalismi, impressioni, costruzioni volute, preoccupazioni pittoriche, simboliche o descrittive, false angosce, fatti inconsci non consapevolizzati, astrazioni, riferimenti, ripetizioni in senso edonistico, tutto ciò dev'essere escluso (per quanto è possibile naturalmente; l'importante è non attribuire mai valore a ciò che è condizionamento soggettivo).

Attraverso questo processo di eliminazione l'originario umanamente raggiungibile viene a manifestarsi assumendo la forma di immagini. Immagini che sono le nostre immagini prime, nostre e degli autori e degli spettatori, poichè sono le variazioni storicamente determinate dei mitologemi primordiali (mitologia individuale e mitologia universale si identificano).

Variazioni, poichè gli archetipi, questi elementi incrollabili dell'inconscio, cambiano forma continuamente: in ogni istante essi non sono più gli stessi che erano prima; per questo l'arte è in continua mutazione e deve essere in continua ricerca.

Tutto va sacrificato alla possibilità di scoperta, a questa necessità di assumere i propri gesti.

Lo spazio-superficie del quadro interessa il processo autoanalitico solo in quanto spazio di libertà in cui noi andiamo alla scoperta; come tavola delle presenze dei germi attorno ai quali e sui quali noi siamo organicamente costituiti.

Qui l'immagine prende forma nella sua funzione vitale: essa non potrà valere per ciò che ricorda, spiega o esprime (casomai la questione è fondata) né voler essere o poter essere spiegata come allegoria di un processo fisico: essa vale solo in quanto è: essere.

Piero Manzoni

Today the Concept of the Picture ... [Prolegomena] 1957

Today the concept of the picture, of painting, of poetry in the usual sense of the word can no longer have any meaning for us: and with it all the critical baggage originating from a world has already been; judgments of quality, of intimate emotions, of pictorial meaning, of expressive sensibility—everything that in short is born out of certain gratuitous aspects of certain art.

The artistic moment consists not of hedonistic facts, but is rather about bringing to light, reducing the preconscious universal myths to images. Art is not a descriptive phenomenon, but a scientific procedure of foundation.

In fact, the work of art originates from the unconscious, which we understand as an impersonal

“Oggi il concetto di quadro . . .”
(Today the Concept of the Picture . . .)

Text published for the first time, untitled, inside the pamphlet for the solo show *Piero Manzoni*, Galleria del Corriere della Provincia, Como, December 3–10, 1957 (version translated here). The pamphlet is creamy white with black characters, ca. 22.8 × 31.6 cm (open), ca. 22.8 × 15.8 cm (closed).

psyche shared by all men, even though it manifests itself through a personal consciousness (hence the possibility of the author-work-spectator relationship).

Every man draws the human element of himself from this base without realizing it, in an elementary and immediate manner.

For the artist it is a conscious immersion in the self and so having overcome that which is individual and contingent, he plunges in to reach the living germ of human totality.

What at first sight may seem paradoxical is obvious in fact: that is to say that the more we immerse ourselves in ourselves, the more we open up, because the closer we are to the germ of our totality, the closer we are to the germ of the totality of all men.

Art is thus not true creation and foundation if it does not create and

found in the place where mythologies have their ultimate foundation and their origin: the archetypical base.

In order to take on the meaning of one's era the point is therefore to achieve one's own individual mythology in the place where it comes to identify with the universal mythology.

The difficulty lies in freeing oneself from extraneous facts, from futile gestures: facts and gestures that pollute the usual art of our times, and that at times are even highlighted to the point that they become insignia of artistic trends.

The sieve that allows us to separate the authentic from the dross, which leads us to discover in an incomprehensible and irrational sequence of images, provided by a general case, an array of coherent and ordered meanings, is a process of self-analysis.

This is how we reconnect with our origins, eliminating all superfluous actions, all that which is personal and literary in us in the worst sense of the term: nebulous recollections of infancy, sentimentalism, impressions, hyperbolic constructions, pictorial, symbolic, or descriptive preoccupations, false anxieties, unconscious, unprocessed facts, abstractions, references, repetitions in a hedonistic sense, all that must be excluded (as far as possible naturally; what is important is never to attribute value to that which is subjective conditioning).

Through this process of elimination the humanly achievable original is made manifest, taking the form of images. Images that are our prime images, ours and those of the authors and the spectators, as they are the historically determined variations of the primordial mythologems (individual mythology

and universal mythology can be identified).

Variations, in that the archetypes, these unshakeable elements of the unconscious, change form continually: at any given moment they are no longer the same as they were before; for this reason art is in continuous mutation and must be subject to continuous investigation.

Everything is to be sacrificed to this possibility of discovery, to this need to assume our own gestures.

The space-surface of the painting is of interest to the self-analytical process only in as much as it is a space of freedom that we can explore; as a table of the presence of the germs around which and on which we are organically constituted.

Here the image takes form in its vital function: it cannot be valid for that which it recalls, explains, or expresses (if anything the question

is to found) nor can it aspire to be or to be explained as an allegory of a physical process: it is valid only in that it is: being.

Piero Manzoni

In addition to the occasion of the exhibition at Como in 1957, this text was published in French, with slight modifications, with the title “Prolégomènes à une activité artistique,” in the Belgian periodical *Scherven* (Overboelare) 3 (1959); it was dated “March ’57” and also included a very short biographical profile and an illustration of an *Achrome* (1958–59). It was republished in Italian as “Prolegomeni all’attività artistica” in the magazine *Evoluzione delle lettere e delle arti* in January 1963 (see pages 237–41).¹⁵ A typescript of the texts exists with minimal variations in comparison to the version published in December 1957 and with only two handwritten additions: the entire title is in capitals “Prolegomena to Artistic Activity” and the year “57” has been added after the artist’s name.¹⁶ Among the variations in the version dated 1957, the introduction is written in the singular, while in both the above-mentioned typescript and in the 1963 version the text begins “Today the concepts of the picture”; the edition published in 1957 reads “The sieve that allows us to separate” while in the typescript it is “The level that allows



Piero Manzoni in his studio, Milan, 1957



Exhibition flyer
for *Piero Manzoni*,
Galleria del Corriere
della Provincia,
Como, December
3–10, 1957

us” and the 1963 edition reads “The ‘test’ that allows us.” We have therefore chosen the subtitle “Prolegomena,” as it is consistent in the other versions mentioned.

At the current state of the research, this is the earliest text signed by Manzoni alone. The fact that it was republished at such a late date (1963) suggests the importance attached by the artist to the text and indirectly emphasizes the origins of a number of Manzoni’s aesthetic theories. The term *prolegomena*, with its Kantian and Jungian flavor, is pertinent to the initial exposition of his personal doctrine in accordance with the philosophical and psychoanalytical culture he developed during his high school and university years. As mentioned previously, Manzoni had read and cites the book *Essays on a Science of Mythology* by Carl Gustav Jung and Károly Kerényi, published in Italian as *Prolegomeni allo studio scientifico della mitologia* in 1948. Manzoni cites Jungian phrases in this text such as, “I understand the unconscious as an impersonal psyche shared

by all men, even though it manifests through a personal consciousness” and “archetypes are unshakeable elements of the unconscious, but they change continually.”¹⁷ While much of the text repeats and reformulates a number of concepts already seen in the manifestos and texts of the previous months, points of primary importance in that they were new and fundamental to Manzoni’s future investigations are to be found in the final section. There is a passage between terminology that is still reminiscent of the Movimento Arte Nucleare (Nuclear Art Movement), a linking element deriving from the “vital function” of the image and the conclusion that leads to “being” (to be understood in this period in both its “existential” value and in its meaning as “entity”), which was to be the new verb on which Manzoni founded new research hypotheses, or rather the “verb” that was to travel in unison with his new material and theoretical research (respectively the art works and the writing) arriving at a reciprocal fusion “without a solution of continuity” to use another well-known phrase by Manzoni from 1960 (see pages 155–61). The “being” begins to take flesh, to take shape in the work of art, and the work of art “is valid only in that it is.” These are the first seeds of self-sufficiency and self-determination—which were also to have tautological nuances—to be associated with Manzoni’s first “white works.” It is perhaps no coincidence that these reflections emerged toward the end of 1957, during Manzoni’s new “discovery” or “establishment” of monochrome painting (what later became the *Achromes*).

- 15 Piero Manzoni, “Prolegomeni all’attività artistica,” *Evoluzione delle lettere e delle arti* (Milan) 1, no. 1 (January 1963): 47–49.
- 16 The typescript is in the Guido and Gabriella Pautasso Collection, Milan.
- 17 Jung and Kerényi, *Prolegomeni allo studio scientifico della mitologia*, 229 and 146.

Lettere al giornale

Roma, 14 Dicembre 1957

Caro Vergani,
solo ultimamente ho avuto occasione di leggere la lettera del Prof. Sestieri che si riferiva ad un mio accenno fatto nell'articolo pubblicato nel N. 4 del tuo giornale. Non ti nascondo la mia meraviglia.

Non vedo come il Sovrintendente delle provincie di Salerno e Potenza possa essere stato spinto a prendere così vivamente posizione da quel mio passo che non lo coinvolge. Il Prof. Sestieri vede nel mio scritto «l'oscurezza» una indetta diffamazione nei suoi riguardi, anche un insulto per l'intera classe dei Sovrintendenti. Ora se Egli avesse letto con attenzione il mio articolo, avrebbe potuto rilevare come io segnalassi e deprecassi le disagiate condizioni in cui sono costretti a lavorare, i nostri funzionari delle Sovrintendenze e come io mi augurassi che a traverso maggiori disponibilità finanziarie si potessero migliorare le predette condizioni di lavoro. Sostenevo altresì che spinti da ragioni economiche gli elementi migliori erano e sono portati verso le Università, e sottolineavo come molti e continui episodi di leggerezza e trascuratezza fossero indici di scarsa sollecitudine da parte del personale stesso. Non ritengo che tutto ciò possa essere considerato insultante e lesivo alla dignità dei Sovrintendenti.

Continuando ad esaminare la lettera del Prof. Sestieri, egli sostiene che i miei argomenti, poiché in parte pubblicati in altri giornali (quanto mi risulta da Ettore della Giovanna in alcuni articoli sul Tempo di Roma) sono privi di qualsiasi validità. Ora io non ritengo che, avendo constatato de visu la situazione del Museo di Messina, possa essere impedito di esporre le mie conclusioni perché contemporaneamente a me anche altri lo fanno. Ed ora il Prof. Sestieri passa ad illustrare la sua carriera. E di questa nessuno di noi nutre dubbio alcuno, ben conoscendo la sua preparazione per quei particolari problemi che riguardano l'archeologia della Magna Grecia.

Egli poi fa una attenta disamina di un edificio ipogeico rinvenuto a Paestum che attribuisce a funzione di tempio. Ed ora io non saprei proprio cosa controbattere se il capilavoro seguente non, avesse attratto la mia attenzione con un passo che credo di non essere ben riuscito a comprendere. Il Sovrintendente dopo aver detto che ho raccolto «l'ipotesi che si possa trattare dell'heroon o cenotafio di un eroe fondatore» subito dopo prosegue affermando che «Rimane poi l'elementare buon senso che fa supporre che in un edificio tanto ben chiuso e protetto, che vi si sono conservati frammenti di legno, di sughero e di tessuti, si sarebbero dovuti trovare resti di ossa che normalmente

abbiamo trovati in più di 500 tombe, quasi tutte in stato di conservazione molto peggiore dell'edificio in discussione, in cui di ossa non si è trovata la minima traccia». Ora io non capisco come il Prof. Sestieri abbia potuto addurre come argomento il fatto che, supposto si tratti di un cenotafio, non si sono trovati resti di ossa. Ma — come il nome stesso dice — il cenotafio è il monumento sepolcrale vuoto innalzato alla memoria di un defunto sepolto altrove o del quale non sia stato possibile recuperare il cadavere; quindi niente ossa.

Altrei Egli in un suo articolo pubblicato sull'Illustrated London News del 23 Ottobre 1954, pur affacciando l'ipotesi che si tratti di un tempio ipogeico di una divinità femminile, descrivendo il materiale rinvenuto nella tomba e precisamente le verghe di ferro che formavano presumibilmente il letto dice «This turned out to be a bed, and there remained little doubt that the building must have been a tomb». La quale frase mi sembra, oltremodo indicativa. Egli affaccia anche l'ipotesi che sul letto potesse essere distesa l'immagine lignea della divinità, ma come sono rimasti frammenti della travatura interna, così in tale caso si sarebbero dovuti trovare anche frammenti di questa preziosa immagine. Sostialmente poi il Prof. Sestieri crede di ravvisare un culto femminile dai seguenti argomenti.

La presenza di sei hydrie che contenevano miele. Poiché le hydrie sono vasi di netta pertinenza femminile. Egli le collega ad un culto di divinità femminile. Ma è forse azzardato supporre che, trattandosi di vasi sepolcrali di particolare bellezza, siano stati posti lì dentro per onorare la persona idealmente sepolta prescindendo da quello che era la primitiva destinazione di questi vasi nella vita quotidiana? Egli è confortato nella sua ipotesi dal fatto che in tutti i vasi contenevano miele, alimento che era considerato alla stregua del nettare cibo degno degli dei. Ma mi sembra che la medesima offerta possa essere stata fatta all'eroe divinizzato che gli abitanti avevano scelto a mitico fondatore della loro città. Il Sestieri rileva anche che i frammenti trovati all'interno del témenos recano incisa una M che egli collega con Meter, ossia la Dea Madre che a Pesto godera di un particolare culto. Ed è appunto per questo che non mi sembra che questi frammenti possano essere sicuramente messi in relazione con l'edificio in questione: data la contiguità del tempio e del recinto sacro di Hera e del rimaneggiamento avvenuto in epoca romana che possono avere provocato sbracciamenti di terra e conseguente trasporto di frammenti fittili da un luogo a un altro.

Mi sembra poi legittimo ritenere che

nella metà del VI Sec. A. E. V. gli abitanti di Paestum, come già avvenne in gran parte delle colonie greche della Sicilia ed ancor più nella Magna Grecia come a Siris ed a Metaponto, abbiano voluto nobilitare la nascita della loro città con la leggenda di un mitico eroe fondatore greco al quale dedicarono un heroon o cenotafio.

Mi accorgo, caro Direttore di essere uscito dal seminato e di avere parlato spirito solo da spirito polemico. Chiuso quindi ringraziandoti per l'ospitalità e sperando che il Prof. Sestieri non me ne voglia troppo, tuo Ugo di Croppella

Caro Vergani,

Capita spesso di sentir dire di qualcuno che non comprende l'arte contemporanea, ma ama quella del passato; tutto questo nasce da un equivoco fondamentale nei confronti dell'arte stessa e si può esser sicuri che le persone che così parlano non capiscono nulla né dell'arte del passato né di quella contemporanea.

Poiché, intendiamoci bene, comprendere un quadro o comunque un'opera d'arte non vuol dire capirne il soggetto, ma assumerne il significato; la pittura non è un lusso in funzione dell'arredamento; un quadro ed è sempre stato un oggetto magico, un oggetto religioso.

Solo che gli dei cambiano, cambiano continuamente, si evolvono con l'evolversi delle civiltà; poiché ogni attimo è un passo, è una nuova civiltà che nasce.

L'artista è l'annunciatore di queste nuove condizioni umane; egli scopre i nuovi totem e tabù di cui la sua epoca ha in sé il germe ma non ancora la consapevolezza, egli fonda in una civiltà «in fieri».

Per questo il concetto di quadro, di pittura, di poesia non possono aver senso per noi; il momento artistico non sta in questi fatti edonistici, ma poiché innanzitutto la pittura per noi non può essere descritta nel portare in luce, ridurre ad immagini i miti universali precocientifici.

L'opera d'arte trae infatti la sua origine dall'inconscio, che noi intendiamo come una psiche impersonale comune a tutti gli uomini, anche se si manifesta attraverso una coscienza personale (da qui la possibilità del rapporto autore-ospettatore).

Ciascun uomo trae l'elemento umano di sé da questa «base» senza rendersene conto, in modo elementare ed immediato.

Per l'artista si tratta di una immersione cosciente in sé stesso per cui superato ciò che è individuale e contingente, egli affonda fino a giungere al vivo germe della umana totalità.

E' ovvio infatti ciò che a prima vista può sembrare paradossale; cioè che quanto più ci immergiamo in noi stessi, tanto più ci apriamo, perché quanto più siamo vicini al germe della totalità di tutti gli uomini.

Per poter assumere il significato del-

la propria epoca il punto è dunque raggiungere la propria mitologia individuale là dove giunge a identificarsi con la mitologia universale.

La difficoltà sta nel liberarsi dai fatti estranei, dai gesti inutili; fatti e gesti che inquinano l'arte consueta dei nostri giorni, e che talora anzi vengono evidenziati a tal punto da diventare insegne di modi artistici.

Il crivello che ci permette questa separazione dell'autentico dalle scorie, che ci porta a scoprire in una sequela incomprensibile ed irrazionale di immagini un complesso di significati coerente e ordinato, è un processo di autoanalisi.

E' con esso che noi ci ricollochiamo alle nostre origini, eliminando tutti i gesti inutili tutto quello che vi è in noi di personale e letterario nel senso de- teriore della parola: ricordi nebulosi d'infanzia, sentimentalismi, impressioni, costruzioni volute, preoccupazioni pittoriche simboliche o descrittive, false angosce, fatti inconsci non consapevolizza- zati, astrazioni, riferimenti, il continuo ripetere in senso edonistico scoperte esaurite, tutto ciò dev'essere escluso (per quanto possibile naturalmente; l'importan- te è non attribuire mai valore a ciò che è condizionamento soggettivo).

Attraverso questo processo di elimina- zione l'originario umanamente raggiun- gibile viene a manifestarsi, assumendo la forma di immagini. Immagini che sono le nostre immagini prime, nostre degli autori e degli spettatori, poiché sono le variazioni storicamente deter- minate dei mitologemi primordiali (mito- logia individuale e mitologia univer- sale si identificano).

Tutto va sacrificato a questa possibi- lità di scoperta, a questa necessità di assumere propri gesti.

Lo spazio-superficie del quadro inte- ressa il processo autoanalitico solo in quanto spazio di libertà; come tavola delle presenze dei germi attorno ai qua- li e sui quali noi siamo organicamente costituiti.

Qui l'immagine risulta, nel suo signifi- cato vitale; essa non potrà valere per ciò che ricorda, spiega o esprime (caso- mai la questione è «fondare»), né vo- ler essere o poter essere spiegata come allegoria di un processo fisico: essa va- le solo in quanto è: essere.

Piero Manzoni

Caro Vergani,
«State contenti, umana gente, al quia — che se volete sapere il tutto — me- stier non era partorir Maria», così Dan- te, ciò che significa limitare la bono- scenza alle verità rivelate o predicate o imposte, accettare il mistero, il dog- ma; costringere il problema gnoseolo- gico della costruzione dell'intelletto u- mano, al sensibile.

Esistono però uomini che vogliono su- perare queste barriere, che, incalzati dall'anelito che mai ha tregua, voglio- no percepire l'insensibile, conoscere ciò che si nasconde al di là delle apparen- ze; «che non stanno contenti al quia» ma vogliono penetrare il mistero e, co-

me Faust, tentano di forzare il regno delle Madri, la smisurata Galleria Oscu- ra, greve di nubi impercettibili dove, al di fuori del tempo e dello spaz- zio, dal metafisico rampolla il fisico, dall'energia la materia, dove incaza la eterna trasformazione cosmica, il prin- cipio di vita per cui sono le esistenze e l'inconoscibile diventa conoscibile, dove l'infinito si circoscrive nel limitato, l'u- niversale nell'individuale, dove il nou- meno diventa fenomeno, il nulla di- venta tutto.

E' alla luce di queste considerazioni che bisogna esaminare l'opera di Picas- so, che impone problemi molto più com- plessi di una semplice critica estetica.

Il problema infatti che si pone per Picasso è: come mai un pittore che do- mina il proprio mestiere come egli do- mina, esperto del più raffinati ac- corgimenti pittorici, che ha saputo di- pingere con tanta eccellenza e maes- tria, con tanta intensità di compren- sione e commozione umana la repas- seuse, la maternità, i saltimbanchi, la bevitrice, a un dato momento, spinto da un irresistibile imperativo interiore, rompe le forme e le linee della realtà sensibile per esplodere in una pittura di deformazione e di mostri, esoterica e per molti incomprensibile.

Quale la ragione di questa strana evoluzione?

Siamo qui davanti ad una delle più angosciate e tragiche ribellioni che mai siano fermentate in uno spirito uma- no. La sua pittura è lo scatenarsi di un luciferismo ribelle, una sfida al Dio trascendente nella brama di collocarsi al centro dell'universo per tutto compren- dere, per penetrare nel mistero, per ca-pire l'eterno nel caduco, per vedere lo invisibile, ed i mostri di Picasso sono così le creazioni, per usare una classifi- cazione di Guido Manacorda, del mon- do della Selva, del mondo cioè degli istinti, del rigoglioso prorompere delle forze vitali, ubbidienti solo alla fatalità cosmica, e non del mondo, sempre per usare la classificazione manacordiana, del Tempio, del mondo cioè dove tutto si ordina e distribuisce in schemi logici, in costruzioni razionali, in categorie dialettiche.

I mostri picassiani possono essere con- siderati un fenomeno analogo alle ap- parizioni dei mistici, e meritano la stes- sa considerazione: Primum philosophari e poi dipingere ed infatti si potrebbe dire che l'opera di Picasso tenta di dar forma e rap- presentazione all'immanenza. E' quindi fatale che Picasso rompa le linee della realtà visibile, le violenti, tra- sformi e deformi; è fatale che nella sua pittura un volto non possa avere un solo naso o gli occhi in simmetria. La sua opera attesta un tale desiderio impetuoso di libertà che non vuole ac- cettare neppure gli schemi della realtà sensibile.

E' ammissibile che l'opera di Picasso possa essere, su un terreno polemico, respinta, ma è supremamente sciocco il deriderla. Essa può far inorridire ma deve anche ammonire. E' il sintomo in- fatti di un mondo in disfacimento; che

scricchiola in tutte le sue strutture da quelle politiche a quelle sociali, da quel- le religiose a quelle morali; è la de- nuncia di un mondo nel quale le for- mule che rispondevano ai supremi pro- blemi dell'umanità non dicono più rien- te. E' l'esplosione che si sprigiona da un processo di decomposizione. Essa è la conseguenza fatale di quella situazione dello spirito umano che con altrettanta fatalità ha generato l'ermetismo, l'es- stenzialismo e la musica dodecafonica. Quest'arte che si avvantaggia di tutte le tecniche pittoriche più audaci rap- presenta la somma delle esperienze cul- turali della prima metà del nostro se- colo e con Freud e Einstein è una del- le manifestazioni che rimarrà come la voce più caratteristica del nostro tempo.

I conformisti, coloro della Messa ele- gante della domenica, coloro per i qua- li il mondo va bene così come va, certo non possono intendere il significato del- l'opera di Picasso. Se lo intendessero lo respingerebbero, ciò che da un pun- to di vista culturale sarebbe almeno più accettabile che la loro stupida de- risione.

Le polemiche che intorno all'opera di Picasso si sono scatenate e si scatenano, richiamano alla memoria quelle an- cora più violente che si scatenarono in- torno alla musica di Wagner, quando i tradizionalisti di quel tempo definiva- no la musica del grande Maestro fra- stuono, e cosa scandalosa, immorale, quando chi la difendeva veniva addi- rittura espulso da determinati ambienti.

Anche allora però di Wagner tutti parlavano, proprio come ora tutti par- lano di Picasso, sia pure per deriderlo, per dileggiarlo o chiamarlo pazzo o ciurmatore.

Quest'anno, in occasione del 75° com- pieanno di Picasso gli Stati Uniti han- no voluto rendere onore alla sua opera organizzando due imponenti esposizio- ni di tutte le sue opere da quelle del primissimo periodo fino alle più recenti.

Queste manifestazioni che sono state organizzate con una grandiosità come mai non si è fatto per nessun altro ar- tista vivente, stanno a dimostrare che nell'opera di Picasso si riconosce o al- meno si vede non solo una semplice nuova espressione pittorica, ma un nuo- vo verbo, un nuovo fermento della con- cessione del mondo che oggi è ancora allo stato di intuizione e presentimen- to ma che domani potrà storicizzarsi in nuovi assestamenti sociali, politici, religiosi.

L'arte sarà stata ancora una volta la precorritrice delle faticose tappe del cammino umano e coloro che oggi irri- dono o disprezzano l'opera di Picasso dovrebbero tener presente ciò che ha affermato Giordano Bruno, il precursore del pensiero moderno, il filosofo le cui intuizioni sono sempre vive ed ope- ranti: «a chi cerca il vero bisogna montare sopra la ragione delle cose corporee» e che rappresenta una chiave magica per spiegare il significato dei così detti mostri di Picasso, che posso- no essere veri atti di accusa contro chi tenta di spegnere ogni luce di verità.

Tito Grancini

Dear Vergani, We Often Hear ... 1958

Dear Vergani,

We often hear it said of some- one that he does not understand contemporary art but loves art of the past; all this stems from a fundamen- tal misunderstanding with regard to art itself, and we can be sure that these people who talk like this under- stand nothing of either the art of the past or its contemporary form.

Let's be clear, since compre- hending a picture, or in any case a work of art, does not mean under- standing the subject but rather assuming the meaning; painting is not a luxury as a function of furnishings; a picture [is] and always has been a magical object, a religious object.

But the gods change, they change continually, they evolve with the evolution of civilization, as every

“Caro Vergani, Capita spesso di sentir . . .”
(Dear Vergani, We Often Hear . . .)

Text signed by Manzoni alone and probably published in March 1958 in *Il Bastardo* (Milan) 1 (1958): 3–4.

moment is a step, is a new civilization that comes into being.

The artist is the herald of these new human conditions; he discovers the new totems and taboos of which his era carries the germ but not yet the understanding, he finds in a civilization *in fieri*.

Hence the concept of picture, of painting, of poetry cannot have meaning for us; the artistic situation consists not of these hedonistic facts, but (as first and foremost painting for us cannot be described) is about bringing to light, reducing the preconscious universal myths to images.

In fact, the work of art originates from the unconscious, which we understand as an impersonal psyche shared by all men, even though it manifests itself through a personal consciousness (hence the possibility of the author-work-spectator relationship).

Every man draws the human element of themselves from this base without realizing it, in an elementary and immediate manner.

For the artist it is a conscious immersion in the self and so having overcome that which is individual and contingent, he plunges in to reach the living germ of human totality.

What at first sight may seem paradoxical is obvious in fact: that is to say that the more we immerse ourselves in ourselves, the more we open, the closer we are to the germ of the totality of all men.

In order to take on the meaning of one's age the point is therefore to achieve one's own individual mythology in the place where it comes to identify with the universal mythology.

The difficulty lies in freeing oneself from extraneous facts, from futile gestures: facts and gestures

that pollute the usual art of our times, and that at times are even highlighted to the point that they become insignia of artistic trends.

The sieve that allows us to separate the authentic from the dross, which leads us to discover in an incomprehensible and irrational sequence of images an array of coherent and ordered meanings is a process of self-analysis.

This is how we reconnect with our origins, eliminating all futile gestures, all that which is personal and literary in us in the worst sense of the term: nebulous recollections of infancy, sentimentalism, impressions, deliberate constructions, pictorial, symbolic, or descriptive preoccupations, false anxieties, unconscious, unprocessed facts, abstractions, references, the continual repetition in a hedonistic sense of exhausted discoveries, all that must be excluded (as far as possible naturally; what

is important is never to attribute value to that which is subjective conditioning).

Through this process of elimination the humanly achievable original is made manifest, taking the form of images. Images that are our prime images, ours and those of the authors and the spectators, as they are the historically determined variations of the primordial mythologems (individual mythology and universal mythology identify themselves).

Everything is to be sacrificed to this possibility of discovery, to this need to assume our own gestures.

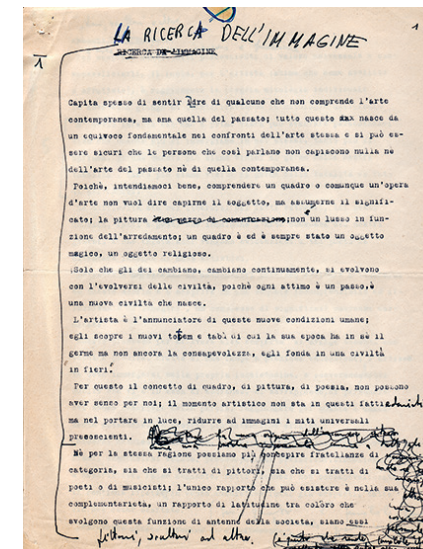
The space-surface of the painting is of interest to the self-analytical process only in as much as it is a space of freedom; as a table of the presences of the germs around which and on which we are organically constituted.

Here the image takes form in its vital meaning: it cannot be valid

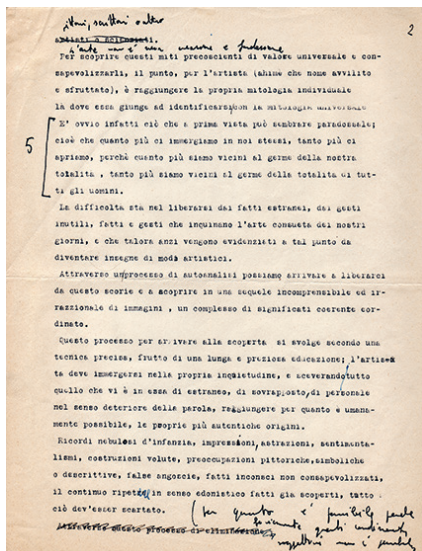
for that which it recalls, explains, or expresses (if anything the question is “to found”) nor can it aspire to be or to be explained as an allegory of a physical process: it is valid only in that it is: being.

Piero Manzoni

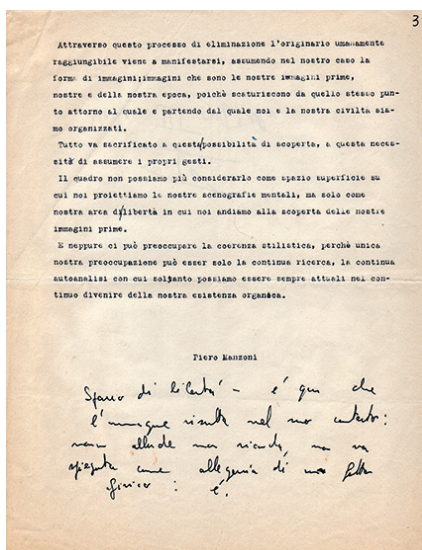
The 1958 text in the periodical *Il Bastardo*, which in a number of issues is also entitled *Il Bastardo: Giornale di battaglia* and whose managing editor was Guido Vergani, was only recently tracked down by this author due to the extreme rarity of the periodical. It extensively recaps the various typescripts on the “search for the image” with a number of modifications and omissions. As is well-known, Manzoni frequently re-used parts of published texts, rewriting certain phrases. One of the differences from the typescripts is the opening “Dear Vergani,” which can be explained by the fact that it was published in the “Letters to the Editor” section. Of note are the references to the work of art as a “magical object” and a “religious object,” fundamental concepts for a number of future experiments such as the *Basi magiche* (Magic Bases; 1961) or the exhibition-performance with the eggs intended to be eaten *Consumazione dell’arte / Dinamica del pubblico / Divorare l’arte* (Consumption of Art / Dynamic of the Public / Devour Art) at the gallery Azimut in Milan on July 21, 1960.



Typescript of
“La ricerca
dell’immagine”
(Investigation
of the Image),
ca. 1957



Typescript of
“La ricerca
dell’immagine”
(Investigation
of the Image),
ca. 1957



The date March 1958 was noted by Manzoni on the “information sheet” (itself dated April 1958) compiled for Umbro Apollonio, conservator of the Archivio Storico d’Arte Contemporanea in Venice.¹⁸ Early in 1958 Manzoni began



Brochure of the
exhibition *Fontana,
Baj, Manzoni*,
Galleria del Circolo
di Cultura, Bologna,
March 23–April 8,
1958

to overhaul his “operational strategy”; officially he no longer participated in projects under the aegis of the Movimento Arte Nucleare (Nuclear Art Movement)—with the exclusion of *Il Gesto 3*, published in September 1958, of which Manzoni was the editor with Baj and Dangelo but which had been prepared in advance—although he did continue exhibiting with a number of its members, including the movement’s founder, Baj. At the start of 1958, in fact, there was an exhibition that redefined the aesthetic and generational genealogies: *Fontana, Baj, Manzoni*, a three-person show held from January 4 to 17, 1958, at Galleria Bergamo in Bergamo accompanied by a pamphlet containing a text by Luciano Anceschi (but no images of the works on show) and also shown at the Circolo di Cultura in Bologna from March 23 to April 8, 1958, where Manzoni almost certainly exhibited his “white works” in public for the first time.¹⁹ The young artist was in fact probably “testing the water” by exhibiting the first “white works” in the

company of Fontana and Baj in Bologna, before presenting them with ever-greater awareness and courage in the solo show at Galleria Pater in Milan from April 22 to May 4, 1958. A few weeks later the group show *L'Avanguardia: Picabia, Sant'Elia, Fontana, Baj, Manzoni* also opened at Galleria Montenapoleone in Milan on May 27, bringing together the Dada-Futurist experiments and those of the new avant-garde. In this period Manzoni cultivated his contacts abroad. That summer, in Holland, he established relationships with artists and gallerists such as Gust Romijn and Hans Sonnenberg. Holland (where he was to join the Dutch ZERO group and later exhibit with members of the Nul group) was also the setting for his first solo show abroad, *Piero Manzoni Schilderijen*, which ran from September 10 to 29, 1958, at Rotterdamsche Kunstkring in Rotterdam.

18 Cf. the Manzoni personal file at the Archive of the Venice Biennale—ASAC, Raccolta documentaria, Artisti, Piero Manzoni, num. inv. 26623.

19 For further information see Gaspare Luigi Marcone, *Fontana, Baj, Manzoni* (Poggibonsi: Carlo Cambi Editore, 2018). Three symbolic works are illustrated in the brochure of the Bologna exhibition.

È vizio molto diffuso tra gli artisti, o meglio tra i cattivi artisti, una certa vigliaccheria mentale, per cui rifiutano di prendere una qualsiasi posizione, invocando una mal intesa libertà dell'arte o altri egualmente grossolani luoghi comuni.

Così in genere costoro, avendo un'idea molto vaga dell'arte, finiscono per confondere l'arte con la vaghezza stessa.

È necessario quindi cercare di chiarire il più possibile cosa intendiamo per arte, per poter trovare la linea conduttrice sulla quale agire e giudicare.

L'opera d'arte trae la sua origine da un impulso inconscio che scaturisce da un substrato collettivo di valore universale, comune a tutti gli uomini, da cui essi attingono i loro gesti e da cui l'artista ricava le «arce» dell'esistenza organica. Ciascun uomo estrae l'elemento umano di sé da questa base senza rendercene conto, in modo elementare ed immediato.

Per l'artista si tratta di una immersione cosciente in se stesso per cui, superato ciò che è individuale e contingente, egli affonda fino a giungere al vivo germe della umana totalità. Tutto quello che vi è di comunicabile per la umanità è qui che si ricava, e attraverso la scoperta del substrato psichico comune a tutti gli uomini, si rende possibile il rapporto autore-opera-spettatore. L'opera d'arte in questo modo ha valore totemico, di mito vivente, senza dispersioni simboliche e descrittive, è una espressione primaria e diretta.

Il fondamento di valore universale dell'arte ci è dato, oggi, dalla psicologia. Questa è la base comune che permette all'arte di immergere le sue radici nell'origine prima di tutti gli uomini e di scoprire i miti primari dell'umanità. L'artista deve affrontare questi miti e ridurli da materiale amorfo e confuso a immagine chiara.

Poiché si tratta di forze ataviche e che derivano dal subcosciente, l'opera d'arte assume un significato magico.

D'altra parte l'arte ha sempre avuto un valore religioso, dal primo artista stregone al mito pagano e al mito cristiano ecc.

Il punto chiave sta oggi nello stabilire la validità universale della mitologia individuale.

Il momento artistico sta dunque nella scoperta dei miti universali precoscienti e nella loro riduzione ad immagini.

È evidente che per portare alla luce zone di mito autentiche e vergini, l'artista deve avere la consapevolezza estrema di se stesso ed essere dotato di una precisione e di una logica ferrea.

Per arrivare alla scoperta vi è tutta una tecnica precisa, frutto di una lunga e preziosa educazione; l'artista deve immergersi nella propria inquietudine e, scerverando tutto quello che vi è in essa di estraneo, di sovrapposto, di personale nel senso deteriore della parola, arrivare fino alla zona autentica dei valori.

Così è ovvio ciò che a prima vista poteva sembrare paradossale: cioè che quanto più ci immergiamo in noi stessi, tanto più ci apriamo, perché quanto più siamo vicini al germe della nostra totalità, tanto più siamo vicini al germe della totalità di tutti gli uomini.

Possiamo dunque dire che l'invenzione soggettiva è l'unico mezzo di scoperta delle realtà obiettive, l'unico che ci dia la possibilità di comunicazione tra gli uomini.

Mitologia individuale e mitologia universale giungono a identificarsi.

Naturalmente dopo tutto questo è chiaro che non possiamo ammettere alcuna questione simbolica o descrittiva: ricordi, impressioni, nebulose d'infanzia, pittoricismi, sentimentalismo, tutto ciò dev'essere assolutamente escluso; così pure ogni ripetizione in senso edonistico di argomenti già esauriti, poiché chi continua a bacciarci con miti già scoperti è un esteta e peggio.

Astrazioni, riferimenti, devono essere assolutamente evitati; nella nostra libertà d'invenzione dobbiamo arrivare a costruire un mondo che abbia la sua misura solo in se stesso.

Non possiamo assolutamente considerare il quadro come spazio su cui proiettiamo le nostre scenografie mentali, ma come nostra area di libertà in cui noi andiamo alla scoperta delle nostre immagini prime.

Immagini quanto più possibile assolate, che non potranno valere per ciò che ricordano, spiegano esprimono ma solo in quanto sono: essere.

PER LA SCOPERTA DI UNA ZONA DI IMMAGINI

Piero Manzoni

PER LA SCOPERTA DI UNA ZONA DI IMMAGINI

PER LA SCOPERTA DI UNA ZONA DI IMMAGINI

PER LA SCOPERTA DI UNA ZONA DI IMMAGINI

PER LA SCOPERTA DI UNA ZONA DI IMMAGINI

For the Discovery of a Zone of Images 1958

A certain mental cowardice is a very common vice among artists, or rather among the bad artists, whereby they refuse to take up any position whatsoever, invoking a poorly understood freedom of art or other equally vulgar commonplaces.

Having a very vague idea of art, they consequently confuse art with that very vagueness.

It is therefore necessary to try to clarify as far as possible what we mean by art, in order to find the guiding line along which we can act and judge.

The work of art originates from an unconscious impulse deriving from a collective substratum of universal value, shared by all men, from which they draw their gestures and from which the artist learns the

“Per la scoperta di una zona di immagini”
(For the Discovery of a Zone of Images)

Text signed by Piero Manzoni alone, published in the portfolio/book *Documenti d'arte oggi mac 1958* (Milan: Libreria A. Salto editrice, 1958), 74.

arcai, or origins, of organic existence. Every man unconsciously extracts the human element of himself from this base in an elementary and immediate manner.

For the artist it is a conscious immersion in the self and so, having overcome that which is individual and contingent, he plunges to reach the living germ of human totality. All that is communicable for humanity is extracted here, and through the discovery of the psychic substratum shared by all men, the artist-work-spectator relationship is made possible. In this way the work of art has a totemic value, that of a living myth, with no symbolic or descriptive dispersions, it is a primary and direct expression.

The foundation of art's universal value is today provided by psychology. This is the common base that allows art to sink its roots into the prime origin of all men and

to discover the primary myths of humanity.

The artist must tackle these myths and reduce them from amorphous and confused material to a clear image.

As we are dealing with atavistic forces that derive from the unconscious, the work of art takes on a magical significance.

On the other hand, art has always had a religious value, from the first shaman-artist to the pagan myth, the Christian myth, and so on.

The key point today lies in establishing the universal validity of individual mythology.

The artistic moment therefore consists of the discovery of pre-conscious universal myths and their reduction to images.

It is clear that in order to bring to light authentic and virgin zones of myth, the artist must have a profound awareness of the self and be

gifted with robust precision and logic. In order to arrive at this discovery there is a precise technique, fruit of a long and invaluable education; the artist must immerse himself in his own anxiety and, distinguishing all that within it that is extraneous, superimposed, and personal in the detrimental sense of the word, reach the authentic zone of values.

What at first sight may seem paradoxical is obvious in fact: that is to say that the more we immerse ourselves in ourselves, the more we open up, because the closer we are to the germ of our totality, the closer we are to the germ of the totality of all men.

We can therefore say that subjective invention is the only means of discovering objective realities, the only one that gives us the possibility of communication among men.

Individual mythology and universal mythology succeed in identifying themselves.

Naturally, after all this it is clear that we cannot admit any symbolic or descriptive question; nebulous memories and impressions of childhood, pictorialisms, sentimentalisms, all this must necessarily be excluded; the same is true of all hedonistic repetition of stale arguments, as he who continues to amuse himself with hackneyed myths is an aesthete and worse.

Abstractions, references, must absolutely be avoided; in our freedom of invention we must succeed in constructing a world that has its measure in itself alone.

We absolutely cannot consider the picture as a space onto which we project our mental scenographies, but rather as the area of freedom in which we explore our primary images.

Images which are as absolute as possible, which cannot be valued for that which they recall, explain,

and express, but only for that which they are: being.

Piero Manzoni

The text for the Concretist portfolio, a different and more extensive version of the piece with the same title that was published in 1956, was accompanied (on the previous page, 73, on the same yellow paper) by three “black-and-white” reproductions of Nuclear works by Manzoni from 1957: *Tenderly*, *Paradoxus Smith*, and *Igitur*; in correspondence with pages 75–76 the invitation/pamphlet for the solo show *Piero Manzoni*, which opened at Galleria Pater, Milan, on April 22, 1958, was inserted, on one side of which three *Achromes* in gesso from 1957–58 were reproduced. The new text therefore appears almost to be a link between the “zone of images” discovered by Manzoni with his works from 1957 and the “new discovery” of the *Achromes*.



Exhibition flyer for *Piero Manzoni*, Galleria Pater, Milan, April 22–May 4, 1958

Documenti d'arte d'oggi mac 1958, published by the Movimento Arte Concreta (Concrete Art Movement), was configured as an artistic portfolio/book with drawings, reproductions, invitations, and glued-paper materials by forty-three artists ranging from Enrico Baj and Vinicio Berti to Lucio Fontana and Luigi Veronesi and including a folding paper *Scultura da viaggio* (Travel Sculpture) by Bruno Munari. There were also numerous

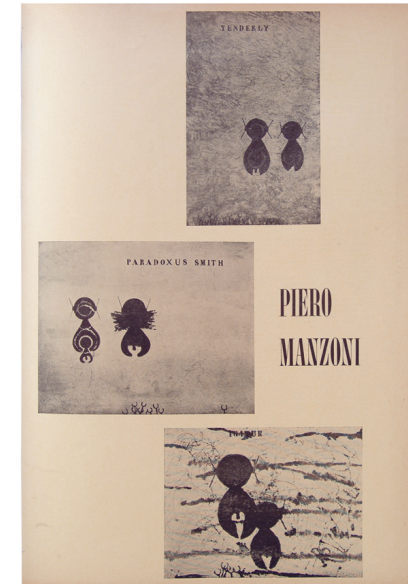


Achrome, 1957–58,
gesso and canvas,
60 × 120.5 cm,
The Olnick Spanu
Collection,
New York

texts by at least thirty-eight artists, critics, and poets, from Nanni Balestrini and Gillo Dorfles to Roland Penrose and Edoardo Sanguineti. Moreover, on page 81, the announcement “Concrete Art Editions 1948/1958 exhibition at the Libreria Salto, Milan, Via Santo Spirito 14 from March 25 to April 14, 1958,” probably refers to an exhibition and at least a partial presentation of the portfolio and the project. In reality, given the unique composition of the object in question, there are notable complexities regarding its dating and circulation. *Documenti d’arte oggi* was the fourth and

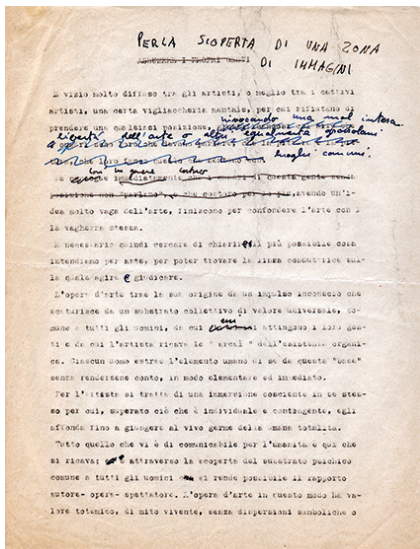


Cover of *Documenti d’arte d’oggi mac 1958*, published by Libreria A. Salto editrice, Milan, 1958

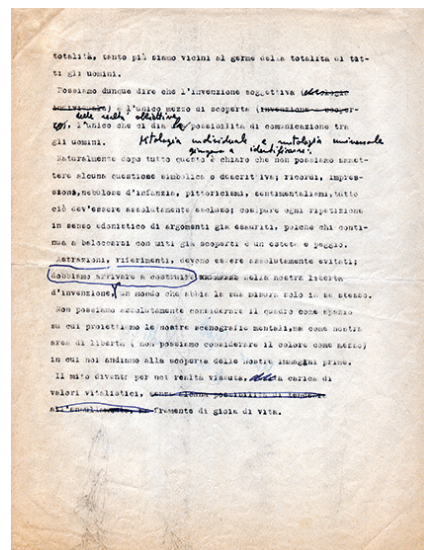
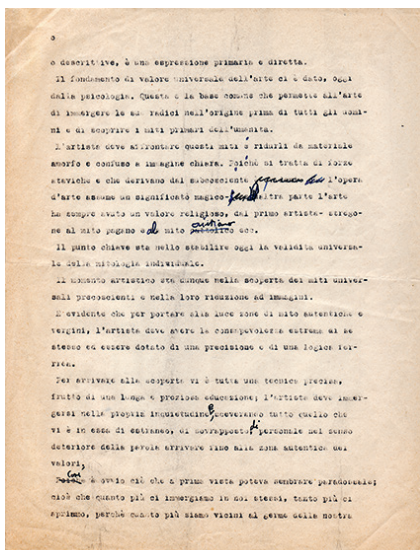


Page 73 of *Documenti d’arte d’oggi mac 1958*, published by Libreria A. Salto editrice, Milan, 1958

final “folder” by the Movimento Arte Concreta that was founded in 1948 and principally promoted by Gillo Dorfles, Gianni Monnet, Bruno Munari, and Atanasio Soldati, joined by various other artists over the years. These publications were true “experimental zones,” akin to artist’s books albeit heterogeneous and collective in nature. Manzoni thus joined a tradition established for a decade; its original premises might have been in decline but the doyens of the movement were always receptive and open to new experiments and the new generations. This portfolio brought together figures that already had ties to Manzoni or were to have ties in later years including Baj, Dorfles, Fontana, and the future *poeti novissimi* (new poets) Nanni Balestrini, Elio Pagliarani, Antonio Porta, and Edoardo Sanguineti, to mention just a few. The critics have paid little attention to the influence of the Movimento Arte Concreta, and in particular the figure of Bruno Munari, in relation to Manzoni’s development and experimental research. The artist with his “spongey” mind drew



Typescript of “Per la scoperta di una zona di immagini” (For the Discovery of a Zone of Images), ca. 1957



on diverse sources; for example, the Concretist proclamations found in the manifestos for “machinism,” “total art,” and “organic art” under the playful direction of Munari (datable to 1952 and published by Arturo Schwarz in *Pittura Italiana del dopoguerra*

in 1957)²⁰ did not pass unnoticed by Manzoni. It was no coincidence that, for example, in October 1960 Manzoni exhibited his *Corpi d'aria* (Bodies of Air; 1959–60) in Rome in a group show at Topazia Alliata’s Galleria Trastevere entitled *Sculture da viaggio*, with explicit reference to Munari.

In this text too there is a reference to Pavese; Manzoni wrote: “he who continues to amuse himself with hackneyed myths is an aesthete and worse,” while the Piedmont writer noted “He who continues to amuse himself with a myth long unfolded, penetrated, and violated cannot be a true believer, poet, or scientist. He can be an aesthete and nothing more.”²¹



Cover of *Il Gesto* (Milan), no. 3, 1958

20

Sauvage, *Pittura italiana del dopoguerra*, 238–41.

21

Cesare Pavese, “Il mito,” *Cultura e realtà* (Rome), no. 1 (May–June 1950): 8.

L'arte, i concorsi e l'Italia sentimentale

Stimo in Agosto. Dopo anni di sudati lavori al sole, al vento, sotto la pioggia, dopo migliaia di metri quadrati di piastrelle, centinaia di copriate, pentelle, tiranti, case, dopo quintali e tonnellate di cemento, calce, pozzolane, sabbie, e soprattutto, dopo un numero spropositato di pranzi a base di zuppa di pesce, laboriosamente consumati dai dirigenti i lavori, nei ristoranti di Fiumicino, l'omonimo aeroporto internazionale si avvia verso la conclusione. Ci sarebbe da tirare finalmente un respiro di sollievo, per l'ultima volta di quest'opera « coloniale » che era un po' diventato l'incubo del buon italiano medio. « L'aeroporto qui, l'aeroporto là, i quattrini, le forniture, l'af-fisso turistico, etc. » tutte belle cose, tutti patemi d'animo che stanno per terminare. Ed invece noi vi è ancora una categoria che soffre per questo onnipotente aeroporto, ed è precisamente quella degli artisti. Infatti mi è stata ultimamente consegnata una lettera di protesta da un gruppo di artisti italiani:

« I lavori dell'aeroporto di Fiumicino sono ormai quasi ultimati. Si deplora che senza fare alcun concorso nazionale tra gli scultori, si stia già costruendo il basamento di una statua rappresentante Leonardo da Vinci, alta da sei agli otto metri, nel centro del piazzale. Inoltre lo scultore Peitoff ha già eseguito un'enorme statua di Ava Gardner a Fiumicino. (Qui mi permetto una parentesi, dedicata all'Italia sonnacchiosa e piedipiasta, infatti l'idea di una statua della Gardner, per conto mio equivale, al Vesuvio, agli spaggetti, all'albero di Bellavista, glorie nazionali. La Gardner non è italiana, non è una gloria nazionale ma un'intermazionale cosette e se deve rappresentare l'Italia, significa che purtroppo in questi casi non è l'Italia con la I maiuscola. Ma tant'è, noi italiani alla marchiaro ci sentiamo orgogliosi e commossi, e forse soltanto avremmo preferito la Loren. Tanto ci meritiamo ed allora... prositt!!!) »

Si spera che per gli altri edifici funzionali la legge del 2 per cento e non



vi sia bisogno di interpellanze alla Camera, dato che i sindacati hanno già mandato alcune lettere di protesta a dei ministri. Nella speranza che, in ultima analisi, queste si rivelino soltanto delle notizie allarmistiche, vi preghiamo di sottoporre il caso all'opinione pubblica italiana, attraverso le righe del « Pensiero Nazionale » o quanto che ha sempre difeso la verità e le leggi italiane fatte per il progresso del paese ».

UN GRUPPO DI ARTISTI ITALIANI

Commenti da fare ad una lettera così esplicita? Soltanto qualcuno. I concorsi in Italia di solito non vengono fatti, e quando vengono banditi, si sa quasi sempre di sicuro chi è il vincitore. Ma alle volte si è dato il caso che pur riuscendo un vincitore effettivo, l'esecuzione sia stata affidata ad altri. Infatti a Taranto, per esempio, qualche anno fa, fu bandito un concorso per un monumento da erigere al musicista Paisiello. Lo vinse lo scultore Franchina. Evitando i giudizi estetici sulla assegnazione di questo premio, ciò che più ci interessa è lo sviluppo della faccenda. Infatti dopo la commissione giudicatrice, l'opera passò all'esame della giunta comunale, e qui arrivata uno dei consiglieri si ricordò, che, in altri tempi, un poeta della città aveva promesso allo scultore Canonica, la sicura paternità per questo monumento. Canonica era gravemente ammalato, ed allora tutti i componenti la giunta, da buoni italiani con chiarezza e severità, decisero l'umanità di assegnare l'esecuzione dell'opera al vecchio artista. (Che aveva di già il bozzetto pronto). Tutto ciò, con la massima incuranza per la messa in scena del concorso, ed ignorando il vincitore effettivo che venne così a trovarsi con il classico pugno di mosche in mano.

Ci rimane così soltanto la speranza, molto tenue in verità, che fatti simili non si debbano ripetere.

Da Milano, ci scrive Piero Manzoni

« Una vecchia abitudine, che per tanti è ormai una tradizione, ha portato anche quest'estate, sulle orme dei futuristi, molti artisti d'ogni parte del mondo ad Albisola. »

Purtroppo, in questi ultimi anni, molti piccoli trafficanti e pittori di terz'ordine, attratti dalla fama del paese e dai nomi che lo frequentano, hanno invaso questa piccola « ville d'art » e ne deturpano il paesaggio colla loro presenza e coi loro quadri, grazie anche alla condiscendenza di una « galleria del circolo artistico » (di assai recente costituzione) che, quanto peggio sono, tanto più volentieri li ospita.

Comunque questo svantaggio è sufficientemente equilibrato dalla mancanza, nella zona, di neo-naturalisti, cediti per la maggior parte in questo periodo ad agresti contemplanze, nelle parrocchie della Brianza, ed ancor più dall'assenza dei Tapies, dei Wolf, dei Bacon, dei Buffet... insomma di tutta quella, più che famosa, flora artistica che tanto ci assilla ed opprime per tutto l'inverno nelle gallerie cittadine.

A netto vantaggio della situazione torna invece la presenza di artisti importanti come Lucio Fontana e Wilfredo Lam: è qui anche Jorn, ma a mio parere « il suo caso non aggiunge nulla di nuovo al serro delle Muse »: la sua opera anche se sovrasta da buone qualità pittoriche, non è che un banale ritruggito romantico espressionista.

Non così invece Fontana, oggi forse il più interessante artista italiano, la cui opera ha aperto e continua ad aprire nuove strade: in questi giorni sta lavorando a ceramiche e terrecotte, brillanti variazioni dei suoi « tagli ».

Pure Lam lavora ai suoi « personaggi » che traggono origine dai totem selvaggi della sua terra e dalla lezione cubista. I suoi primi quadri di questo tipo, furono esposti per la prima volta con gran successo nel 1938. E' solo da pochi anni che qui in Italia alcuni modesti artisti hanno cominciato ad imitarlo; ma le copie nostrane fanno una ben meschina figura di fronte all'alto livello e al vero valore degli originali ».

Le mostre

A Riccione espone il ceramista Giuliano de Marsanich. Ottime opere di gustosa fattura, in cui ad un pieno gusto cromatico si aggiunge una sottile e triste ironia, che spesso sfocia nel vero e proprio sarcasmo. La sua produzione che va da alcuni prelini che con volto spento cantano e laudano, a dei guerrieri dalle lunghe braccia impegnati in furiose battaglie. Ed ai tristi volti dei clown, fanno riscontro, i gibbosi gatti dalla faccia quasi infernale, o i rigidi turani, ed ancora degli abissali pesci contorti. In questo ultimo anno l'artista si è sviluppato sino ad avvicinarsi verso la più completa maturità. Ed è per questo che sempre più si porta a nascondere nel sorriso, nel ghigno, nella risata, dolori umani dei quali egli stesso è partecipe.

ANTONIO CAPUTO

Qualcosa di nuovo

Leggo che Claudio Villa è stato buttato a mare da due suoi ammiratori ai quali aveva risposto male. Precedentemente i due si erano dispiaciuti con il cantante perché si era esibito con il nastro: ovvero davanti al pubblico apriva la bocca ma chi cantava era un registratore tra le quinte. Abbiamo detto: è stato buttato a mare. Che si stia forzando la situazione? Attendiamo altri episodi del genere. Forse c'è qualcosa di nuovo sotto il sole.

From Milan: Piero Manzoni Writes to Us 1959

An old habit, which for many is now a tradition, has again brought many artists from all over the world, following in the footsteps of the Futurists, to Albisola this summer.

Unfortunately, in recent years, numerous minor dealers and third-rate painters, attracted by the fame of the town and the names that frequent it, have invaded this small *ville d'art* and deface the landscape with their presence and with their paintings, thanks in part to the compliance of an "art-club gallery" (of very recent constitution) that the worse they are, the more gladly it hosts them.

However, this disadvantage is sufficiently balanced by the absence, in the area, of neo-Naturalists, most of whom are

“Da Milano, ci scrive Piero Manzoni”
(From Milan: Piero Manzoni Writes to Us)

Article published in the biweekly *Il Pensiero Nazionale* (Rome) 13, no. 17, September 1-15, 1959, 40.

devoted to rural contemplation in this period, in the parishes of the Brianza region, and all the more so by the absence of the Tàpieses and the Wolses, the Bacons, the Buf-fets . . . in short, all that artistic flora rather than fauna that so assails and oppresses us throughout the winter in the city galleries.

The presence of important artists such as Lucio Fontana and Wifredo Lam is instead to the distinct advantage of the situation: Jorn is here too, but in my opinion “his case adds nothing new to the wreath of the muses”: his work, even though supported by good painterly qualities, is nothing but a banal romantic Expressionist regurgitation.

This is however not so with Fontana, today perhaps the most interesting Italian artist, whose work has opened and continues to open new paths: he is currently working on ceramics and terra-cottas,

brilliant variations on his *tagli* (slashes).

Lam is also working on his “characters” that originate from the wild totems of his homeland and the Cubist influence.

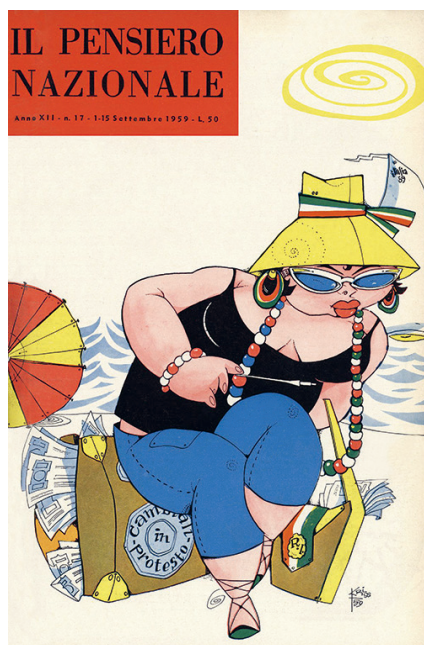
His first paintings of this type were exhibited for the first time to great success in 1938. It is only in recent years that here in Italy certain mediocre artists have begun to imitate him; but their homespun copies cut a wretched figure compared with the high level and the true value of the originals.

This was the first article in collaboration with the Roman periodical *Il Pensiero Nazionale*. Manzoni was in contact with Antonio Caputo, an artist and journalist who contributed to the biweekly, editing the artistic section. We know of an extensive corpus of documents including letters, notes, and press releases sent by Manzoni to Caputo, material that formed the basis for a number of articles;²² the periodical published just three articles signed by Manzoni, but comparing the typescripts mentioned with other articles signed by Caputo, Manzoni could be defined as the coauthor of a number of reports published in other issues. In April of that year, Caputo reviewed the three-person show by Bonalumi, Castellani, and Manzoni at Galleria Appia Antica in Rome, held from April 3 to 15, introduced by a text by the poet Leo Paolazzi (later known as Antonio Porta).²³ The year 1959 was important for Manzoni; in the spring he exhibited *Achromes* with creased canvas in the Dutch solo show *Relief-Schilderijen* at Galerie de Posthoorn in The Hague (April 21–May 9), while on May 27 he opened a solo show at Bar La Parete in Milan; the invitation featured a work titled for the first time *Superficie acroma* (Achrome Surface) while in a photograph of the opening



Enrico Baj,
Lou Laurin-Lam,
Roberto Crippa,
Nini Crippa, Gigina
Baj, Wifredo Lam,
and Piero Manzoni
in Albisola Marina,
1958

the first *Linee* (Lines) can be seen on the wall (not yet enclosed in cylinders).



Cover of *Il Pensiero Nazionale* (Rome) 13, no. 17, September 1–15, 1959

In his text for *Il Pensiero Nazionale*, Manzoni reported on the art scene in Albisola; while he was less than complimentary toward Jorn, with whom he had had a few misunderstandings, as seen in the correspondence with Baj, and took a stab at the “artistic flora” composed of Antoni Tàpies, Wols, Francis Bacon, and Bernard Buffet, he praised Lucio Fontana probably for the first time in print as “today perhaps the most interesting Italian artist, whose work has opened and continues to open new paths.” The tones of this Roman article should also be contextualized in relation to an important solo show the artist held in the same period at Albisola, the first monothematic exhibition of the *Linee* (Lines) at Pozzetto Chiuso in Albisola Marina from August 18 to 25, 1959;



Lucio Fontana working on *Nature*, Albisola Marina, 1959



Lucio Fontana, *Concetto spaziale, Natura* and *Concetto spaziale, Natura*, 1959, clay with slash, 64 × 29 × 15 cm and 63 × 28 × 15 cm, Fondazione Lucio Fontana, Milan

starting in July of that year the *Linee* were also traced on rolls of paper of various lengths, then enclosed in black-painted cardboard cylinders. A label was attached to the cylinder, which in the first examples was completely handwritten, providing information regarding the contents (length, name of



Linea m 10,53 (Line 10.53 Meters Long), August 1959, ink on paper, cardboard tube, 27 × 6 cm

the artist, date).²⁴ Fontana, for his part, was one of the first admirers of the *Linee* series and purchased the *Linea m 9,48* (Line 9.48 Meters Long) at this exhibition. It was actually in September 1959 that the first issue of the magazine *Azimuth*, which was founded and curated by Manzoni with Enrico Castellani, was published. This issue contained texts by heterogeneous group of intellectuals (including Vincenzo Agnetti, Nanni Balestrini, Guido Ballo, Samuel Beckett, Gillo Dorfles, Carl Laszlo, and Yoshiaki Tono) and featured reproductions of works by contemporary Italian artists (such as Franco Angeli, Agostino Bonalumi, Lucio Fontana, Gino Marotta, Mimmo Rotella, and others) and foreign artists from the historical avant-garde and the latest movements (from Kurt Schwitters to Otto Piene, from Jasper Johns to Robert Rauschenberg, from Yves Klein to Christian Megert and many others).²⁵



Linea (Line), 1961, majolica ceramic dish and glaze, 40 cm (diameter)

- 22 Cf. Tonino Caputo: *L'itinerario artistico di un pittore nomade*, ed. Marco Beraldo (Treviso: Canova, 2004), in particular 80–105.
- 23 Antonio Caputo, “Le mostre,” *Il Pensiero Nazionale* (Rome) 13, no. 8, April 16–30, 1959, 40.
- 24 For further investigation of the *Linee* see the recent publication with texts by Luca Bochicchio, Flaminio Gualdoni, Gaspare Luigi Marcone, and Jack McGrath, *Piero Manzoni: Lines*, ed. Rosalia Pasqualino di Marineo (Zurich: Hauser & Wirth Publishers, 2019), published on the occasion of the eponymous exhibition at Hauser & Wirth, New York, April 25– July 26, 2019.
- 25 For further research on the gallery and magazine see *Azimut/h: Continuità e nuovo* (Venice, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, September 20, 2014–January 19, 2015), ed. Luca Massimo Barbero (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2014).

Ancora sulle mostre e i concorsi d'arte

Si stanno svolgendo in tutta Italia le celebrazioni della «giornata Olimpica», ed in stretta relazione con la stessa, in tutte le provincie italiane sono state indette delle mostre premio per il soggetto sportivo nell'arte.

E fin qui nulla di male. Il soggetto sportivo nell'arte ha una illustre prosapia che risale sino alla antichità classica greca... ed anzi onore era per gli artisti raffigurare e cantare i giochi e le gare che si svolgevano nell'arona di Olimpia. Quindi l'idea per se stessa poteva andare bene, ma purtroppo si è subito pensato di immischiarla, perché pur presentandola come una manifestazione a carattere nazionale, l'iniziativa in realtà è stata spacciata in tanti piccoli episodi a carattere provinciale. Infatti per partecipare ad una delle mostre premio, mettiamo di Ferrara, o Reggio, o Lecce, l'artista più che accompagnato da una sua opera, deve essere preceduto da un certificato di residenza nella città in cui la mostra si svolge. Ora con questo procedimento non si è ottenuto altro risultato che diluire un premio, che poteva essere a carattere nazionale ed avere quindi un certo peso ed un determinato valore, in tante centinaia di piccoli premi e diplomi d'onore, che non vanno al di fuori, come riconoscenza, dalle mura casalinghe e che pur permettono ad un uguale numero di mezza cartuccia (in arte, s'intende...) di fregiarsi di un titolo, che nella carta dovrebbe avere un valore nazionale.

Seconda macchia nera, è risultata la formazione della commissione d'accreditazione, e della giuria. Numericamente forte di un numero di commissari che va dagli otto ai dieci, in cosa prevalgono come percentuale, i rappresentanti dello sport, a scapito naturalmente nella fase di votazione, degli intenditori e critici d'arte.

Si verifica così il caso che oscuri redattori sportivi di gazette regionali, organizzazioni di giri politici, presidenti o consiglieri di associazioni calcistiche, possano impunemente accettare dei quadri che di artistico hanno soltanto la comune denominazione, in base ad un ragionamento naturale in loro che li spinge a promuovere quelle opere in cui il movimento atletico del braccio, della gamba, del torso etc. sembra loro particolarmente apprezzato, trascurando naturalmente tutto ciò che può caratterizzare

una buona pittura, e che a loro è completamente ignota.

Naturalmente a questo punto, per rendere non per bocca, sarebbe logico che che precondensino Monacchini alla presidenza della lega lotatori, o che De Chiaro arbitrasse delle partite internazionali di calcio, e che Scarpitta intervenisse da giudice in ogni incontro di pugilato di una certa importanza.

Anzi se avessi saputo in tempo di queste mostre d'arte, mi sarei permesso di dare un mio modesto consiglio: accettare i quadri in base ai tempi cronometrati nell'eseguirli. Tempo massimo per l'esecuzione, possiamo... quaranta minuti dopo il primo arrivo, pardon... dopo il primo quadro ultimato. Naturalmente a corollario di questa mia proposta, avremmo avuto i massaggiatori privati per artisti, i secondi, dei gruppi in base alla tendenza artistica dei partecipanti, ed in ultima analisi, i pittori che si degnano per restare al ritmo infernale imposto dai più fertili.

Da Milano Viltà nell'arte

« Si parla sempre e si potrà sempre parlare dei pericoli che la cattiva pittura non ha saputo evitare, ma se ne parlerà sempre invano giacché la cattiva pittura, proprio come l'arte, esisterà sempre; così come non è stata la prima, la mostra « Vitalità nell'Arte » (Palazzo Grassi, Venezia, agosto-ottobre) non sarà nemmeno l'ultima del genere che, ahimè, vedremo.

Nessuno degli espositori riesce, nella generalità, ad intendersi o a stabilire un discorso con gli unici due pittori veramente vitali presentati nella mostra, Pollock e Burri, la cui presenza tra tutto il ballamme di quest'esposizione nostra ancor di più, dando la possibilità di un paragone diretto, quanto le retoriche espressionistiche, timorose del nuovo, paurose della libertà d'invenzione, restie ad ogni engagement superiore, siano lontane da una vera vitalità.

Infinita volte i più scemplici sentimenti umani son diventati rifugi di sciagurati: infinite volte si è tentato e si tenterà d'ingannarci invocando la patria, la mamma, la terra, persino gli spaghetti!

Giocando su sentimenti nostrani ci sono stati riproposti come una via di salvezza da orrendi baratri di perdizione persino i paesaggi briantoli, camuffati, sì, da « astratti » (un colpo al cerchio, uno alla botte) ma pur sempre paesaggi briantoli. Perché la retorica accademica si ripresenta sempre con le stesse prepotenze, gli stessi discorsi, le stesse « pitture ». Si rimpiangono le buone, vecchie macchine a vapore, i nostri vecchi stessani, si parla di fuggire al « vuoto della tecnica », di difendere (leoni!) la nostra civiltà, di ritornare all'uomo. Ma l'arte non ritorna in alcun posto:

le turbe di individuali che hanno, letteralmente, ostacolato la vita dell'arte cercando di ridurla al rango di un giochetto formale, che hanno fatto il possibile per evitare ogni impegno superiore per sé e per gli altri gli eterei fanatici della « castrazione spirituale » come avrebbe detto Goethe, non vedranno ritornare ciò che presso loro non ha mai albergato. L'artista ritorna solo alla lotta contro i luoghi comuni, alla libera ricerca e con lui s'incolleriranno e stabiliranno un dialogo coloro che si impegneranno con altrettanta totalità sullo stesso piano di lotta.

Non è con eccessi di novità o di avanguardia o di engagement intellettuale che si giustano le possibilità artistiche di una civiltà, ma proprio con certe genuine questioni che non tengono conto del discorso avviato nella situazione culturale in cui si vive ».

FURIO MANZONI

Ritornando sull'argomento Fiumicino

Naturalmente come annualmente di questi concorsi in Italia se ne organizzano migliaia: di quelli più seri ed importanti, imposti per legge, come già ho accennato nel mio precedente articolo, non se ne ha alcuna notizia.

Fiumicino e la sua direzione dei lavori tacciono. Circa un mese fa sono stati stanziati altri quattro miliardi e mezzo, la chiesa dell'aeroporto è stata ormai ultimata sin da giugno, ed i basorilievi ed i pannelli di ceramica che la adornano non ci sembra siano stati prescelti dopo una regolare partecipazione di artisti e presentazione di opere.

Poi anche darsi che le autorità competenti attendano un avvenimento importante, quale può essere mettiamo... il decemilimesimo decollo dalla pista di un aereo della TWA, o della PAA, da abbinare alla pubblicazione del bando di concorso... ma la cosa, ad essere realmente sincera, non ci sembra molto probabile.

Diciamo piuttosto che anche qui si andrà avanti per mezzo della bustarella, ed i più raccomandati potranno assaggiare una fetta di quella enorme torta che si chiama Aeroporto Intercontinentale di Fiumicino.

Ma la speranza, ultimo nome, non ci abbandona mai... ed allora mettiamoci ad attendere e speriamo.

D'altra parte posso assicurare che saremo i primi a tirare un enorme sospiro di sollievo, e ad esclamare: « Scusateli, ci evavamo sbagliati... ».

Mostre

Dada Maino, una delle più valenti giovani pittrici ha vinto meritatamente la Tavolozza d'Argento al premio « Michetti » a Francavilla a Mare.

Alla Schneider espone il pittore polacco Back. Ottimo pittore, che sfrutta con eguale bravura il concetto di spazio ed alcune intensità coloristiche.

A. CAPUTO

From Milan: Vileness in Art 1959

There is always talk and there could always be talk of the perils that bad painting has been unable to avoid, but that talk will always be in vain given that bad painting, like art itself, will always exist; just as the exhibition *Vitalità nell'Arte* (Vitality in Art; Palazzo Grassi, Venice, August-October) was not the first and neither, I'm afraid, will it be the last of its kind that we see.

None of the exhibitors manages, in general, to understand or establish a dialogue with the only two truly vital painters presented in the exhibition, Pollock and Burri, whose presence amid the bedlam of this show shows all the more, given the possibility of a direct comparison, how the expressionistic rhetoric, afraid of the new, fearful of the freedom of invention, shy of any higher

L'abbonato fedele
rinnova in tempo
l'abbonamento

“Da Milano Viltà nell'arte”
(From Milan: Vileness in Art)

Article published in the biweekly *Il Pensiero Nazionale* (Rome) 13, no. 19, October 1-15, 1959, 40.

engagement, is far from a true vitality.

Infinite times the simplest human sentiments have become the refuge of scoundrels: infinite times they have attempted and will attempt to deceive us by invoking nation, mother, land, and even spaghetti!

Playing on homegrown sentiments, we have been re-presented as a means of salvation from horrendous abysses of perdition even the minor Brianza landscapes, disguised, yes, as “abstracts” (robbing Peter to pay Paul), but still Brianza landscapes. Because academic rhetoric always comes back with the same proposals, the same discourses, the same “paintings.” They mourn the good old steam engines, our old emblems, they talk of escaping the “void of technique,” of defending (them!!!) our civilization, of returning to man.

Art does not actually return anywhere: the hordes of individuals who have, literally, obstructed

the life of art, seeking to reduce it to the status of a formal plaything, who have done everything possible to avoid any kind of higher commitment for themselves and the other eternal fanatics of “spiritual castration,” as Goethe would have said, will never see the return of what has never lodged with them. The artist only *returns* to the struggle against the commonplaces, to free research and those who commit themselves with equal totality on the same plane of struggle will understand and establish a dialogue with him.

It is not with excesses of novelties or of avant-garde or intellectual *engagement* that the artistic possibilities of a civilization are ruined, but instead with certain gratuitous issues that fail to take into account the discourse initiated in the cultural milieu in which we live.

Piero Manzoni

This text was published on the occasion of the Venetian exhibition *Vitalità nell'arte* mounted by the Centro Internazionale delle Arti e del Costume, the general secretary of which was Paolo Marinotti, who also the author of a text in French, *Réponse à moi-même*, that was included in the catalogue.²⁶ The numerous artists featured included Karel Appel, Alberto Burri, Wessel Couzijn, Alan Davie, Willem de Kooning, Jean Dubuffet, Franco Garelli, Asger Jorn, Marino Marini, Gea Panter, Jackson Pollock, Arnaldo and Giò Pomodoro, Kimber Smith, and Emilio Vedova.



Page from catalogue of the exhibition *Vitalità nell'arte*, Palazzo Grassi, Venice, August–October, 1959

The only artists that Manzoni considered “vital” were Pollock and Burri. Manzoni also reiterated his admiration of the Umbrian master Burri in the letters he wrote in the summer of 1960 to the Spanish intellectual Juan-Eduardo Cirlot who considered Fontana, Burri, and Manzoni to be the most original trio in Italian art of the period.²⁷ In particular, in January 1957 Burri had been featured in a solo show at Galleria del Naviglio



Alberto Burri,
Sacco e Rosso,
1959, burlap,
acrylic, vinavil
on canvas,
150 × 130 cm

in Milan; works such as *Martedì grasso* (Shrove Tuesday) from 1956, and the *Bianchi* (Whites), the series launched by the Umbrian master from the beginning of the decade, as well as the famous *Studio per lo strappo* (Study for the Rip) from 1952 acquired by Fontana, were very probably pieces known to Manzoni. According to Manzoni's article, awareness of American painting and in particular Pollock, who was already a "myth," was widespread in Italy at that time. There were museum exhibitions such as *The New American Painting*, a group show at the Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna in Milan in June 1958, and the solo show at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome in March 1958, which was to inspire the essay by the young critic Enrico Crispolti.²⁸



Jackson Pollock,
Convergence, 1952,
oil on canvas,
242 × 399 cm



Achrome, ca. 1959,
canvas in creased
squares and kaolin,
101 × 81 cm, Rira
Collection, Cologne

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Cf. *Vitalità nell'arte* (Venice, Palazzo Grassi, August–October 1959) (Venice: Centro Internazionale delle Arti e del Costume, 1959). It is noteworthy that the catalogue was designed by Albe Steiner and that Carlo Scarpa was responsible for the exhibition design, which was later shown at the Kunsthalle in Recklinghausen (October–December 1959) and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (December 1959–January 1960).

27

Cf. Juan-Eduardo Cirlot, *De la crítica a la filosofía del arte*, ed. Lourdes Cirlot (Barcelona: Quaderns Crema, 1997), 107–24.

28

Enrico Crispolti, *Pollock* (Milan: All'insegna del Pesce d'oro, 1958).

8 domande 8

al pittore Manzoni

Casualmente mi sono incontrato con il pittore Piero Manzoni. (Vedi lettera a Gu in n. 38) quello che espone le linee: devo ammettere che sembra saggio.

D.: Lei ha esposto non molto tempo fa una linea di m. 19,93: può dirmi qualche particolare?

R.: Si trattava di una vera e propria linea esposta in un rotolo di carta lungo appunto m. 19,93: quella di cui parlavo l'ho sacrificata alle esigenze dimostrative, l'altro rotolo ed appesa alle pareti della Galleria, ma le altre erano chiuse in tubi sigillati.

D.: Dunque l'acquiescenza non può vedere la linea?

R.: Può vedere solo un campione incolorito esattamente all'annuo insieme ad un'etichetta che ne garantisce il contenuto, l'autore, la data di nascita e ne specifica la lunghezza. In questi giorni poi ho

eseguito una linea di lunghezza infinita, ma anche questa ha il suo difetto. Bisogna tenere l'altissimo che la contiene perfettamente teso, perché aprendolo la linea si spezza.

Q.: Lei è un dada? C'è il dadaismo?

R.: Sì, appunto, e quel movimento sorto a Parigi verso il 1910 con lo scopo di rinviare l'arte contro la tradizione è "dada" e fecero i baffi alla Gioconda e alla pittura. Alla fine degli anni '20 i dadaisti astratti opposero la concretizzazione di oggetti giusti. Alla fine degli anni '30 si veniva tenuta, nel 1913 a New York, il gruppo "dada" invece a parli in precedenza di un vespaiolo di Mondrian, Bidel e pittori ricettivi, e tuttora conservano, il Museo di Arte Contemporanea di Amsterdam o la Galleria dell'Arte Informale di Lega. Ho un pezzo teso, lo vuol comprare?

D.: Lanci perdere e dico, ha avuto altri generi di produzione oltre le linee?

R.: Certamente, dal '57 ho cominciato a produrre i quadri bianchi: più tecnicamente "cassetti" scaturi.

D.: Ha abolito il colore oltre alla figura?

R.: Sì, lo tendo ad abolire tutto ciò che nell'espressione artistica può essere superfluo. Vede, ci sono dei quadri che contengono il quadro alla sua scatola da sempre il più possibile: così prendono tutto quello che trovano; per lo più roba d'altri, o cercano di compiere in questa scatola (finché trabocca di cianfrusaglie). Nel primo è la scatola, cioè il quadro, e la scatola è poco a poco, quando siamo giunti al fondo della scatola è vuota, allora lasciano in aria la scatola e ce ne andiamo.

(Ho creduto opportuno risparmiare le tre domande che ancora mi mancavano, se mai, le chiederò per telefono al manzoniano).

GRECO

Le idee del pitecantropo

INCONTRI

Quando io ero come, gli incontri storici avevano tutt'altro aspetto di quelli odierni. Personalmente, l'incontro più storico che dovetti sostenere fu quello con una dozzina di brontosauri arrabbiati: ciò si dimostra che potrei benissimo affrontare anche la politica estera dei giorni nostri.

Tuttavia, la mia lunga esperienza mi fa avere idee piuttosto personali sull'utilità degli incontri più o meno al vertice. Per circa mezzo milione di anni sono stato molto pessimista in proposito, e l'ho sempre azzeccato. Oggi, per non fare un torto a voi uomini sapienti, mi astengo dall'esprimere un parere sui viaggi di Kravtsov e di Eisenhower. Preferisco, modestamente, occuparmi degli altri cento e cento incontri minori che si svolgono ogni giorno.

In primo luogo, ci sono gli incontri tra alleati. Oggi parte Adenauer per assicurare De Gaulle della sua assoluta fedeltà atlantica. Appena Adenauer è partito, scatta come un fulmine De Gaulle e corre da Mac Millan per garantirgli di essere affezionatissimo alle comunità atlantiche. Però non lo trovo; il premier inglese è partito per la Turchia allo scopo di giurare sotto il sole di Ankara che i rapporti tra alleati atlantici sono insostituibili. Ad Ankara trova Segni, arrivato il per



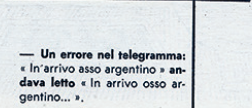
garantire a suo volta la fedeltà italiana all'alleanza; il quale Segni, però deve partire di corsa, perché a Roma lo aspetta il primo ministro olandese, giunto quaggiù al solo scopo di rincuorare le sue intenzioni ferme ed immutabili di non tradire l'alleanza atlantica. È così di seguito.

Si incontrano sopra le nostre teste, a velocità supersoniche, gli aerei che trasportano dozzine di ministri degli esteri, anch'essi in continuo, febbrile movimento, sempre, beninteso per assicurare gli alleati della propria fedeltà. A ciò si aggiungono discorsi, telegrammi, telefonate, piccioni viaggiatori che recano messaggi inespugnati tutti alla fedeltà atlantica — e scusate se mi ripeto, ma i politici si ripetono ancor più di me.

Io mi domando che cosa penserebbe un maresciallo dei carabinieri se tutti i giorni i nipoti di un miliardario si recassero da lui tre o quattro volte per garantirgli che non intendono ammazzare il nonno, che è vero, il nonno è ricco però loro non lo avvelenano, che stia pure tranquillo perché non gli fanno l'iniezione con l'ago avvelenato, che intendono evitare in ogni modo di buttarlo dal treno in corsa. Non credete che il maresciallo avrebbe ragione di insospettirsi?

Poi, ci sono gli incontri tra i nostri rappresentanti e quelli dei paesi arabi o negri, od estremi orientali. Qui, regolarmente, si parla di crescente prestigio dell'Italia. E per fortuna ho finito il foglio, altrimenti, se docessi dire quello che penso del prestigio politico italiano in quei paesi, andremmo tutti a finire dentro. Per stanchezza, mi è andata bene.

MUTTI, pre-nome delle caverne



Giustizia per la Calabria!

La rivista «Tre eme» (Roma, via Risolano Venuti, 78) nel suo fascicolo n. 3 pubblica, per la firma del suo direttore Silvio Mairano, un articolo sulle possibilità economiche della Calabria partendo dal punto di vista del turismo, giungendo alla conclusione che la bella regione calabrese, disattesa da numerosi grandi ingegni, sta stata trattata ingiustamente dai vari Governi che si succedettero al potere nei primi cento anni dell'unità d'Italia.

Nello stesso fascicolo — che è riccamente illustrato — Basil Savarino pubblica un guaioso racconto di ambiente siciliano d'ultri tempi, una aspra vicenda che non solo si poteva essere vissuta in qualsiasi paese del Mezzogiorno. È una nota di colore passano tanto più piacevole alla lettura in quanto contrasta, volutamente, con i costumi attualmente in voga, come un richiamo a tempi; forse di minor programma di molto più intensa vita spirituale.

Tra gli altri articoli contenuti nello stesso fascicolo, particolarmente interessanti quelli riguardanti: « Il culto della Televisione », lo sviluppo degli Autostati dell'A.C.I. e la Missione Italiana a Palma, nonché le varie rubriche.

Eight Questions to the Painter Manzoni 1959

I met the painter Piero Manzoni by chance (see letter to Gu in no. 38), the one who exhibits the lines: I have to admit that he seems wise.

Not long ago you exhibited a line 19.93 meters long: can you explain it to me?

It was an actual line traced on a roll of paper that was in fact 19.93 meters long; I sacrificed the one we are talking about for demonstration purposes—I had unrolled it and hung it on the walls of the gallery—but the others were sealed in tubes.

“8 domande 8 al pittore Manzoni” (Eight Questions to the Painter Manzoni)

Interview by Wladimiro Greco with Piero Manzoni published in // *Travaso* (Rome), no. 40, October 5, 1959, 18.

So the purchaser cannot see the line?

He can only see a sample glued to the outside of the tube together with a label authenticating the contents, the artist, and the date of execution and specifying the length. In the last few days I also made a line of infinite length, but this too has its defect. The tube containing it has to be kept perfectly sealed, because if it is opened the line disappears.

Are you a Dadaist? What is Dadaism?

Yes, I belong to that movement that arose in Paris in around 1910 with the aim of renewing art against tradition: the Dadaists added moustaches to the *Mona Lisa*, and they countered the first timid expositions of the abstract sculptors with the concretization of sanitary objects.

The Dada group sent the porcelain components of a Montmartre urinal to the exhibition of abstract art held in 1913 in New York. The Museum of Contemporary Art in Amsterdam and the Gallery of Informal Art in Liège received and still have a bidet and chamber pots in their collections. I have a rare piece; do you want to buy it?

Never mind, but tell us, have you produced anything else other than the lines?

Certainly, since '57 I have been producing the white paintings: technically speaking "achrome surfaces."

Have you abolished color as well as the figure?

Yes, I am working to abolish everything that may be superfluous in

artistic expression. You see, there are painters who believe that the picture is a box to be filled as full as possible; so they take everything they find, mainly the stuff of others, and try to compress it into this box until it overflows with trinkets. We take the box, that is, the picture, and we empty it little by little, and when we reach the bottom, when the box is empty, we throw the box into the air and leave.

(I felt it was better to save the three questions I still had left. I can always ask them by phoning the asylum).

Greco

dal 18 al 24 agosto 1959

piero manzoni

esporrà al Pozzetto Chiuso in Albisola Mare una linea lunga metri 19,93 ed altre linee di lunghezza minore

la S.V. è invitata all'inaugurazione che avrà luogo alle ore 18 di Martedì 18 agosto

Invitation to the exhibition *Piero Manzoni*, Pozzetto Chiuso, Albisola Marina, August 18–24, 1959

This text, a blend of the serious and the facetious, provides useful information regarding the *Linee* (Lines) and was written on the occasion of Manzoni's solo show at Pozzetto Chiuso at Albisola Marina in August 1959. Greco had already published in the same satirical magazine an ironic and sarcastic article about the exhibition at Galleria del Prisma featuring Bonalumi, Castellani, and Manzoni and another about the *Linee*.²⁹ In addition to references to the Dadaist experiments that are not strictly correct from a philological, historiographical perspective, the interview contains an important allusion to



Linea m 9,48 (Line 9.48 Meters Long), 1959, ink on paper, cardboard tube, 26.5 × 5.7 cm, Fondazione Lucio Fontana, Milan



Linea [frammento]
(Line [Fragment]),
1959, ink on paper,
24 × 150 cm,
Giovanni Anceschi
Collection

a “line of infinite length . . . The tube containing it has to be kept perfectly sealed, because if it is opened the line disappears.” This type of *Linea* was partially referenced also by Vincenzo Agnetti in the publication *Piero Manzoni: le linee*, published for Manzoni’s solo show that opened at the gallery Azimut in Milan on December 4, 1959. All the known examples of the *Linea di lunghezza infinita* (Line of Infinite Length) are dated 1960 and composed of a simple wooden tube with a paper label that “in-forms” of the “in-finite,” without an opening case. The passage, “You see, there are painters who believe that the picture is a box to be filled as full as possible . . . We take the box, that is, the picture, and we empty it little by little . . . we throw the box into the air and leave” is in tune with certain phrases in “Spazio vuoto e spazio pieno” (Empty Space



Achrome, ca. 1958,
creased canvas and
kaolin, 70 × 100 cm

and Full Space), the text by Yoshiaki Tono that was published in the first issue of Manzoni’s *Azimuth* in September of that year.

Altre notizie sulla Quadriennale

L'agitazione dei pittori dissidenti, esaurientemente esposta nel numero precedente del nostro giornale, non accenna a finire, anzi in una conferenza stampa tenuta al caffè Rosati, sabato 17 ottobre, sono stati esposti ai giornalisti convocati i termini in cui i firmatari del manifesto d'astensione hanno deciso di sviluppare le loro posizioni.

Verrà organizzata una mostra di « Secezione » che avrà il carattere di un Salon di artisti riuniti in una libera associazione. Questa associazione che assumerà il nome di « Libera Associazione di Pittori » ed il cui comitato è formato da Vedova, Santomaso, Fontana, Reggiani, Consagra, D'Orazio, Afro e Corpora, avrà come scopo primo la difesa delle mostre nazionali dagli interessi di parte dei sindacati. A questo punto occorre dire che l'adesione di alcuni artisti all'operato della commissione Baldini-Belloni e soci, non ha minimamente incrinato quelli che sono i presupposti primi che hanno originato l'astensione della parte più viva ed operante dell'arte italiana, ma hanno il valore di singoli interessi personali esauditi. Soprattutto perché la secessione in atto non era causata dal numero di invii diramati o dalla quantità delle opere richieste (anche se questi punti determinavano alcune gravissime deficienze) ma da una coscienza e generale constatazione che lo statuto che regola o che avrebbe dovuto regolare l'operato della commissione inviti, è insufficiente, superato e non soddisfa più quindi i valori spirituali e culturali dell'arte moderna.

Resta ancora da aggiungere che gli aciduli attacchi di qualche critico bilioso e superato ad artisti come Afro o D'Orazio, assume il valore di sporadico episodio di feracità da non prendere minimamente in considerazione.

Stando così le cose, le linee di condotta dei reggiani della quadriennale e degli artisti dissidenti continuano a divergere sempre di più, e sarà nostro dovere informare l'opinione pubblica italiana degli ulteriori sviluppi che la situazione dovesse assumere.

Le mostre

La nuova stagione artistica romana è ormai ufficialmente cominciata, ed alcune ottime mostre d'aperta ci hanno favorevolmente impressionati.

Alla galleria F88 di via Margutta, espongono i fratelli Sartoris. Pittore il fratello maggiore Alberto, scultore Ugo.

I motivi d'ispirazione delle opere esposte partono sostanzialmente da una medesima origine, dovuta ad una maturata ed elaborata influenza dell'arte

pre-colombiana. Alberto ci è sembrato molto più completo di Ugo, anche perché la maggiore età gli ha aperto una più completa visione delle esperienze culturali che sono alla base della sua pittura, permeandogli così di portare sulla tela con una tecnica perfetta i valori base di queste esperienze. La superficie del quadro spesso sembra frammentarsi in una serie di ricerche particolari, pur non perdendo nulla della unità iniziale, anzi rafforzandola.

Bellissime opere soprattutto « Segni nello spazio », « Pescatori all'alba », « L'Indo » e « La terra degli elefanti ».

Ugo invece, pur lasciando intravedere ottime possibilità di sviluppo, ci è sembrato ancora legato ad una soluzione formale. La sua produzione comprende bronzi, tuffi e cementi. Tra i bronzi molto buoni « Figura arcaica » e « Motivo spinale ». Da sottolineare anche il tuffo « Motivo ad incastro » ed il cemento « Sacerdote ».

Per la stessa galleria vi è da segnalare che nella seconda quindicina di novembre esporrà nuovamente il pittore Max Günther, che nella sua precedente mostra aveva fatto registrare un tutto venduto.

Alla Galleria « La Salita » espone la pittrice Bice Lazzari. Impegnata in una ricerca monocromatica di superfici, ha sviluppato dei quadri, degni della massima attenzione. Alcune delle opere particolarmente felici come la « Superficie IRIH 1959 » creano nello spettatore uno stato di sospensione spirituale, come l'intrusione di una forma quasi violente in una superficie spaziale di attesa.

Alla galleria « Schneider » hanno esposto insieme lo scultore Cappelletto ed il pittore Nangroni. Tanto ci hanno soddisfatto le opere del Cappelletto quanto ci hanno lasciato la bocca un poco amara i quadri del Nangroni. Infatti c'è da annotare che mentre nelle tre superfici bianche esposte in vetrina vi era una linea di ricerca ed un discorso ben definito, una qualche caotica confusione regnava nelle opere distribuite nel resto della galleria. Il Cappelletto invece denota una ben costruita ricerca spaziale che nei ferri acuminati che circondano le sue strutture sviluppa il massimo delle sue linee di forza.



Alla Galleria « Appia Antica » dal 24 espone il gruppo O una serie di disegni litografici, serigrafici e collage. Gli espositori sono i seguenti: Van Bohemen, Dahmen, Manzoni, Mota, Pieters, Sanders, Schoonhoven, Schumacher, Wage-macher, Tajiri.

Alla galleria del « Prima » di Milano espone il pittore Jochems.

ANTONIO CARUTO

Da Milano

La stagione artistica milanese si è aperta quest'anno con una piacevole sorpresa: la mostra dei « giovani » Anceschi, Boriani, Colombo, De Vecchi, quattro pittori alla loro prima esposizione, viene infatti ad assumere un del tutto particolare ed importante significato nel panorama artistico di Milano, portando l'adesione (per lo meno mentale) dei giovanissimi alle nuove prospettive programmate.

Negli ultimi anni infatti si è verificato a Milano un netto movimento di reazione a quel genere di pittura cui si accennò (per quanto vagamente) per certi suoi caratteri di « accomodamento » come ad un « secondo Novecento »: reazione alle forme intimiste, naturaliste e anche neo-figurative che cercarono alcuni anni fa di inserirsi in un discorso neo-surrealista, ma che (come ogni forma rinunciataria), scivolarono su di un piano quasi regionale, e si ritrovano ora, mancando loro l'adesione delle nuove leve, isolate.

L'inserirsi di questa mostra di giovanissimi nella situazione attuale con un netto rifiuto verso queste forme o para-realistiche e neo-espressioniste, è dunque significativo e ci fa sperare bene per un ridimensionamento della situazione artistica milanese.

Come tutti i giovani Anceschi, Boriani, Colombo e De Vecchi, per quanto molto acuti e preparati, hanno ovviamente i loro difetti, nette incertezze, chiare paternità; ma se è facile fare a questo proposito i nomi di Fontana e Burri, possiamo scegliere nelle opere dei nostri quattro una vivace intenzione inventiva che può trascendere decisamente i legami di materiali e gesti per accettare da Burri e Fontana un insegnamento assai più profondo.

In molti infatti i legami con altri artisti da cui ovviamente derivano sono del tutto di superficie e sterilmente accademici: si veda ad esempio Marella che usa le materie di Burri... per ricavarne alta fine... paesaggi e nature morte.

Ciò che invece di veramente vitale ci danno i grandi artisti Burri, come Fontana, Piraso, come Pollock, non è tanto una materia, o un gesto, o un segno, quanto piuttosto una lezione di attitudine di vita: la volontà, la forza di far dell'arte: la libertà d'invenzione.

E' questa l'unica lezione che possiamo assimilare, l'unica che ci riguarda.

PIERO MANDRINI

From Milan 1959

The Milanese art season opened with a pleasant surprise this year: the exhibition of the “young” Anceschi, Boriani, Colombo, and Devecchi, four painters in their first show, in fact takes on a particular and important significance within the Milan art scene, presenting the (at least mental) adherence of the very young to the new programmed perspectives.

In recent years in Milan in fact there has been a clear reaction to that genre of painting that due to certain characteristics of “compromise” has been suggested (albeit vaguely) as a “second twentieth century”; a reaction to the intimist, naturalist, and also neo-figurative forms that a few years ago sought to insert themselves into a neo-Surrealist discourse, but which (as with every defeatist form) slipped

“Da Milano”
(From Milan)

Article published in the biweekly *Il Pensiero Nazionale* (Rome) 13, no. 21, November 1-15, 1959, 40.

into an almost regional context and now find themselves isolated, the younger generations having failed to join.

Participating in this exhibition of very young artists in the current situation with a clear refusal of these para-Surrealist and neo-Expressionist forms is therefore significant and inspires hope for a reshaping of the Milanese art scene.

Like all young people, Anceschi, Boriani, Colombo, and Devecchi, as acute and well-versed as they are, obviously have their defects, evident uncertainties, and clear influences: but while it is easy in this sense to name Fontana and Burri, we can see in the works of our four a lively inventiveness certainly capable of transcending the bonds of materials and gestures to accept from Burri and Fontana a much deeper teaching.

In many cases, in fact, the ties with other artists from which they

obviously derive are wholly superficial and aseptically academic: we see, for example, Marotta using the materials of Burri . . . to obtain at the end . . . landscapes and still lifes.

What the great artists such as Burri, Fontana, Picasso, and Pollock give us that is truly vital is not so much a material or a gesture or a sign, as a lesson in attitude to life: the will, the strength to make art: the freedom of invention.

This is the only lesson we can assimilate, the only one that concerns us.

Piero Manzoni



Cover of *Il Pensiero Nazionale* (Rome) 13, no. 21, November 1–15, 1959

This text was published on the occasion of the group show featuring Giovanni Anceschi, Davide Boriani, Gianni Colombo, and Gabriele Devecchi (or De Vecchi) at Galleria Pater in Milan from September 22 to October 10, 1959. A few months later the artists were to found Gruppo T, with the T standing for *tempo*, or “time.” Manzoni promoted the four “young” artists as a group with a vocation for experimentation; in fact, they were to contribute to the programming at Azimut. The gallery opened its doors the following month with Manzoni’s solo show *Linee* (Lines), which began on December 4, 1959, and a group show in which Anceschi, Boriani, Castellani, Colombo, Devecchi, Maino, Manzoni, Mari, Massironi, and Zilocchi all participated, lasting from December 22, 1959, to January 3, 1960.

Arturo Schwarz summarized the episode as follows: “At the end of ’58 the group [Anceschi, Boriani, Colombo, Devecchi] was already practically formed and began an initial



Gabriele Devecchi, Davide Boriani, Giovanni Anceschi, and Gianni Colombo with *Ambiente a volume variabile—Grande oggetto pneumatico* (Large Pneumatic Object—Environment with Variable Volume), work on display at *Mirrorama*, Gruppo T's first exhibition, Galleria Pater, Milan, 1960

collaboration, publicly documenting the activity in an exhibition in September '59 at Galleria Pater in Milan, with works clearly designed to pose and resolve questions of material and surface (Action Painting, Spazialismo [Spatialism], monochromes). On the occasion of this exhibition, close relations with Baj, Fontana, and Manzoni were established, with whom, and with Castellani, he founded the gallery Azimuth [*sic*], soon abandoned, after an initial group show, with the young artists, following ideological disagreements.”³⁰

In Manzoni's text, the passage “the will, the strength to make art: the freedom of invention” is practically identical to the phrase Agnetti adopted in the text *Piero Manzoni: le linee* in December 1959: “the only eternally assimilable elements they have handed down to us are willpower, and the power to create art,” testifying to the particular harmony between the two artists.



Invitation to the group exhibition, Azimut, Milan, December 22, 1959–January 3, 1960

2
1960

a cura di Enrico Castellani - Piero Manzoni



AZIMUTH

**THE NEW
ARTISTIC
CONCEPTION**

**LA NUOVA
CONCEZIONE
ARTISTICA**

**DIE NEUE
KÜNSTLERISCHE
KONZEPTION**

**LA NOUVELLE
CONCEPTION
ARTISTIQUE**

Editorial [The New Artistic Conception] 1960

While in the first issue of *Azimuth* we set out the general premises for a new artistic scene, in this second issue we have tried to clarify it within a particularly significant panorama.

What we are proposing is an all-new artistic conception: other artists are perhaps now working within this trend, but those that appear here are the promoters, the most significant protagonists.

This issue is published on the occasion of the exhibition *La nuova concezione artistica* (The New Artistic Conception) held in January at the gallery Azimut in Milan, the first exhibition of an avant-garde movement to be presented in Italy for some decades.

For technical reasons we have only published one work for each

Se nel primo numero di Azimuth avevamo posto le premesse generiche ad una nuova situazione artistica, in questo secondo numero abbiamo cercato di puntualizzarla, in un panorama particolarmente significativo.

Quella che proponiamo è una concezione artistica integralmente nuova: forse altri artisti lavorano ora al seguito di questa nuova tendenza, ma quelli che qui appaiono ne sono i promotori, i più significativi protagonisti.

Questo numero è pubblicato in occasione della mostra «la nuova concezione artistica» tenuta in gennaio alla galleria «Azimut» in Milano, la prima mostra d'una tendenza d'avanguardia che venga presentata in Italia da alcuni decenni.

Per ragioni tecniche abbiamo pubblicato solo un'opera per ogni artista; altre opere di particolare interesse sono citate nel catalogo della mostra, inserito al centro della rivista.

L'assenza di O. Piene dalla mostra, è dovuta a motivi di forza maggiore. Cogliamo l'occasione per ringraziare quanti col loro aiuto ci hanno permesso l'organizzazione della mostra e l'edizione di Azimuth 2, in particolare la Signora Isa Buzzi, l'Arch. F. Buzzi, il Dr. U. Kultermann, direttore dello Städtisches Museum Leverkusen, il sig. A. Maschera, il sig. M. Arcaini, e la Soc. Tecnograf di Milano.

La redazione

AZIMUTH 2 dedicato a

« la nuova concezione artistica »

a cura di Enrico Castellani e Piero Manzoni
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testi di

Enrico Castellani
Udo Kultermann
Piero Manzoni
Otto Piene

opere di

Kilian Breier
Enrico Castellani
Oscar Holweck
Yves Klein
Heinz Mack
Piero Manzoni
Almir Mavignier
Otto Piene

“Redazionale [La nuova concezione artistica]”
(Editorial [The New Artistic Conception])

Editorial, text published in Italian in *Azimuth* (Milan) 2, 1960.

artist; other works of particular interest are cited in the exhibition catalogue, inserted in the center of the magazine.

The absence of O. Piene from the exhibition is due to force majeure. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those whose help has permitted the organization of the exhibition and the publication of *Azimuth 2*, in particular Ms. Isa Buzzi, the architect F. Buzzi, Dr. U. Kultermann, director of the Städtisches Museum Leverkusen, Mr. A. Maschera, Mr. M. Arcaini, and Società Tecnograf of Milan.

The editors

This brief text, which is signed “The editors” and therefore attributable to Manzoni and Castellani, is a kind of introduction to the second and final issue of the magazine *Azimuth*. The issue’s title was “The New Artistic Conception” (in Italian, English, French, and German), and it was associated with the exhibition of the same title held from January 4 to February 1, 1960, at the gallery Azimut in Milan. The texts published were “Continuity and Newness” by Castellani, “A New Concept of Painting” by Udo Kultermann, “Darkness and Light” by Otto Piene, and the well-known text “Free Dimension” (see



Invitation to the exhibition *La nuova concezione artistica*, Azimut, Milan, January 4–February 1, 1960



Uliano Lucas and
Piero Manzoni
at the exhibition
12 Linee (12 Lines)
at Azimut, Milan,
December 1959

pages 155–61) by Manzoni. The “catalogue” cited in the editorial was in reality a pamphlet listing the names of the artists in the group show (Kilian Breier, Oskar Holweck, Yves Klein, Heinz Mack, and Almir Mavignier in addition to Manzoni and Castellani) and the captions to a number of works. This issue of *Azimuth*—as noted in the magazine—was dated January 1960 but actually published a few months later; Antonio Caputo wrote, for example, reinterpreting the editorial: “*In Milan*: On May 10 the new issue of *Azimuth* appeared, published by the gallery of the same name, edited by Piero Manzoni and Enrico Castellani. The first issue published in 1959 provided a broad overview of the advanced artistic trends of today, with particular reference to the young artists, and in particular to the development, from Automatism and from Art Informel through to monochromatic and achromatic experiences. The second issue (published in three languages given the widespread distribution of the magazine abroad) is entirely dedicated to the ‘new artistic conception,’ a movement headed in Italy by the editors of the magazine, in France by Yves Klein and Tinguely, in Germany by Mack and Piene.”³¹

In the same months, the title “The New Artistic Conception” was to be used for the exhibition *Castellani Manzoni: A New Artistic Conception* at New Vision Centre in London, from March 1 to 19, and in April for the group show at the Circolo del Pozzetto in Padua, for which the manifesto of the same title was to be printed (see pages 169–70).

Antonio Caputo, “Di tutto un po’,” *Il Pensiero Nazionale* (Rome) 14, no. 11, June 1–15, 1960, 40, and cf. Tonino Caputo, *L’itinerario artistico di un pittore nomade*, 102–03.

lichkeiten. Das ästhetische Ziel aber bleibt, die Farbe in Bewegung zu bringen, dem Betrachter das dynamische Eigenleben der Farbe physisch erlebbar zu machen. «Das Licht der Farbe auf Bildern in seinem Schein flutet zwischen dem Bild und dem Betrachter und füllt den Raum, der zwischen ihnen liegt.» (Piene).

In den Bildern der jungen Maler lassen sich von der Konstruktion, von der technischen Ausführung her Vergleichspunkte zu veränderten Formen des modernen Lebens überhaupt ziehen, zur experimentellen Arbeitsweise der Physiker, die mit dem Begriff der Anti-Materie zu arbeiten beginnen, zur Produktionsweise der modernen Industrie, die elektronische Steuerungsanlagen für umfangreiche Arbeitsprozesse eingeführt hat und zur erstmaligen Überwindung der Erdschwere durch die neueste Raketenentwicklung.

LIBERA DIMENSIONE

Il verificarsi di nuove condizioni, il proporsi di nuovi problemi, comportano, colla necessità di nuove soluzioni, nuovi metodi, nuove misure: non ci si stacca dalla terra correndo o saltando; occorrono le ali; le modificazioni non bastano: la trasformazione dev'essere integrale.

Per questo io non riesco a capire i pittori che, pur dicendosi interessati ai problemi moderni, si pongono a tutt'oggi di fronte al quadro come se questo fosse una superficie da riempire di colori e di forme, secondo un gusto più o meno apprezzabile, più o meno orecchiato. Tracciano un segno, indietreggiano, guardano il loro operato inclinando il capo e socchiudendo un occhio, poi balzano di nuovo in avanti, aggiungono un'altro segno, un'altro colore della tavolozza, e continuano in questa ginnastica finché non hanno riempito il quadro, coperta la tela: il quadro è finito: una superficie d'illimitate possibilità è ora ridotta ad una specie di recipiente in cui sono forzati e compressi colori innaturali, significati artificiali. Perché invece non vuotare questo recipiente? perché non liberare questa superficie? Perché non cercare di scoprire il significato illimitato di uno spazio totale, di una luce pura ed assoluta?

Alludere, esprimere, rappresentare, sono oggi problemi inesistenti (e di questo ho già scritto alcuni anni fa), sia che si tratti di rappresentazione di un oggetto, di un fatto, di una idea, di un fenomeno dinamico o no: un quadro vale solo in quanto è, essere totale: non bisogna dir nulla: essere soltanto; due colori in-

Neuartige Strukturen von grundlegender Verbindlichkeit spielen bei allen diesen zeitgenössischen Bestrebungen eine entscheidende Rolle. Doch niemals lassen sich Dinge der technischen Wirklichkeit auf die Kunst übertragen, noch lässt sich ein künstlerisches Ereignis durch verwandte Formen aus der Wirklichkeit legitimieren oder motivieren. Der Künstler gebraucht lediglich wie der Wissenschaftler oder der Techniker die Materialien seiner Zeit und bringt mit ihnen die von ihm als notwendig erkannte Aufgabe zur Gestaltung. So bleibt die Gewinnung einer künstlerischen Struktur wie im Bereich der Technik die technische Struktur, immer nur ein Ausgangspunkt, immer nur die Basis für das, was als Resultat angestrebt wird: im Bereich der Kunst die auf den Menschen gerichtete totale Veränderung seines Seins.

UDO KULTERMANN

tonati o due tonalità di uno stesso colore sono già un rapporto estraneo al significato della superficie, unica, illimitata, assolutamente dinamica: l'infinità è rigorosamente monocroma, o meglio ancora di nessun colore (e in fondo una monocromia, mancando ogni rapporto di colore, non diventa anch'essa incolore?).

La problematica artistica che si avvale della composizione, della forma perde qui ogni valore: nello spazio totale forma, colore, dimensioni non hanno senso; l'artista ha conquistato la sua integrale libertà: la materia pura diventa pure energia; gli ostacoli dello spazio, le schiavitù del vizio soggettivo sono rotti: tutta la problematica artistica è superata.

E' per me quindi oggi incomprensibile l'artista che stabilisce rigorosamente i limiti di una superficie su cui collocare in rapporto esatto, in rigoroso equilibrio forme e colori: perché preoccuparsi di come collocare una linea in uno spazio? perché stabilire uno spazio, perché queste limitazioni? Composizione di forma, forme nello spazio, profondità spaziale, tutti questi problemi ci sono estranei: una linea si può solo tracciarla, lunghissima, all'infinito, al di fuori di ogni problema di composizione o di dimensione: nello spazio totale non esistono dimensioni. Inutili sono anche qui tutti i problemi di colore, ogni questione di rapporto cromatico (anche se si tratta solo di modulazioni di tono), possiamo solo stendere un'unico colore, o piuttosto ancora tendere un'unica

superficie ininterrotta e continua (da cui sia escluso ogni intervento del superfluo, ogni possibilità interpretativa): non si tratta di «dipingere» blu nel blu o bianco su bianco (sia nel senso di comporre, sia nel senso di esprimersi): esattamente il contrario: la questione per me è dare una superficie integralmente bianca (anzi integralmente incolore, neutra) al di fuori di ogni fenomeno pittorico, di ogni intervento estraneo al valore di superficie: un bianco che non è un paesaggio polare, una materia evocatrice o una bella materia, una sensazione o un simbolo o altro ancora: una superficie bianca che è una superficie bianca e basta (una superficie incolore che è una superficie incolore) anzi, meglio ancora, che è e basta: essere (e essere totale è puro divenire).

Questa superficie indefinita (unicamente viva), se nella contingenza materiale dell'opera non può essere infinita, è però senz'altro infinita, ripetibile all'infinito, senza soluzione di continuità; e ciò appare ancora più chiaramente nelle «linee»: qui non esiste più nemmeno il possibile equivoco del qua-

dro: la linea si sviluppa solo in lunghezza, corre all'infinito: l'unica dimensione è il tempo. Va da sé che una «linea» non è un orizzonte né un simbolo, e non vale in quanto più o meno bella, ma in quanto più o meno linea: in quanto è (come del resto una macchia vale quanto più o meno macchia, e non in quanto più o meno bella o evocatrice; ma in questo caso la superficie ha ancora solo valore di medium). Lo stesso si può ripetere per i «corpi d'aria» (sculture pneumatiche) riducibili ed estensibili, da un minimo ad un massimo (da niente all'infinito), sferoidi assolutamente indeterminati, perché ogni intervento inteso a dare una forma (anche informale) è illegittimo e illogico.

Non si tratta di formare, non si tratta di articolare messaggi (né si può ricorrere a interventi estranei, quali macchinosità parascientifiche, intimismi da psicanalisi, composizioni da grafica, fantasie etnografiche ecc: . . . ogni disciplina ha in sé i suoi elementi di soluzione); non sono forse espressione, fantasma, astrazione, vuote finzioni? Non c'è nulla da dire: c'è solo da essere, c'è solo da vivere.

PIERO MANZONI

FREE DIMENSION

The emergence of new conditions and the appearance of new problems imply, together with the necessity of new solutions, new methods and new terms of measurement. One does not leave the ground merely by running and jumping; wings are required. Modifications are not sufficient; the transformation must be integral.

It is for this reason that I am unable to understand the painters that, whilst declaring themselves to be interested in modern problems, even today look on a painting as if it was a surface to be filled with colour and forms in accordance with a taste which can be more or less appreciated and which is more or less trained. They trace in a line, stand back, look at their work with head tilted to one side and with squinting eye, then jump forward once again and add another line or another colour from the palette; and these gymnastics continue until the canvas is filled up, covered. The painting is thus completed and a surface with limitless possibilities is finally reduced to a sort of recipient into which unnatural colours and artificial significance are forced and compressed. Why not empty, instead, this recipient? Why not liberate the surface? Why not attempt to discover the limitless significance of total space? Of pure and absolute light?

Allusion, expression and representation are non-existent problems today - and I wrote about this some years ago - whether one is dealing with objects, facts, ideas or dynamic or inert phenomena. A painting has value in as much as it is a totality. There is no need to say anything. It is only necessary to exist. Two tones of the same colour or two blended colours already have a relationship that is extraneous to the significance of the surface which is unique, limitless, absolutely dynamic. The infinitability is rigorously monochrome, or better still of no colour. (In fact, hasn't a monochrome, since it lacks all relation to colour, already become colourless?) Artistic criticism which makes use of concepts like composition and form has no value; form, colour and dimensions have no sense in total space. The artist has achieved integral freedom; pure material becomes pure energy; the obstacles of the space, the slavery to subjective foibles are annihilated; all problems of artistic criticism are surmounted; everything is permitted.

I find it quite incomprehensible, therefore, that the artist rigorously lays down today the limits of a surface on which to arrange forms and colours in exact relationships and in strict equilibrium. Why should one be bothered by the problem of disposing a line

Free Dimension 1960

The emergence of new conditions and the appearance of new problems lead, along with the need for new solutions, to new methods and new measures: one does not leave the ground by running or jumping; one needs wings; modifications are not enough: the transformation must be complete.

For this reason I cannot understand those painters who, while claiming to be interested in modern problems, still today consider a painting as if it were a surface to be filled with color and shapes, in accordance with a taste that can be more or less appreciated, more or less learned. They trace a mark, take a step back, observe their work inclining their head and narrowing an eye, then they leap forward again to add another mark, another color

“Libera Dimensione”
(Free Dimension)

Text published in Italian, English, and French in *Azimuth* (Milan) 2, 1960.

from the palette and continue with this frenetic gymnastics until they have filled the picture and covered the canvas: the picture is finished: a surface of unlimited possibilities is now reduced to a kind of recipient into which unnatural colors and artificial significance are forced and compressed. Why not empty this recipient instead? Why not liberate this surface? Why not attempt to discover the limitless significance of a total space, of a pure and absolute light?

Allusion, expression, and representation are nonexistent problems today (I wrote about this some years ago), whether one is dealing with the representation of an object, a fact, an idea, a dynamic phenomenon, or otherwise: a painting has value only in as much as it is a totality: there is no need to say anything: just be. Two harmonious colors or two tones of the same color already constitute a

relationship extraneous to the significance of the surface, unique, limitless, absolutely dynamic: the infinitability is rigorously monochromatic, or better of no color (in the end, in the absence of any relationship of color, does a monochrome not itself become colorless too?).

The artistic problem that draws on composition, on form, loses all value here: in the total space form, color, and dimensions have no sense, the artist has conquered his complete freedom: pure matter becomes pure energy; the obstacles of space, the slaveries of the subjective vice have been overthrown: the whole artistic problem has been overcome.

For me it is therefore incomprehensible today for an artist to rigorously establish the limits of a surface on which to place forms and colors in an exact ratio, in a rigorous equilibrium: why worry about

how to place a line within a space? Why delimit a space, why such limitations? All problems such as composition of form, forms in space, and spatial depth are extraneous to us: a line can only be traced without limits of length, to infinity, above and beyond any question of composition or dimension: dimensions do not exist in total space.

All problems of color are also irrelevant here, all questions of chromatic relations (even if they are only modulations of tone). We can only lay a single color, or rather extend a single, uninterrupted, and continuous surface (from which every superfluous intervention, every interpretative possibility is excluded): it is not a case of “painting” blue on blue or white on white (both in the sense of composition and that of expression), quite the contrary: the issue for me is to provide an integrally white surface (integrally colorless,

neutral in fact) completely unrelated to any pictorial phenomenon, to any intervention extraneous to the surface value: a white that is not a polar landscape, an evocative or beautiful material, a sensation or a symbol, or anything else: a white surface that is a white surface and nothing more (a colorless surface that is a colorless surface), better still that just is: to be (and total being is pure becoming).

This undefined (and uniquely living) surface, which in the material contingency of the work cannot be infinite, can on the other hand be infinitable, infinitely repeatable, without a solution of continuity; this appears even more clearly in the *Linee* (Lines); here there is not even the possible ambiguity of the picture; the line develops only in length, it stretches infinitely; its only dimension is time. It goes without saying that a *Linea* is neither a horizon nor a symbol, and has value not in that it

is more or less beautiful, but in that it is more or less line: in that it is (just a blotch has value in as much as it is more or less a blotch, and not more or less beautiful or evocative; but in this case the surface still only has value as a medium).

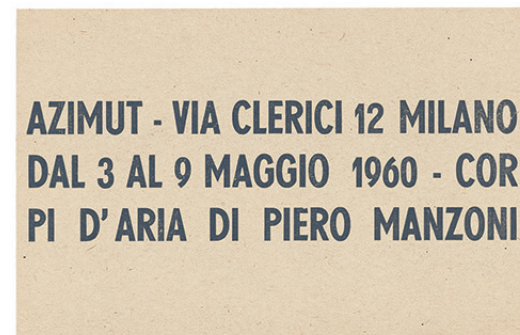
The same may also be said for the *Corpi d'aria* (Bodies of Air, or pneumatic sculptures), reducible and extendible from a minimum to a maximum (from nothing to the infinite), absolutely indeterminate spheroids as any attempt to give them (an even formless) form is illegitimate and illogical.

It is not a question of forming, not of articulating messages (and nor can one turn to extraneous interventions such as para-scientific complexity, psychoanalytical intimacies, graphic composition, ethnographical fantasies and so on . . . every discipline carries within itself its elements of solution). Are not

expression, fantasism, and abstraction empty fictions? There is nothing to be said: there is only to be, there is only to live.

Piero Manzoni

“Free Dimension” is probably Manzoni’s most famous text. A French version, untitled and with a few variations, was published in the catalogue of the exhibition *Monochrome Malerei*, the group show curated by Udo Kultermann at the Städtisches Museum Leverkusen Schloss Morsbroich in Leverkusen, Germany, and running from March 18 to May 8, 1960, in which an *Achrome* (1959–60) titled *Weißes Bild* is reproduced as figure 59 in the brief biographical profile at the end of the catalogue. The text was also published in Japanese in the magazine *The Geijutsu-Shincho* in summer 1960.³² A typescript version in English dated January 1960 was published in the catalogue raisonné by Freddy Battino and Luca Palazzoli with manuscript additions in Japanese that according to Battino were sent to Shozo Yamazaki for publication in the aforementioned Japanese magazine.³³ The second and final issue of the magazine *Azimuth*, published in Italian, French, English, and German, contains texts by Castellani, Udo Kultermann, and Otto Piene (see pages 147–48); an *Achrome* by Manzoni is also reproduced, a canvas sewn in squares dated 1959. This issue was entitled *The New Artistic Conception* in parallel with the group show held from January 4 to February 1 at Azimut in Milan. However, the magazine was very probably



Invitation to the exhibition *Corpi d'aria di Piero Manzoni*, Azimut, Milan, May 3–9, 1960

issued in May of that year (see pages 147–48) and in that case, the first edition of the text would have been the French version in the Leverkusen catalogue (March 1960). This last hypothesis may also be confirmed by a letter in Italian to Kultermann, in which Manzoni writes, “For the articles, . . . we have sent you those which we have prepared for *Azimuth 2* and which I feel are very good: they will also be published in *Azimuth*, but will not appear before March 20, and will not be in German.” A typescript exists that constitutes the preliminary draft of “Free Dimension,” entitled “L’unica dimensione” (The Only Dimension).³⁴ The four pages are datable to 1959–60, with manuscript additions and corrections, some of which are difficult to decipher, including square brackets, marks, and numbers in the margins, which might indicate a different distribution of certain parts of the text and references to thoughts of a similar nature located in the text in diverse positions. Irrespective of its actual month of publication, “Free Dimension” is a key text in Manzoni’s development as well as the best-known and most frequently cited (and abused). The importance of these reflections is multiple; they are firstly a means for Manzoni himself to further spread his ideas on an international level (given the various translations) as well as an opportunity to clarify certain concepts that—if we exclude the “polemical” articles published in *Il Pensiero Nazionale* in 1959—needed to be “revised” (and denied?) following the new works produced between 1958 and 1960, given that the more strictly “poetic” contents date from 1958 (see pages 87–92 and 99–104). The most interesting aspect is the awareness that Manzoni developed: after “Free Dimension” the artist began to produce even “freer” works, finding “his dimension”; this is a text that stimulated Manzoni’s creativity and led to the production within a few months of works different to both the *Linee*



Linee (Lines),
1959, ink on paper,
cardboard tube

(Lines) and the *Achromes*. Along with numerous passages such as “in the total space form, color, and dimensions have no sense, the artist has conquered his complete freedom,” a sign is provided by the conclusion: “It is not a question of forming, not of articulating messages (and nor can one turn to extraneous interventions such as para-scientific complexity, psychoanalytical intimacies, graphic composition, ethnographical fantasies, and so on . . . every discipline carries within itself its elements of solution). Are not expression, fantasism, and abstraction empty fictions? There is nothing to be said: there is only to be, there is only to live.”³⁵ In essence, psychoanalysis, ethnography, and abstraction as well as “para-scientific” criteria (and much more besides it might be added) that at least caressed—if not characterized—his earlier development, were totally abolished on the theoretical plane, although traces of the “organic,” of the “living flesh,” of the union between “artist-work-spectator” were always present in the concrete nature of the works. In essence, the artist was keen to avoid the ambiguities of verbal “justifications” or “illustrations” of his own works. Following “Free Dimension” in fact, the texts signed by Manzoni alone were almost always “simply” lists of works and projects (see pages 199–202, 207–08, and 245–48).

- 32 Cf. *The Geijutsu-Shincho* (Tokyo), no. 7 (July 1960): 130–32.
- 33 Freddy Battino and Luca Palazzoli, *Piero Manzoni: Catalogue raisonné* (Milan: Edizioni di Vanni Scheiwiller, 1991), 102–03, no. 263.
- 34 The typescript is in a private collection in Milan.
- 35 Recently Manzoni’s “There is nothing to be said: there is only to be, there is only to live” has been placed in relation the thinking of Ludwig Wittgenstein; cf. Giorgio Zanchetti, “Baltimore è proprio a Baltimore? Spaesamento e tautologia nelle *Tavole di accertamento*,” in *Piero Manzoni: Nuovi studi*, ed. Rosalia Pasqualino di Marineo, proceedings of the study day held at Palazzo Reale, Milan, November 25, 2014 (Poggibonsi: Carlo Cambi Editore, 2017), 97–109; in particular the passage cited regarding Wittgenstein drawn from the book by the Italian philosopher Enzo Paci: “Ultimately, philosophy annuls the very scientific propositions and this allows us to penetrate the real world before which there is nothing to say as in the world one is, one lives, one does not speak about it: in the face of real life all that remains is silence” (104).



“La ‘nuova concezione artistica’”
 (The “New Artistic Conception”)

Text signed by Alberto Biasi, Enrico Castellani, Heinz Mack, Piero Manzoni, and Manfredo Massironi, published on the occasion of the exhibition of the same title at the Circolo del Pozzetto, Padua, April 9, 1960. Large format sheet/poster in metallic gray (recto) with characters in black, all capitals (with the exception of the artists’ surnames); ca. 69.5 × 50.5 cm. At the bottom: “Tip. Poligrafica Moderna—Tel. 45.330—Padua.” Names, places, date, and information regarding the exhibition and the location follow a continual composition on the four sides.

The “New Artistic Conception” 1960

The “new artistic conception” is essentially research and stands outside any schematizable trend: it is born out of the complex structure of modern life.

The “new artistic conception” derives from the overcoming of “art for art’s sake” and “art through art” because it overcomes sentimental individualism.

The “new artistic conception” rejects causal determinism and the random indeterminate in a search for truth, which derives from an increasingly widespread collective adhesion.

The “new artistic conception” abandons the limited space of two dimensions for a vaster space in which light is the determinant element.

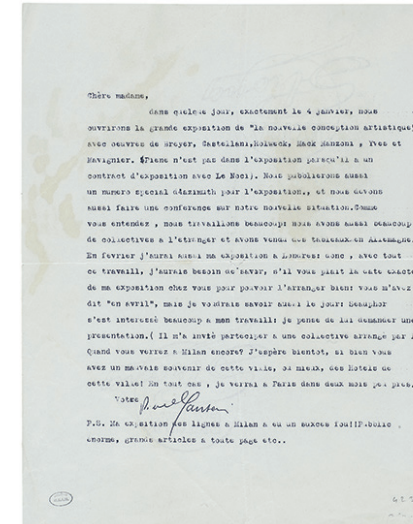
The “new artistic conception”

overcomes traditional aesthetics in defense of a collective life ethic.

Biasi, Castellani, Mack, Manzoni, Massironi

Circolo del Pozzetto,
Via Emanuele Filiberto 1, Padua
from six p.m. on April 9, 1960

The "New Artistic Conception"



Letter from Piero Manzoni to Iris Clert, December 1959

The large metalized sheet/poster for the Paduan exhibition of 1960 had a paratactic and direct style.

The phrase "The 'new artistic conception' is essentially research and stands outside any schematizable trend: it



Achrome, ca. 1960,
cotton wool in
squares, 48 x 38 cm

is born out of the complex structure of modern life” attempts to render less dogmatic certain concepts previously expressed in other contexts. Manzoni exhibited his *Achromes*³⁶ in a period of frenetic activity involving the London exhibition with Castellani (March), the major group show at Leverkusen (March–May 1960), the preparations for his solo show of the *Corpi d’aria* (Bodies of Air) at the gallery Azimut (May 3 to 9, 1960), his participation in the auction/group show *Contemporary Italian Art* at the Illinois Institute of Design in Chicago (May 9–20, 1960), and a further group show again at Azimut (starting May 25).

36 Cf. the review “Rassegna ‘d’estrema punta’ al Circolo del Pozzetto,” *Il Gazzettino* (Venice), April 24, 1960.



Manifesto against Nothing
for the International
Exposition of Nothing
1960

Representative of Avant-gardism, of Conventionalism, of Modernism, of Conservatism, of Communism, of Capitalism, of Patriotism, of Internationalism, of Monochromy, of Monotony, of Zen, of Surrealism, of Dadaism, of Lettrism, of Informalism, of Constructivism, of Neoplasticism, and of Tachism.

- A canvas is worth almost as much as no canvas
- A sculpture is almost as good as no sculpture
- A machine is almost as beautiful as no machine
- Music is almost as pleasant as no music
- Noise is almost as pleasant as no noise

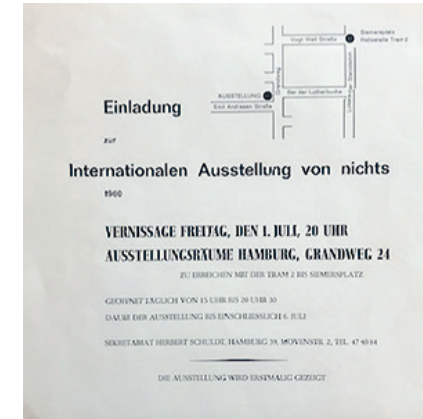
“Manifesto contro niente per l’esposizione Internazionale di niente”
(Manifesto against Nothing for the International Exposition of Nothing)

Text in French, Italian, and German, signed by Carl Laszlo, Onorio Mansutti, Rolf Fenkart, Bazon Brock, Herbert Schuldt, Piero Manzoni, Enrico Castellani, Heinz Mack, and Otto Piene, dated 1960. The square sheet is creamy white with characters in black and red, ca. 30.2 × 29.6 cm. The text follows an unusual layout on three sides, each in a different language. On one margin: “Typography: Onorio.”

No art market is almost as profitable
as the art market
Something is almost nothing (no
thing)

Carl Laszlo, Basel
Onorio, Basel
Rolf Fenkart, Basel
Bazon Brock, Itzehoe
Herbert Schuldt, Hamburg
Piero Manzoni, Milan
Enrico Castellani, Milan
Heinz Mack, Düsseldorf
Otto Piene, Düsseldorf

Sale of nothing, numbered and
signed.
The price list is available to the
public.
At the opening no one will speak.
In this catalogue nothing is repro-
duced.



Invitation to
the exhibition
*Internationale
Ausstellung von
nichts*, Hamburg,
July 1960

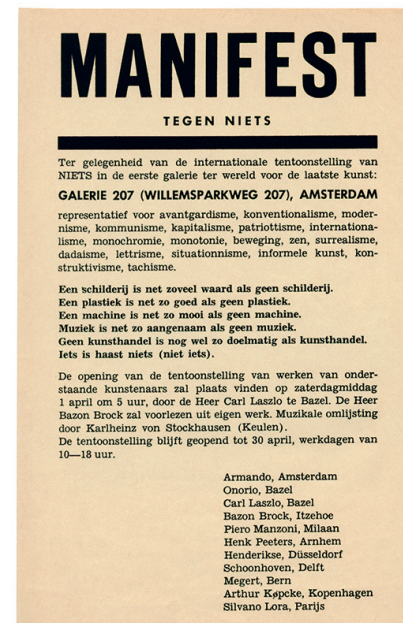
This manifesto was prepared in parallel with an exhibition (or “nonexhibition” organized by Herbert Schuldt in Hamburg in July 1960 and then reconstructed in the Kunsthalle in Hamburg in 2004)³⁷ maintaining validity as a printed text of which we know of a version, with variations, in Dutch. Both manifestos can also be traced back to the activity of Carl Laszlo, who was in contact with the signatory artists of both versions and also editor of the magazine *Panderma*, which was always designed by Onorio Mansutti with contributions by Brock and Schuldt, among others. Published in Basel, the fourth issue of *Panderma* (1960–61) bears the “title” *Man Is Nothing*, which is repeated in various languages on the cover. It repeats one of the texts Laszlo published in the magazine and dated 1959, also translated into various languages, the opening of which reads: “Man?: Nothing! In himself man is nothing, he is nothing but an infinitesimal part of the infinite.” In another announcement titled *In Hamburg nichts zerstört!* (Nothing Destroyed in Hamburg!), mention is made of a number of visitors who “ransacked” the exhibition organized by a number of contributors to *Panderma*, probably a reference to Schuldt’s *Internationale Ausstellung von nichts*. The magazine

also featured a reproduction of an *Achrome* (1958–59) already published in the first issue of *Azimuth*. In the listings section, mention is made of the second issue of the magazine *Azimuth* from Milan (1960) and the gallery Azimut, which closed in July 1960. Manzoni made mention in passing in a letter he sent to Marco Santini from Denmark toward the end of June 1960 while he was “in residence” at Herning, hosted by the businessman and collector Aage Damgaard after having opened the solo show *Luftskulptur Billeder 9 Linier* at Galerie K pcke in Copenhagen on June 10: “I hope that Castellani has now finalized the *Exposition International de Rien*. You have to study for your exams now, but he doesn’t have much to do. If you see Castellani, give him a little push please.”



Piero Manzoni,
Sante Bolognini,
Carl Laszlo, and
Enrico Castellani,
Milan, ca. 1959

Manzoni’s name also appears in the Dutch version, without mention of the year, “Manifest tegen niets,” with a simpler layout in black on a beige-brown sheet. (“Neoplasticism” was missing from the initial list, but “movement/agitation” and “Situationism” were added; also missing was the phrase about “noise” and the four final phrases from “Sale of nothing” through to “nothing is reproduced.”) The introduction to



“Manifest tegen niets” (Manifesto against Nothing), ca. 1961

the Dutch text reads: “On the occasion of the International Exhibition of Nothing in the world’s first gallery for the new art: Galerie 207 (Willemsparkweg 207), Amsterdam.” The conclusion reads: “The opening of the exhibition of works by the undermentioned artists will take place on the afternoon of Saturday, April 1, at five p.m., curated by Mr. Carl Laszlo of Basel. Mr. Bazon Brock will read extracts from his work. Musical accompaniment by Karlheinz von Stockhausen (Cologne). The exhibition will remain open through April 30, weekdays from ten a.m. to six p.m.” There follows the list of signatories, but compared with the trilingual version from 1960, Rolf Fenkart, Herbert Schuldt, Enrico Castellani, Heinz Mack, and Otto Piene are missing, replaced by Armando (Amsterdam), Henk Peeters (Arnhem), Jan Henderikse (Düsseldorf), Jan J. Schoonhoven (Delft), Christian Megert (Bern), Arthur K pcke (Copenhagen), and Silvano Lora (Paris).

Manifesto against Nothing for the International Exposition of Nothing



Poster of the Heinz Mack exhibition, Azimut, Milan, March 11–28, 1960

Due to the themes they tackle, both documents, like “Einde” (End; see pages 183–85), represent extreme and paradoxical cases and testify to a sensation shared in those years: for example, in Italy too, the Gruppo N organized the *Closed Exhibition: No One Is Invited to Participate* at Padua in December 1960. In the Dutch version, the mention of Saturday, April 1 would refer to 1961; April 1 would also confirm the more “conceptual” and/or playful nature of the event.³⁸ Laszlo and the *Panderma* circle, assisted by the artists mentioned, therefore probably “exported” the idea of the manifesto from Germany and Switzerland (1960) to Holland (1961).

37 We have contacted Herbert Schuldt but unfortunately have not been able to find any further information regarding the 1960 exhibition in time for the publication of this book.

38 Both *Manifest tegen niets* and *Einde* are also dated 1961 in Antoon Melissen, “nul=0: The Dutch Avant-Garde of the 1960s in a European Context,” in *Nul=0: The Dutch Nul Group in an International Context*, ed. Colin Huizing and Mattijs Visser, Stedelijk Museum Schiedam (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2011), 12–13 and 123.

E I N D E

Sinds de bevrijding heeft Ons Volk zich weten op te werken tot een Welvaartsstaat, waar alleen de vrijheid tot armoede en ellende zijn bestaansrecht heeft verloren. Deze resultaten zijn tot stand gekomen, zonder dat er van enige bloei op het terrein der kunst sprake is geweest. Waar de Nederlandse kunst is afgezakt tot een provinciaal peil, stijgt de waarde van de Gulden. Was het tot nog toe heiligschennis te twijfelen aan de slogan: „zonder kunst kan een volk niet leven”, nu verklaren wij:

Het Nederlandse Volk heeft voor zijn welzijn helemaal geen kunst nodig, ja: kunst kan gemist worden als kiespijn!

Uw werkster verdrijft haar verveling met moderne muziek, uw tandarts verzamelt moderne kunst, uw boekhouder amuseert zich met de machines van Tinguely:

U kunt met kunst uw status niet meer verbeteren! Een aantal vooraanstaande kunstenaars neemt tans het initiatief:

1. **Besluit het vervaardigen van kunstvoortbrengselen te staken;**
2. **De likwidatie te bevorderen van alle instellingen, die zich nog aan de kunst verrijken.**

In Kopenhagen sloten wij zodoende de avantgardegalerie K pcke en verbraken alle winstgevende betrekkingen. In eigen land wordt begonnen met de sluiting van de zgn. Galerie 207 (Willemsparkweg 207) te Amsterdam. Voortaan zullen ondergetekenden zich doorlopend belasten met het opheffen van kunstkringen en het sluiten van tentoonstellingsruimten, waaraan dan eindelijk een waardiger bestemming kan worden gegeven.

Voor de Galerie 207 te A'dam: **Cornelius Rogge**

Het voorlopig aktiecomit :

Armando (Amsterdam), Bazon Broch (Itzehoe), Henderikse (Dusseldorf), Arthur K pcke (Kopenhagen), Silvano Lora (Parijs), Piero Manzoni (Milaan), Megert (Bern), Henk Peeters (Arnhem), Schoonhoven (Delft).

End
[1961]

Since the Liberation, Our People has succeeded in elevating itself to the level of a Social State, in which only the freedom of poverty and misery has lost its reason for being. These results have been obtained without a renaissance on a cultural level. While Dutch culture has declined to a provincial level, the value of the florin is rising. Until now, merely doubting the slogan “Without culture a people cannot exist” would have been considered sacrilegious. Today we declare that:

The Dutch people has no need of art for its well-being; indeed, we can do without art just as we can do without a toothache!

Your worker beats boredom listening

“Einde”
(End)

Text in Dutch, with the title “Einde” (End), undated [1961], signed by Armando, Bazon Brock, Jan Henderikse, Arthur K pcke, Silvano Lora, Piero Manzoni, Christian Megert, Henk Peeters, and Jan J. Schoonhoven. Beige-brown sheet with black characters and frame, ca. 21.6 x 14 cm.

to modern music, your dentist collects modern art, your accountant has fun with Tinguely's machines:

You can no longer improve
your status with art!

A certain number of well-known artists are therefore taking the initiative:

- 1 By deciding to interrupt the production of artistic works;
- 2 By promoting the liquidation of all those institutions that still enrich the arts.

In Copenhagen we have therefore closed the avant-garde gallery K pcke and interrupted all lucrative activities. At home, the closure of the so-called Galerie 207 (Willemsparkweg 207) in Amsterdam has begun.

From today, the undersigned commit themselves to overturning art clubs and closing exhibition spaces so that they can finally be given a more justifiable function.

For the Galerie 207 of Amsterdam:
Cornelius Rogge

The provisional action committee:
Armando (Amsterdam)
Bazon Brock (Itzehoe)
Henderikse (D sseldorf)
Arthur K pcke (Copenhagen)
Silvano Lora (Paris)
Piero Manzoni (Milan)
Megert (Bern)
Henk Peeters (Arnhem)
Schoonhoven (Delft)

End

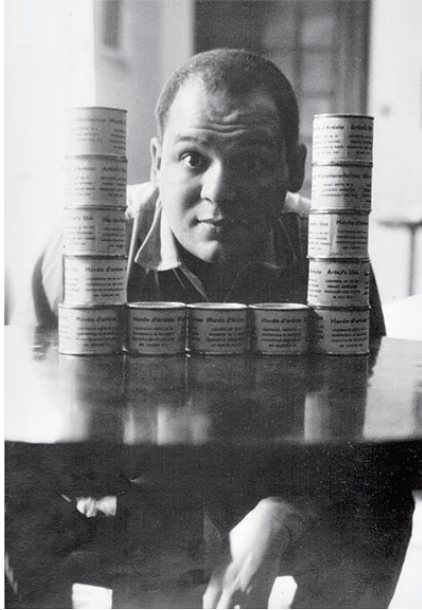


Invitation to the
group exhibition,
Azimut, Milan, June
24–July 18, 1960

This document could be compared to the Dutch version of the “Manifesto against Nothing for the International Exposition of Nothing” from 1960 (see pages 175–76); both Dutch documents were promoted by Galerie 207 of Amsterdam this time by Cornelius Rogge. The signatories of “Einde” closely follow those of the Dutch “Manifest tegen niets”; Carl Laszlo and Onorio Mansutti, both active in Basel, were missing. The cultural context in which “Einde” should be seen could be contemporary with the creation of the Dutch Nul “group,” which was founded in 1961. After perhaps adopting the initiative of the two earlier manifestos by Carl Laszlo in Germany and Switzerland, its members published “Einde” independently. In fact, in the fourth issue of *Panderma* (Basel, [1960–61]), Armando, van Bohemen, Henderikse, Henk Peeters, and Schoonhoven were still cited as the “Holländische Informelle Gruppe” (Dutch Art Informel Group). The absence of a date might make the document more “absolute” in its irony and provocative conceptualism. With regard to the closure of Galerie Kōpcke in Copenhagen, it is worth recalling that Manzoni exhibited in two solo shows at the gallery: *Luftskulptur Billeder 9 Linier* (June 10–July 1, 1960) and

End

Kunstnerlort Levende Kunstværk, opened on October 18, 1961. The names of the signatories and the relative cities are transcribed as in the original document with a number of misspellings corrected.



Piero Manzoni
with some cans
of *Merda d'artista*
(Artist's Shit) in his
apartment on Via
Cernaia, Milan, 1961

"Allora non udremo più miseri discorsi su Magellano e su Drake. Udrete il racconto di viaggiatori che hanno circumnavigato l'Eclittica e donoiato la Stella Polare, come il Capo Horn".
Melville

Il verificarsi di nuove condizioni, il proporsi di nuovi problemi, comportano con la necessità di nuove soluzioni, nuovi metodi, nuove misure: non ci si stacca dalla terra correndo e saltando: occorrono le ali; le modificazioni non bastano: la trasformazione dev' essere integrale. Per questo noi non riusciamo a capire i pittori che, pur dicendosi interessati ai problemi moderni, si pongono tutt'oggi di fronte al quadro come se questo fosse una superficie da riempire di colore e di forme, secondo un gusto più o meno apprezzabile, più o meno orecchiato. Tracciano un segno, indietreggiano, guardano il loro operato inclinando il capo e socchiudendo gli occhi, poi balzano di nuovo in avanti aggiungendo un'altro segno, un'altro colore della tavolozza finché non hanno riempito il quadro e coperta la tela: il quadro è finito, una superficie d'illimitate possibilità è ora ridotta a una specie di recipiente in cui sono forzati e compressi colori innaturali, significati artificiali. Perché invece non liberare questa superficie? Perché non cercare di capire che la storia dell'arte non è storia di "pittori", ma bensì di scoperte e di innovatori? Alludere, esprimere, rappresentare, astrarre, sono oggi problemi inesistenti. Forma, colore, dimensioni, non hanno senso: vi è solo per l'artista il problema di conquistare la più integrale libertà: le barriere sono una sfida, le fisiche per lo scienziato come le mentali per l'artista. Dada Maino ha superato la "problematica pittorica": altre misure informano la sua opera: i suoi quadri sono bandiere di un nuovo mondo, sono un nuovo significato: non si accontentano di "dire diversamente": dicono nuove cose.

Piero Manzoni

GRUPPO N via s. pietro 3, padova

DADA MAINO

dal 20 maggio '61; inaugurazione alle 18

The Emergence of New Conditions ... 1961

"Then shall we list to no shallow gossip of Magellans and Drakes; but give ear to the voyagers who have circumnavigated the Ecliptic; who rounded the Polar Star as Cape Horn."
—Melville

The emergence of new conditions and the appearance of new problems leads, along with the need for new solutions, to new methods and new measures: one does not leave the ground by running or jumping: one needs wings; modifications are not enough: the transformation must be complete. For this reason I cannot understand those painters who, while claiming to be interested in modern problems, still today

"Il verificarsi di nuove condizioni"
(The Emergence of New Conditions ...)

Untitled text, printed on the left-hand reverse side of the invitation for the solo show by Dadamaino (known in this period as Dada Maino); on the right-hand side: "GRUPPO N," and in lowercase letters: "Via San Pietro 3, Padua," and at the bottom: "Dada Maino from May 20 '61; opening at six p.m." The card measures ca. 13.9 × 18.9 cm; white ground with black characters.

consider a painting as if it were a surface to be filled with color and shapes, in accordance with a taste that can be more or less appreciated, more or less learned.

They trace a mark, take a step back, observe their work inclining their head and narrowing their eyes, then they leap forward again to add another mark, another color from the palette, and continue until they have filled the picture and covered the canvas: the picture is finished: a surface of unlimited possibilities is now reduced to a kind of recipient into which unnatural colors and artificial significance are forced and compressed.

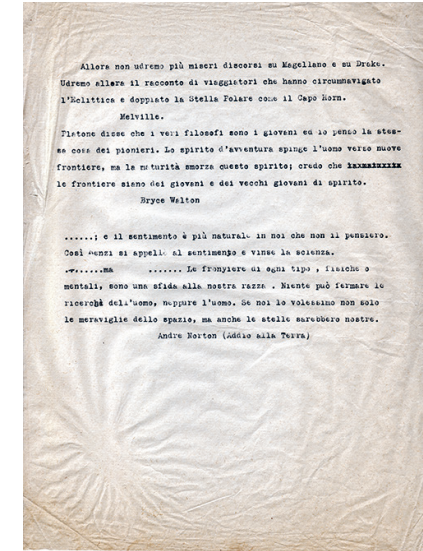
Why not liberate this surface instead?

Why not try to understand that the history of art is not the history of “painters,” but rather of discoveries and innovators?

Allusion, expression, representation, and abstraction are non-existent problems today. Form, color, dimensions have no sense: the artist is faced only with the problem of conquering the most comprehensive freedom: barriers are a challenge, physical for the scientist and mental for the artist.

Dada Maino has overcome the “pictorial problem”: other measures inform her work: her paintings are flags of a new world, they are a new meaning: they do not accept to “say things differently”: they say new things.

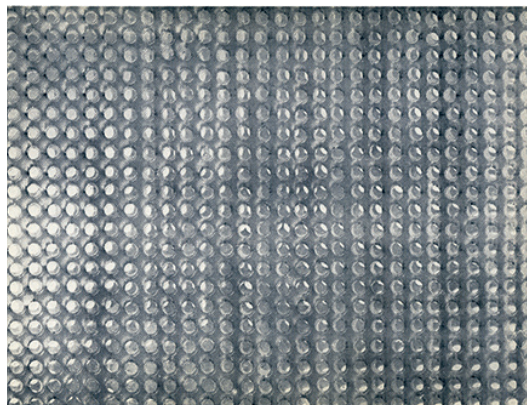
Piero Manzoni



Typescript by
Piero Manzoni
with quotations
of Herman Melville,
Bryce Walton,
and Andre Norton,
undated, Guido and
Gabriella Pautasso
Collection

The text, with the exception of the conclusion and few additional phrases, repeats the opening passages of “Free Dimension” (see pages 155–61) and its messages of “complete freedom” to which were added in this case the phrases drawn from *Mardi and a Voyage Thither* (1849) by Herman Melville that are well suited to the spirit of Manzoni’s investigations and his “total space.” In particular, the phrase “barriers are a challenge, physical for the scientist and mental for the artist” already provides a glimpse of future works, first and foremost *Socle du monde* (Base of the World, 1961), a metal “object” that combines science and magic, created a few months later in Denmark; in fact, the complete inscription present on the metal work is frequently truncated: “Socle du monde / Socle magic no . 3 de / Piero Manzoni—1961— / Hommage à Galileo.” Manzoni explained the “scientific” background to “founding” something new as early as 1957 (see pages 75–80) but in this work the tribute to Galileo Galilei, one of the founders of the modern scientific method, is direct and to the point. This new

“magic base,” with the title overturned, transformed the whole world, including therefore all nature and all culture, into a work of art, overcoming all the spatial-temporal confines.



Recto of the invitation for the exhibition *Dada Maino*, Padua, May 1961



Dadamaino, *Volume a moduli sfasati* (Volume of Displaced Modules), 1960, perforated plastic, 60 × 60 cm

Cuciture a macchina costruiscono oggi (dal '59) il "raster" dei tessuti a luce bianca degli "ACHROMES" (nel '57 e '58 in tela imbevuta di caolino e colla): ho in progetto grandi formati in tessuti plastici. Ho preparato (nel '59) una serie di 45 "CORPI D'ARIA" dal diametro max. di cm 80: ora, qualora l'acquirente lo voglia, potrà acquistare, oltre all'involucro (in gomma) ed alla base, conservati in un apposito astuccio, anche IL MIO FIATO, per conservarlo nell'involucro.

Sto oggi lavorando ad un gruppo di corpi d'aria del diametro di circa m. 2,50, da sistemarsi in un parco: mediante un piccolo dispositivo pulseranno con un lentissimo ritmo di respirazione, non sincronizzato (ho eseguito i primi esemplari sperimentali nel '59, con involucri di piccole dimensioni. Basandomi sullo stesso principio ho progettato anche una parete pneumatica-pulsante da collocare in un'architettura). Nello stesso parco collocherò anche un piccolo boschetto di cilindri pneumatici allungati come steli (alti dai 4 ai 7 metri circa) che vibreranno sotto la spinta del vento.

Ho anche in progetto, sempre per lo stesso parco, una scultura a movimenti autonomi. Quest'animale meccanico trarrà il suo nutrimento dalla natura (energia solare): di notte si fimerà e si rattrappirà su se stessa: di giorno compirà lenti spostamenti, emetterà suoni, proietterà antenne per cercare energia ed evitare ostacoli.

Sto sviluppando inoltre una nuova serie di "CORPI DI LUCE ASSOLUTI". (i "corpi assoluti" che ho realizzati sinora sono sferoidi di plastica con un diametro di cm 40: restano sospesi nello spazio, immobili, sostenuti da un getto d'aria compressa: cambiando l'orientamento del getto, si può farli girare su se stessi vorticosamente, sino ad ottenere un volume virtuale: un "corpo di luce assoluto").

Si possono realizzare "corpi di luce assoluti" di qualsiasi dimensione (ne ho in progetto uno grande, per una particolare architettura) ma al momento sto lavorando alla realizzazione di una serie di "corpi di luce assoluti" molto piccoli, tenuti in azione da un motore ridottissimo, indipendente, che non richiederà speciali installazioni.

Recentemente ho apposto la mia firma e LA MIA IMPRONTA DIGITALE ad alcune uova (il pubblico ha preso contatto diretto con queste opere inghiottendo un'intera esposizione in 70 minuti). Continuo a distribuire uova consacrate colla mia impronta.

Ho potuto eseguire quest'anno UNA LINEA LUNGA 7.200 METRI (nella prima serie di linee, iniziata nella primavera del '59 la lunghezza massima che avevo raggiunto era di m. 33,63): è questa la prima di una serie di linee di grande lunghezza, di cui lascerò un esemplare in ognuna delle principali città del mondo (ogni linea dopo l'esecuzione verrà chiusa in una speciale cassa d'acciaio inossidabile, rigorosamente sigillata, nel cui interno verrà praticato il vuoto pneumatico) fino a che la somma totale delle lunghezze delle linee di questa serie non avrà raggiunto la lunghezza della circonferenza terrestre.

PIERO MANZONI

Immediate Projects 1961

Since 1959 machine stitching has constructed the *raster* of the white, light fabrics of the *Achromes* (which in '57 and '58 were in canvas soaked in kaolin and glue): I have in mind large formats in plastic fabrics. I prepared (in '59) a series of forty-five *Corpi d'aria* (Bodies of Air) with a maximum diameter of eighty centimeters: should the purchaser so desire, he may also acquire, along with the envelope (in rubber) and the base conserved in a special case, // *mio fiato* (My Breath), to be kept in the envelope.

Today I am working on a group of *Corpi d'aria* with a diameter of around 2.5 meters to be installed in a park: by means of a small device they will pulsate with a very slow rhythmic but unsynchronized breathing. (I produced the first experimental

"Progetti immediati"
(Immediate Projects)

Text published in Italian, French, and English in *ZERO* (Düsseldorf), no. 3, 1961.

examples from 1959 with small envelopes. Using the same principle, I have also designed a pneumatic pulsing wall to be located in an architectural setting.) In the same park I shall also plant a small glade of elongated pneumatic cylinders like stems (of around four to seven meters in height) that will vibrate under the pressure of the wind.

I am also planning, for the same park, a sculpture with automated movements. This mechanical animal will draw its nutriment from nature (solar energy): by night it will stop and will fold in on itself; by day it will make slow movements, emit sounds, and project antennae to seek energy and avoid obstacles.

I am also developing a new series of *Corpi di luce assoluti* (Absolute Bodies of Light). (The *Corpi assoluti* that I have made to date are plastic spheroids with a diameter of forty centimeters:

they remain suspended immobile in space, supported by a jet of compressed air: by changing the direction of the jet, they can be made to whirl dizzily about themselves, obtaining a virtual volume: an “absolute body of light”).

Corpi di luce assoluti of any size can be made (I am planning a large one for a specific architectural setting), but at the moment I am working on the creation of a series of very small *Corpi di luce assoluti*, actuated by a very compact independent motor that will not require special installation.

I recently signed and placed my fingerprint on a number of eggs (the public came into direct contact with these works, swallowing an entire exhibition in seventy minutes).

I continue to distribute eggs consecrated with my fingerprint. This year I was able to make a *Linea lunga 7.200 metri* (Line 7200 Meters

Long) (in the first series of lines, begun in the spring of '59 the maximum length I reached was 33.63 meters): this is the first of a series of lines of great length, of which I shall leave an example in each of the world's principal cities (on completion each line will be enclosed in a special case of stainless steel, rigorously sealed, in which a vacuum will be created) until the total length of the lines in this series equals the length of the circumference of the Earth.

Piero Manzoni



Linea lunga 7.200 metri (Line 7200 Meters Long), July 4, 1960, ink on paper, zinc cylinder, lead sheets, 66 × 96 cm, HEART Herring Museum of Contemporary Art

This text was probably written in the summer of 1960; note the reference to the *Linea lunga 7.200 metri* (Line 7200 Meters Long) created on July 4, 1960, in Herring. The text was followed by the *Placentarium* project (see pages 207–08). The four pages of the iconographical section “Dynamo Manzoni” feature a photograph, repeated four times, of the creation of the *Linea lunga 7.200 metri*; an *Achrome* already published in *Azimuth 2* (1960); a view of the solo show *Linee* at the gallery Azimut in Milan in December 1959; a photograph, repeated six times, of an egg signed with a fingerprint. The same issue of the magazine also contains a text/project by Heinz (“Dynamo”) Mack, *The Sahara Project*, in which Klein, Moldow, and Manzoni are mentioned in note 4 in the *Station 6 The Machine Park*. A number of passages in the paragraph are in harmony with the words regarding works for outside spaces described by Manzoni in *Immediate Projects*. The text testifies to Manzoni’s relationship with the artists of the German ZERO group he met in 1959 and with whom he worked on various projects in Italy and abroad.³⁹ The text has an unusual layout in the spacing of the titles of the works and certain keywords. This is the first “text/list” of which we are



Piero Manzoni preparing an *Uovo scultura* (Egg Sculpture), Milan, 1960



Piero Manzoni and a model, sewing an *Achrome*, Milan, 1960

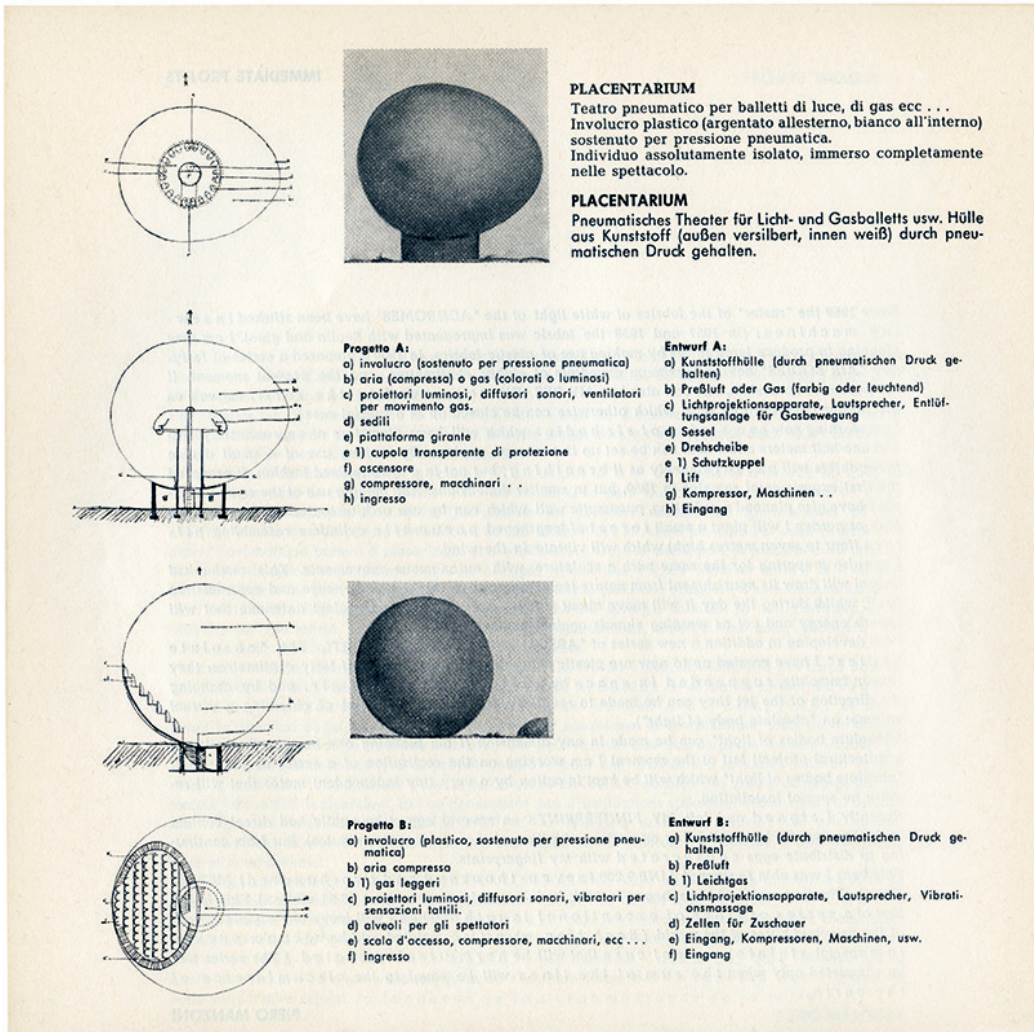
aware, the format then being adopted for “My First *Achromes* Are from ’57 . . .” in 1963 (see pages 245–48). Among the various works already known emerge a number of novelties such as the *Corpi di luce assoluti* (Absolute Bodies of Light), the prototypes of which Manzoni almost certainly made in Denmark and of which rare film clips have survived, and the project for the “mechanical animal” of which we know of just a few rather unclear drawings and sketches;⁴⁰ this thinking is in any case testimony to the artist’s “scientific” and “science fiction” culture—the Spatialist manifestos issued by Fontana and, more precisely, the “Manifesto del macchinismo” (1952) of the Movimento Arte Concreta (Concrete Art Movement) along with a few historic whiffs of Futurism—as well as the “Leonardo-esque spirit” already noted by Juan-Eduardo

Cirlot in 1960⁴¹ and which, in part, was to emerge in the tribute to Galileo Galilei with the creation of *Socle du monde* (1961).



Corpo d'aria n. 8 (Body of Air No. 8), 1959–60, wooden box, rubber balloon, mouthpiece, and base, 4.8 × 42.7 × 12.4 cm

- 39 For further information see Francesca Pola, *Piero Manzoni e ZERO: Una regione creativa europea* (Milan: Electa, 2014).
- 40 The drawings of the “mechanical animal” are published in Germano Celant, *Piero Manzoni: Catalogo generale*, 2 vols. (Geneva and Milan: Skira, 2004), 266–67.
- 41 Cf. Juan-Eduardo Cirlot, “¿Un nuevo idealismo?: Piero Manzoni y la nueva concepción artística,” in *Correo de las Artes* (Barcelona), no. 27, September 1960.



Placentarium 1961

Pneumatic theater for dances of
light, of gas, et cetera . . .

Plastic shell (silvery on the out-
side, white inside), supported by
pneumatic pressure.

Absolutely isolated individual,
completely immersed in the spec-
tacle.

Project A

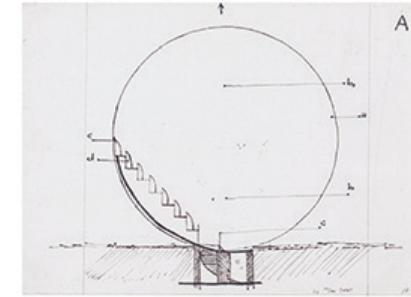
- a shell (supported by pneumatic
pressure)
- b air (compressed) or gases
(colored or luminous)
- c spotlights, loudspeakers, fans
for moving the gases
- d seating
- e revolving platform
- e1 transparent protective dome
- f lift
- g compressor, machinery . . .
- h entrance

“Placentarium”

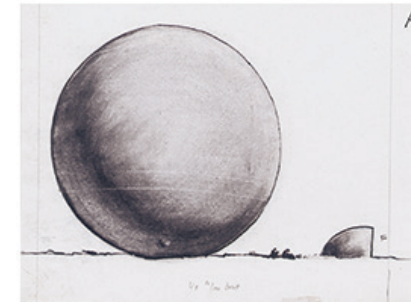
Text with drawing/plan, already sketched out in the summer of 1960, published
in Italian and German in *ZERO* (Düsseldorf), no. 3, 1961.

Project B

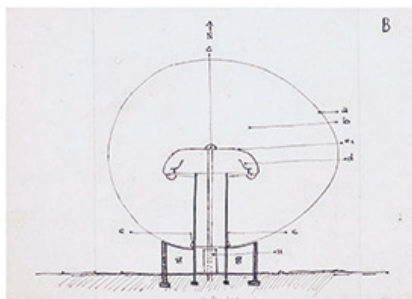
- a shell (plastic, supported by pneumatic pressure)
- b compressed air
- b1 light gases
- c spotlights, loudspeakers, vibrators for tactile sensations
- d cells for the spectators
- e access steps, compressor, machinery, et cetera.
- f entrance



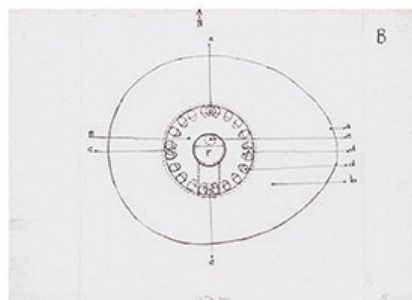
Original drawings of the *Placentarium* project, 1960, each 24 × 33 cm, Elizabeth Goldring Piene Collection



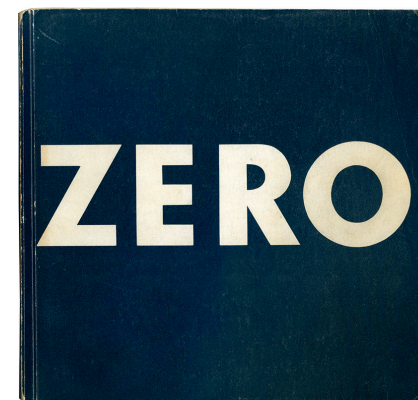
With the “Placentarium” Manzoni perhaps recalled passages from another Concretist manifesto, “Disintegralismo” (Disintegralism; again from 1952): “The work may also be projected all around. The sculptures will correspond to large model which one may enter. The old painting presented us with a landscape seen from the window, today we open that window and enter into the landscape.”⁴² The organic form of the “egg” was used by Manzoni in various “ovoid” works such as the balloon in the *Fiato di artista* (Artist’s Breath, 1960) the “fingerprints” or the real eggs understood as “sculptures to be eaten” in *Consumazione dell’arte / Dinamica del pubblico / Divorare l’arte* (Consumption of Art / Dynamic of the Public / Devour Art) at the gallery Azimut in Milan on July 21, 1960. In “Placentarium,” in addition to an organic reference (the placenta), there is the idea of the container; like the egg it contains substances that give life and the new architecture therefore



Original drawings of the *Placentarium* project, 1960, each 24 × 33 cm, Elizabeth Goldring Piene Collection



allows the work of art to live within it and to be used by other living beings (the spectators). The concluding phrase of “Free Dimension,” “There is nothing to be said: there is only to be, there is only to live” (see pages 155–61), marked Manzoni’s increasing openness to the idea of “life” and in fact from January 1961 he signed people as *Sculture viventi* (Living Sculptures) or *Opere d’arte viventi* (Living Works of Art).



Cover of *ZERO* (Düsseldorf), no. 3, 1961

The *Placentarium* project is also explained more in depth in the typescript of the same title, unpublished in his lifetime and now unobtainable, transcribed in a number of catalogues published after the artist’s death.⁴³

In 1961 the artist and critic Gillo Dorfles, founder of the Movimento Arte Concreta (Concrete Art Movement), published *Ultime tendenze nell’arte d’oggi*, a book destined to enjoy great success that was reprinted numerous times through to the present day; the twenty-seven-year-old Manzoni was mentioned briefly in the “Neoconcretists,” “Monochrome Painting,” and “The Open Work in Painting” sections and at the end of the book under the “Dada (or Neo-Dada)” heading.⁴⁴

42 Sauvage, *Pittura italiana del dopoguerra*, 239.

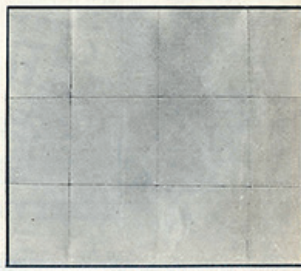
43 The typescript is transcribed in Celant, *Piero Manzoni: Catalogo generale*, 262; for further information regarding this project see Stefano Setti, “Un archetipo avveniristico: L’architettura del *Placentarium*,” in *Piero Manzoni: Nuovi studi*, 111–23.

44 Gillo Dorfles, *Ultime tendenze nell’arte d’oggi* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1961), 113–18, 120–22, 213–15.



INVENTORE DEL BIANCO

Un quadro, così almeno lo chiama Fantore, costituito da batuffoli di cotone bianco allineati su una tavola. Il pittore è orgoglioso di questa trovata, tanto più che è riuscito a vendere opere simili.



Nell'incisor cilindrico in metallo contenente una delle tante «linee» si riflette il viso del pittore, Piero Manzoni non è preoccupato delle recenti posizioni di certa critica ufficiale che sembra giudicare con benevolenza un ritratto all'arte figurativa. «Non è improbabile», ha scritto un critico francese, «che alcune glorie contemporanee diventino gli esemplari di un monumentale errore del nostro gusto».

Una delle trele senza colore di Piero Manzoni. In una recente mostra a Bruxelles un quadro bianco del pittore fu esposto marchiato dai timbri della dogana, che fecero scrivere a un critico che «il pittore Piero Manzoni aveva così voluto abbandonare il bianco assoluto».

«Ma il prezzo?», insistono.
«Al prezzo dell'oro, secondo la quotazione della giornata. Il contenuto netto è di 30 grammi. Parcia lei il conto?».

Piero Manzoni ha risolto molti problemi. I critici più autorevoli stanno ancora discutendo quanto rilievo, nella decisione dell'adattamento sui mercati internazionali, debba essere dato al fatto che troppi collezionisti («Anche l'opera d'arte è un investimento», questo lo dicono degli ultimi anni), più che comperare un certo quadro, acquistavano la firma di un certo autore, senza badare al contenuto. Manzoni ha da tempo semplificato la questione ed è andato molto più «in là», vendendo la sola firma. Fugli firma il cliente, sulla parte del corpo che preferisce, e gli rilascia il argenteo documento: «Carta d'autenticità - Si certifica che il signed [nome e cognome] è stato firmato di mano mia e che pertanto, a partire dalla data odierna, è considerato opera d'arte autentica e veridica. Firmato: Piero Manzoni». Dal buchetto delle ricevute che passano esaminate risulta che in questo momento circolano per Milano ottantadue persone firmate e autentiche da Manzoni.



LE CLIENTI FIRMATE

Mi complimentino e faccio la domanda conclusiva: «Allora, lei che è all'avanguardia, come vede l'avvenire?».

L'espressione di malinconia si diffonde sul volto di Manzoni. «Dovrebbe saperlo», risponde, «che prima o poi tutti gli artisti cadono nella spirale di un mercante. Entro un paio d'anni sarà anche commercializzato».

Franco Serra

Stavendosi di un comune lamposta, il pittore appone la firma sul corpo di due sue clienti. Poiché molti collezionisti più che acquistare un certo quadro comperano la firma di un certo autore, Piero Manzoni ha schieramente semplificato la questione. Fino ad ora 70 persone si sono fatte «firmare». Durante l'anno si sono avvertiti in tutta l'Europa i sintomi di una battuta d'arresto nell'acquisto di quadri astratti. Anche i musei degli Stati Uniti che avevano con i loro acquisti stimolato il mercato europeo sono più prudenti. Nella grande asta milanese del mese scorso solo i maestri, i Klee, i Kandinsky, i Mondrian, non hanno prodotto nelle quotazioni paucate.

The Breath of the Painter Who Does Not Use Brushes Costs Two Hundred Lire a Liter 1962

Piero Manzoni, of the Milanese avant-garde group, has sold to collectors hundreds of balloons he personally inflated: they are called pneumatic sculptures. This is a form of caricature of the abstract art that today is resoundingly in crisis.

I brought a bundle of French newspapers and showed them to him. For five or six months articles have been appearing in Paris regarding the decline of abstract art, but in recent weeks the discussions have become more furious.

First of all I show him the passage marked in red in which it says that Georges Duthuit, a well-known interpreter of abstraction, has reversed his position, not even sparing himself.

“Costa duecento lire al litro il fiato del pittore che non usa pennelli”
(The Breath of the Painter Who Does Not Use Brushes Costs Two Hundred Lire a Liter)

Article-interview by Franco Serra published in *Settimana INCOM Illustrata* (Milan) 15, no. 50, December 16, 1962, 49–51.

A few lines below there is mention of Bazaine: he too, placed by the critics in the pantheon of abstract painters, has crossed over to the other side and now takes a benevolent view of a return to figurative art.

Piero Manzoni, the creator of paintings without color (which he and his disciples call *Achromes*) reads carefully but does not seem to be at all perturbed. He has arrived for our meeting, at the door to his studio in Via Fiori Chiari, a hundred steps or so from the venerable palazzo of the Brera, holding two brushes as if they were candles carried in a procession. Looking at me with sleepy eyes, he apologized: "It must be a year since I last bought brushes." Unintentionally I had surprised him in a moment of weakness. His last painting, back from an exhibition in Copenhagen, is composed of two immaculate canvases joined by a transverse seam and imprisoned within a frame.

Errors of Taste

Patiently, Manzoni continues to examine the newspapers I put under his nose. There is also news that has arrived in Paris by way of London: during the auction at the renowned gallery Sotheby's, the paintings of Klee, Miró, and Dubuffet failed to attract offers above the price proposed by the auctioneer and remained unsold. In another paper, two strokes of red pencil surround the regulations of the Prix Manguin, announced in the last few days and notoriously avant-garde in its position. The promoters warned, "This year we would like to give a figurative trend to the prize, as we believe that in the generation of artists we are looking for a new form of expression is emerging." Just a quarter of the Parisian galleries, against a good half last year, are presenting exhibitions by abstract painters. Informed of the facts, Piero Manzoni looked

up from his reading: he stared at me with sleepy, indifferent eyes.

I try to provoke him with a final blow. Here it comes. This is Raymond Charmet, renowned art critic (“French Intelligence Weekly,” as the subtitle runs), who writes, I quote: “It is highly probable that contemporary glories, a Miró and a Dubuffet, will become examples of a monumental error of our taste.”

In response, Manzoni headed to the corner of the studio where two panels lay, two paintings: the first is completely covered with fluffy cotton wool balls, aligned like a platoon of soldiers on parade; a spongy substance is glued on the other panel. “Expanded polystyrene,” explains the painter, “I was using it four or five years ago.”

I also try to assume an expression of complete indifference. Then again, I am rather well prepared in this area. Anyone who is even slightly

acquainted with our local art is well aware, for example, that two years ago the jury of the Premio San Fedele admitted among the competing works *O. 2 Grigio 2* and also *Momento n. 2*. As is well-known, the “San Fedele,” a prize of national resonance to resources of which the Municipality of Milan also contributes two hundred thousand lire, is the institution directed by the Jesuit priest Arcangelo Favaro that aims to discover and encourage promising painters under thirty years of age, maintaining at the same time a Catholic “aperture” in the avant-garde artistic Milan. *O. 2 Grigio 2*, by Gianni Colombo, was a layer of that grayish cotton that tailors use for padding; *Momento n. 2*, by Manfredo Massironi, was more simply a sheet of yellowish corrugated cardboard, left whole, just as it was when it left the factory that produced it.

“I made the first white works in the autumn of ’57,” explains Manzoni,

“now they are commonplace.”

“Perhaps I haven’t grasped their full meaning,” I admit.

Manzoni has probably forgiven me for having got him up at eleven o’clock in the morning. In any case, he helps me out: “Painters usually face the canvas as if it were a surface to be filled with colors and forms, in accordance with a more or less appreciable taste. When the painting is finished, a surface of unlimited possibilities is reduced to a kind of recipient into which unnatural colors and artificial meanings are forced and compressed. Why not empty the recipient instead? Why not liberate this surface? Why not attempt to discover the limitless significance of a total space, of a pure and absolute light?”

The White and the Black

Another young painter of the group, Enrico Benvenuti, hears the explanation and nods even though, while substantially in agreement, his opinion differs in certain details. Rather than all white, he makes paintings that are all black.

“And how much are your white works worth on the market now?” I ask.

“Between one hundred and two hundred thousand, depending on the format,” replies the painter, “but it is difficult to find them. The first time I showed them in Milan there was a degree of surprise, but then, on the last day of the exhibition, I sold them all to collectors.”

It is not to provide me with these banal explanations that Manzoni dragged me, before I began asking questions, to a corner of his studio. He wants to show me a white

canvas on which two dark rounded marks stand out. The picture has just been sent back to him from an exhibition in Brussels and the two round marks are a real surprise. "I didn't make them," points out the painter before explaining what happened.

While the exhibition in Brussels was still open Manzoni received from a Belgian friend a newspaper clipping that surprised him: a local critic noted the fact that the creator of the *Achromes* had abandoned absolute white. Once he had the painting back in his hands, the painter discovered the cause of this unfair accusation: examining the mark, which were not there when the painting was sent to Belgium, he realized that the marks were two stamps hurriedly applied by customs officials during the outward trip. The Belgian critic, a respectable person, was not to blame: he had been deceived by the exhibition

organizers who had hung the painting as it had been transformed by customs.

Before coming to Via Fiori Chiari and getting Piero Manzoni out of his bed at eleven o'clock in the morning, I had looked for information on the issue. In truth, not everyone, and especially certain art dealers, is in agreement in associating themselves with the singeing condemnation of Abstraction. For example, Guido Le Noci, director of the gallery Apollinaire in Milan and the man behind the Premio Lissone, one of the most important in the sector.

Guido Le Noci has no hesitation in answering an inquisitive journalist: "Those who see in this phenomenon the end, the death, the banishment of abstract art are pure fools. In effect, it is true that there is an air of renewal in the world of committed art. Art always needs to go beyond."

“Ciao, Maestro!”

The conversation with Piero Manzoni now becomes increasingly passionate: this twenty-nine-year-old painter, who has studied philosophy at university and who then left the Accademia di Brera in disgust after having attended for a couple of weeks, seems to me to be very committed and far “beyond.”

“The most interesting thing are the lines,” Manzoni informs me, moving on to another article. He began to trace them in April 1959 and the first that he exhibited in public was 19.93 meters long. He shows me a shorter one that he has in his studio: it is a roll of paper on which the painter has in fact traced a line by hand. Under the bench, in a chrome-plated steel drum, is another line over a kilometer long that was presented at the Premio Lissona. I forego examining it all.

“In the beginning my lines were short,” Manzoni continues to explain,

“then I made them ever longer: 19 meters and 11 centimeters, 20 meters and 1 centimeter, 33 meters and 63 centimeters, et cetera, et cetera. I made the longest of all in 1960: 7 kilometers and 200 meters.”

This last, in a certain sense his masterpiece, is in the collection of the museum in Herning in Denmark, in a sealed box. Other much shorter lines are in the homes of Milanese and foreign collectors. In Chicago, the price of a line of medium length fluctuates around one hundred thousand lire. (It would perhaps be more accurate to say that it fluctuated as for some months, following the alarm raised in Paris; the American collectors have become somewhat diffident). A glance at the list of his exhibitions is sufficient to show how Manzoni’s lines are known throughout the world: The Hague, Antwerp, Bergamo, Berlin, Brussels, Lausanne, Milan, Monaco, Munich,

Paris, Rome, Rotterdam, Tokyo and Wiesbaden.

The episode of the *Corpi d'aria* (Bodies of Air) or pneumatic sculptures dates to around the same era as the lines. I can observe one at my ease: a wooden box contains a kind of deflated balloon and a metal tripod.

“The *Corpi d'aria* were a product fabricated in series: I could sell them at thirty thousand lire each,” comments Manzoni.

Having entered into possession of the wooden case and its contents, the purchaser inflated the balloon to the desired dimension (eighty centimeters, however, is the maximum diameter) and placed it on its metal support. On request the balloon was inflated personally by the artist, on payment of a supplement: Piero Manzoni's breath was valued at two hundred lire per liter and the balloon, at its maximum

expansion, contained around three hundred liters. In this last case, the purchaser usually demanded that the inflation operation took place in his presence, in order to guarantee the authenticity of the contents. The *Corpi d'aria*, around a hundred in total, have prevalently been sold in Milan, but a very few remain due to a technical defect. Over time the rubber of the envelope disintegrates and the balloons burst.

We decide to allow ourselves a break and go out for an aperitif at a bar in Via Brera. Two youths we meet crossing the road recognize Piero Manzoni and say hello: “Ciao, maestro!”

The aperitif puts us in a good mood. After the second aperitif, Manzoni recalls with some emotion: “Last year I organized two events that had no commercial purpose. However it is difficult to bring the public into contact with art. Two

events: one here in Milan at “Galleria Azimut” and the other in Copenhagen. I had marked with my fingerprint around a hundred hard-boiled eggs, consecrating them to art. I invited the public to eat them.”

Sackcloth

“How did it work out?” I ask.

“They ate them, but when I explained what my aim was, they were disappointed. I preferred to leave the room, taking advantage of the confusion. They would not have understood me.”

Alberto Burri, who is now one who is not up for discussion, was another not initially understood. It seemed like the end of the world was upon us when in 1959 a jury of big international names awarded the million of the Premio dell’Ariete for his now famous *Sacco e oro*. (We all remember that work: scraps of

burlap canvas, holes and slashes, touches of tar, marks and patches, with the addition of a corner painted in gold, which justified the title). And yet, the art critic Giuseppe Marchiori now writes of Burri: “It is so easy to say: sackcloth, burnt wood, sheet metal with the tone of those who are offended because painting, according to the classical rules, should be something else. It is absurd to create a hierarchy of the materials with which one can or cannot make art. This is a prejudice that avant-garde art, from the early years of the twentieth century to the present, should have debunked.”

We cross the road again and return to the studio. Piero Manzoni shows me on a shelf a small pyramid of metal cylinders that initially I had mistaken for ordinary cans of meat. I went closer and read on the label a word that is usually never pronounced in the salons. The inscription

is repeated in the principal languages on the printed band that encircles the metal cylinders that are so similar to cans of meat.

“Exhibited in Milan and Amsterdam, last year,” my host announces laconically.

“And sold?” I ask.

“Yes, lots. They found them interesting, especially in Milan. A famous speaker once said that the work of art is material plus the sensibility of the artist. I wanted to provoke a controversy.”

“And the price?” I insisted.

“The price of gold, according to the quotation of the day. The net content is thirty grams. You do the sums.”

Piero Manzoni has solved many problems. The most authoritative critics are still discussing how much weight, given the decline of abstraction on the international markets, should be given to the fact that too many collectors (“The work of art is

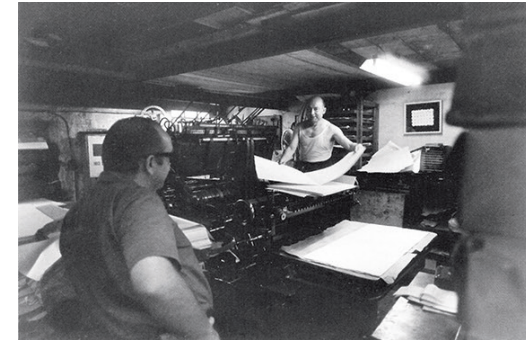
also an investment” runs the slogan of recent years) rather than purchase a certain painting, acquire the signature of a certain artist, regardless of the content. Manzoni has for some time simplified the question and has gone much further “beyond,” selling only the signature. He signs the client, on the preferred part, and issues them with the following document: “Certificate of authenticity—It is hereby certified that Mr. [name and surname] has been signed by my hand and therefore, from today’s date, is considered to be an authentic and true work of art. Signed: Piero Manzoni.” From the receipt book I can examine it emerges that in this moment seventy-three people are walking around Milan signed and authenticated by Manzoni.

I pay my compliments and ask my final question: “So, you who are in the avant-garde, how do you see the future?”

A melancholic expression passed across Manzoni's face.

"You should know," he answers, "that sooner or later all the artists fall into the spiral of a dealer. Within a couple of years I'll be commercialized too."

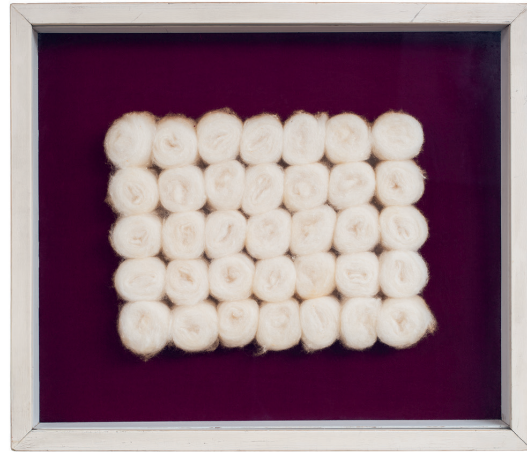
Franco Serra



Giorgio Carmenati
Francia (Valentino
Dori) and Antonio
Maschera at their
printing press,
Milan, ca. 1960

This long article covers in narrative and rather ironic style the principal stages of Manzoni's career and presents considerable useful information. The transcription of the lengthy interview does not include the long captions accompanying the illustrations. The extensive series of photographs features: Manzoni inflating one of his *Corpo d'aria* (Body of Air; p. 49); the creation of the *Linea lunga 7.200 metri* (Line 7200 Meters Long) in Herning and the artist with a *Linea*, two examples of *Merda d'artista* (Artist's Shit) and a number of *Achromes* in his studio (p. 50); a portrait of the artist with the *Linea lunga 1.000 metri* (Line 1000 Meters Long), two individual photos of *Achromes* (in wadding and sewn canvas) and the artist signing two nude models (p. 51). Manzoni continued to consider the *Linee* his primary and most important innovation even after having created numerous other works of various types. Again with regard to the *Linee*, there is a fundamental indirect mention of the *Linea lunga 1.140 metri* (Line 1140 Meters Long) from 1961, probably exhibited at the *XII Premio Lissone* that opened on October 29, 1961. With regard to the Premio Lissone, there is also an important letter from the artist to his mother, probably sent toward the end of the summer in 1961 in which he wrote: "Dear Mother, thank you for your letters and the money, which Uncle Nicola gave me straight away."

The Breath of the Painter Who Does Not Use Brushes . . .



Achrome, 1961–62
cotton wool balls,
19 × 26 cm

I therefore picked up my containers, I packed up the lines, and I shall take them to the Premio Lissone today.” The catalogue for the *XII Premio Lissone* mentions only Manzoni’s name, with no photographs or captions detailing his works exhibited.

Serra’s article was mentioned by Manzoni in a letter to Vincenzo Agnetti (datable to between December 1962 and January 1963) which reads: “The magazine *Settimana Incom* has devoted a three-page article to me with various photos: it does not say anything naturally; but it does not say anything bad, good in fact.”



**prolegomeni
all'attività
artistica**

Oggi i concetti di quadro, di pittura, di poesia nel senso consueto della parola non possono più aver senso per noi: e così tutto un bagaglio critico che trae le sue origini da un mondo che già fu: giudizi di qualità, di intime emozioni di senso pittorico, di sensibilità espressiva; tutto ciò insomma che nasce da certi aspetti gratuiti di certa arte.

Il momento artistico non sta in fatti edonistici, ma nel parlare in luce, ridurre ad immagine i miti universali preconcetti. L'arte non è un fenomeno descrittivo, ma un procedimento scientifico di fondazione.

Infatti l'opera d'arte trae la sua origine dall'inconscio, che noi intendiamo come una psiche imperonale comune a tutti gli uomini, anche se si manifesta attraverso una coscienza personale (da qui la possibilità del rapporto autore-osservatore), ciascun uomo trae l'elemento umano di sé da questa base, senza renderne conto, in modo elementare ed immediato.

Per l'artista si tratta di una immersione cociente in sé stesso per cui superato ciò che è individuale e contingente, egli affonda fino a giungere al vivo germe della umana totalità.

E' ovvio infatti ciò che a prima vista può sembrare paradossale: cioè che quanto più ci immergiamo in noi stessi, tanto più siamo vicini al germe della nostra totalità e tanto più siamo vicini al germe della totalità di tutti gli uomini.

L'arte dunque non è vera creazione e fondazione che in quanto crea e fonda là dove le mitologie hanno il proprio ultimo fondamento e la propria origine: la base archetipica.

Per poter assumere il significato della propria epoca, il punto è dunque raggiungere la propria mitologia individuale là dove giunge a identificarsi con la mitologia universale.

La difficoltà sta nel liberarsi dai fatti estranei, dai gesti inutili, fatti e gesti che inquinano l'arte connessa dei nostri giorni, e che talora anzi vengono evidenziati a tal punto da diventare insegne di modi artistici.

Il « test » che ci permette questa separazione dell'autentico dalle scorie, che ci porta a scoprire in una sequenza incomprensibile ed irrazionale di immagini fessure in un caso generale un complesso di significati coerente e ordinato, è un processo di autoanalisi.

E' con esso che noi ci ricollochiamo alle nostre origini, eliminando tutti i gesti inutili, tutto quello che è in noi di personale e letterario nel senso derisorio della parola: risolti nelbusci d'infanzia, sentimentalisti, impressionisti, costruzioni volute, preoccupazioni pitteriche, simboliche o descrittive, false angosce, fatti inconsci non consapevolizzati, astrazioni, riferimenti, ripetizioni in senso adomativo, tutto ciò dev'essere escluso (per quanto è possibile naturalmente, l'importante è non attribuire mai valore a ciò che è condizionamento soggettivo).

Attraverso questo processo di eliminazione l'originario umanamente raggiungibile viene a manifestarsi assumendo la forma di immagini prime, nostre e degli autori e degli spettatori, poiché sono le variazioni storicamente determinate dei mitologi primordiali (mitologia universale si identificano).

Variazioni, poiché gli archetipi, questi elementi ineliminabili dell'inconscio, cambiano forma continuamente: in ogni istante essi non sono più gli stessi che erano prima; per questo l'arte è in continua mutazione e deve essere in continua ricerca.

Tutto va sacrificato alla possibilità di scoperta, a questa necessità di assumere i propri gesti.

Lo spazio-superficie del quadro interessa il processo automatistico solo in quanto spazio di libertà in cui noi andiamo alla scoperta: come tavola delle pensate dei germi attorno ai quali e sui quali noi siamo organizzati.

Qui l'immagine prende forma nella sua funzione vitale: essa non potrà valere per ciò che ricorda, spiega o esprime, caso mai la questione è

Realizzazione della linea lunga 7.200 metri



fondare, né voler essere o poter essere spiegata come allegoria di un processo fisico: essa vale solo in quanto è essere.

PIERO MANZONI

I miei primi « achromes » sono del '57: in tela imbevuta di collina e colla; del '59 il raster degli « achromes » è costituito da cuciture a macchina. Nel '60 ne ho eseguiti in cotone idrofilo, in polietilene espanso, ne ho sperimentati di fosforescenti, e altri imbevuti di cobalto chiaro che cambiano colore col variare del tempo. Nel '61 ho continuato con altri ancora in paglia e plastica e con una serie di quadri, sempre bianchi, in pallini d'ovatta e poi polveri, con delle macule, in fibre naturali e artificiali. Ho anche eseguito una scultura in pelle di coniglio. Nel '59 ho preparato una serie di 45 « Corpi d'aria » (sculture pneumatiche) del diametro massimo di cm. 40 (all'altezza, colla base cm. 120).

Nel '59 ho realizzato un vecchio progetto: la prima scultura nello spazio: una sfera sospesa sostenuta da un getto d'aria. Essendo nello stesso principio ho poi lavorato a dei « corpi di luce assoluti », sferoidi che, sostenuti dal getto d'aria opportunamente orientato, giravano vorticosamente su se stessi creando un volume virtuale.

All'inizio del '59 ho eseguito le mie prime linee, prima più corte, poi sempre più lunghe (metri 10, 11 metri, 33 metri, 63 metri, 1000 ecc...): la più lunga che io abbia eseguito finora è di 7.200 metri (1960 Herning Danimarca). Tutte queste linee sono chiuse in scende sigillate.

Nel 1960 nel corso di due manifestazioni (Copenaghen e Milano) ho consacrato all'arte imponendoci la mia impronta digitale, delle uova sode; il pubblico ha potuto prendere contatto diretto con queste opere inghiottendo un'intera esposizione in 70 minuti.

Dal '60 vengo le impronte dei miei pollici, destro e sinistro. Nel '59 avevo pensato di esporre delle persone vive (altre, morte, volevo invece chiuderle e conservarle in blocchi di plastica trasparente); nel '61 ho cominciato a firmare « per sempre » persone. A questo mio opere, da una « carta d'identità ».

Sempre nel gennaio del '61 ho costruito la prima « base magica »: qualunque persona, qualsiasi oggetto si fosse sopra era, finché vi restava, un'opera d'arte: una seconda Tio realizzata a Copenaghen; sulla terra, in ferro, di grandi dimensioni, posta in un parco di Hernig (Danimarca 1962) poggia la Terra; è la « base del mondo ».

Nel mese di maggio del '61 ho prodotto e incanalato 90 scatole di « merda d'artista » (pr. 30 ciascuna) conservata al naturale (made in Italy). In un progetto precedente intendeva produrre fide di « sangue d'artista ».

Dal '58 al '60 ho preparato una serie di « tavole d'accertamento » di cui otto sono state pubblicate in litografia, raccolte in una cartella (carte geografiche, alfabeti, impronte digitali...).

Per la musica, nel '61 ho composto due « Afonie »: l'afonia Herking (per orchestra e pubblico), l'afonia « Milano » (per cuore e feto).

Attualmente ('62) ho in fase di studio un « labirinto » controllato elettronicamente, che potrà servire per test psicologici e lavaggi del cervello.

PIERO MANZONI

Prolegomena to Artistic Activity 1963

Today the concepts of the picture, of painting, of poetry in the usual sense of the word can no longer have any meaning for us: the same is true of all the critical baggage originating from a world has already been; judgments of quality, of intimate emotions, of pictorial meaning, of expressive sensibility; everything that in short is born out of certain gratuitous aspects of certain art.

The artistic moment is composed not of hedonistic facts, but rather of the bringing to light, of the reduction to images of the preconscious universal myths. Art is not a descriptive phenomenon but a scientific procedure of foundation.

In fact, the work of art originates from the unconscious, which we understand as an impersonal psyche shared by all men, even

“Prolegomeni all'attività artistica”
(Prolegomena to Artistic Activity)

Text in the magazine *Evoluzione delle lettere e delle arti* (Milan) 1, no. 1 (January 1963): 46–49. See pages 75–80 and 245–48, with comments.

though it manifests itself through a personal consciousness (hence the possibility of the author-work-spectator relationship). Every man draws the human element of himself from this base without realizing it, in an elementary and immediate manner.

For the artist it is a conscious immersion in the self and so, having overcome that which is individual and contingent, he plunges to reach the living germ of human totality.

What at first sight may seem paradoxical is obvious in fact: that is to say that the more we immerse ourselves in ourselves, the more we open up, because the closer we are to the germ of our totality, the closer we are to the germ of the totality of all men.

Art is therefore not true creation and foundation if it does not create and found there where mythologies have their ultimate foundation and their origin: the archetypical base.

In order to take on the meaning of one's own era the point is therefore to achieve one's own individual mythology there where it comes to identify with the universal mythology.

The difficulty lies in freeing oneself from extraneous facts, from futile gestures: facts and gestures that pollute the usual art of our times, and that at times are even highlighted to the point that they become insignia of artistic trends.

The "test" that allows us to separate the authentic from the dross, which leads us to discover in an incomprehensible and irrational sequence of images, provided by a general case, an array of coherent and ordered meanings is a process of self-analysis.

This is how we reconnect with our origins, eliminating all superfluous gestures, all that which is personal and literary in us in the

worst sense of the term: nebulous recollections of infancy, sentimentalism, impressions, deliberate constructions, pictorial, symbolic, or descriptive preoccupations, false anxieties, unconscious, unprocessed facts, abstractions, references, repetitions in a hedonistic sense, all that must be excluded (as far as possible naturally; what is important is never to attribute value to that which is subjective conditioning).

Through this process of elimination the humanly achievable original is made manifest, taking the form of prime images, ours and those of the authors and the spectators, as they are the historically determined variations of the primordial mythologems (individual mythology and universal mythology identify themselves).

Variations, in that the archetypes, these unshakeable elements of the unconscious, change form

continually: at any given moment they are no longer the same as they were before; for this reason art is in continuous mutation and must be subject to continuous research.

Everything is to be sacrificed to the possibility of discovery, to this need to assume our own gestures.

The space-surface of the painting is of interest to the self-analytical process only in as much as it is a space of freedom that we explore; as a table of the presence of the germs around which and on which we are organically constituted.

Here the image takes form in its vital function: it cannot be valid for that which it recalls, explains, or expresses, if anything the question is to found, nor can it aspire to be or to be explained as an allegory of a physical process: it is valid only in that it is: being.

Piero Manzoni

Anno I / Numero 1

Milano / Gennaio 1963

EVOLUZIONE

delle lettere e delle arti

In questo numero:

Giuseppe Bellone, Andrea Cascella

Silvio Ceccato, Matthieu Galey, Guido

Lopez, Luciana Maffei, Piero Manzoni

Mattia Pinoli, Mario De Stefanis

Antonino Verdirame, Angelo Verga

RIVISTA MENSILE DI LETTERE, ARTE E CULTURA

fondare, né voler essere o poter essere spiegata come allegoria di un processo fisico: essa vale solo in quanto è: essere.

PIERO MANZONI

I miei primi « achromes » sono del '57: in tela imbevuta di caolino e colla: del '59 il raster degli « achromes » è costituito da cuciture a macchina. Nel '60 ne ho eseguiti in cotone idrofilo, in polistirolo espanso, ne ho sperimentati di fosforescenti, e altri imbevuti di cobalto cloruro che cambiano colore col variare del tempo. Nel '61 ho continuato con altri ancora in paglia e plastica e con una serie di quadri, sempre bianchi, in pallini d'ovatta e poi pelosi, con delle nuvole, in fibre naturali o artificiali. Ho anche eseguito una scultura in pelle di coniglio. Nel '59 ho preparato una serie di 45 « Corpi d'aria » (sculture pneumatiche) del diametro massimo di cm. 80 (all'altezza, colla base cm. 120).

Nel '60 ho realizzato un vecchio progetto: la prima scultura nello nello spazio: una sfera sospesa sostenuta da un getto d'aria. Basandosi sullo stesso principio ho poi lavorato a dei « corpi di luce assoluti », sferoidi che, sostenuti dal getto d'aria opportunamente orientato, giravano vorticosamente su se stessi creando un volume virtuale.

All'inizio del '59 ho eseguito le mie prime linee, prima più corte, poi sempre più lunghe (metri 10, 11 metri, 33 metri, 63 metri, 1000 ecc...): la più lunga che io abbia eseguito finora è di 7.200 metri (1960 Herning Danimarca). Tutte queste linee sono chiuse in scatole sigillate.

Nel 1960 nel corso di due manifestazioni (Copenaghen e Milano) ho consacrato all'arte imponendovi la mia impronta digitale, delle uova sode: il pubblico ha potuto prendere contatto diretto con queste opere inghiottendo un'intera esposizione in 70 minuti.

Dal '60 vendo le impronte dei miei pollici, destro e sinistro. Nel '59 avevo pensato di esporre delle persone vive (altre, morte, volevo invece chiuderle e conservarle in blocchi di plastica trasparente); nel '61 ho cominciato a firmare « per esporle » persone. A queste mie opere, do una « carta d'autenticità ».

Sempre nel gennaio del '61 ho costruito la prima « base magica »: qualunque persona, qualsiasi oggetto vi fosse sopra era, finché vi restava, un'opera d'arte: una seconda l'ho realizzata a Copenaghen: sulla terza, in ferro, di grandi dimensioni, posta in un parco di Hernig (Danimarca 1962) poggia la Terra: è la « base del mondo ».

Nel mese di maggio del '61 ho prodotto e inscatolato 90 scatole di « merda d'artista » (gr. 30 ciascuna) conservata al naturale (made in Italy). In un progetto precedente intendevo produrre fiale di « sangue d'artista ».

Dal '58 al '60 ho preparato una serie di « tavole d'accertamento » di cui otto sono state pubblicate in litografia, raccolte in una cartella (carte geografiche, alfabeti, impronte digitali...).

Per la musica, nel '61 ho composto due « Afonie »: l'afonia Herbing (per orchestra e pubblico), l'afonia « Milano » (per cuore e fiato).

Attualmente ('62) ha in fase di studio un « labirinto » controllato elettronicamente, che potrà servire per test psicologici e lavaggi del cervello.

PIERO MANZONI

My First *Achromes* Are from '57 ... [Some Creations— Some Experiments—Some Projects] 1963

My first *Achromes* are from '57: in canvas soaked in kaolin and glue: since '59 the *raster* of the *Achromes* has been stitched by machine. In '60 I made others in cotton wool, in expanded polystyrene, I experimented with phosphorescents, and others soaked in cobalt chloride that changed color with variations in the weather. In '61 I continued with others in straw and plastic and with a series of pictures, always white, in cotton wool balls and then hairy ones, with clouds, in natural or artificial fibers. I also made a sculpture in rabbit skin. In '59 I prepared a series of forty-five *Corpi d'aria* (Bodies of Air) (pneumatic sculptures) with a maximum diameter of 80 centimeters (with a height, complete with base, of 120).

“I miei primi ‘achromes’ sono del ‘57 ...”
(My First *Achromes* Are from '57 ...)

Untitled text published in the magazine *Evoluzione delle lettere e delle arti* (Milan) 1, no. 1 (January 1963): 49.

In '60 I realized an old project: the first sculpture in space: a suspended sphere supported by a jet of air. Using the same principle, I then worked on "absolute bodies of light," spheroids that, supported by the suitably oriented jet of air, whirled dizzily about themselves, creating a virtual volume.

At the beginning of '59 I made my first lines, firstly shorter, then ever longer (10 meters, 11 meters, 33 meters, 63 meters, 1000, et cetera): the longest I have made to date is of 7200 meters (1960, Herning, Denmark).

All these lines are closed in sealed boxes.

In 1960, during the course of two events (Copenhagen and Milan), I consecrated hard-boiled eggs to art by putting my fingerprint on them: the public was able to come into direct contact with these works, devouring an entire exhibition in

seventy minutes.

Since '60 I have sold the prints of my right and left thumbs. In '59 I thought of exhibiting living persons (others, deceased, I instead wanted to place and conserve in blocks of transparent plastic); in '61 I began signing people "to exhibit them." I provide these works of mine with a "certificate of authenticity."

Again in January '61 I constructed the first *Base magica* (Magic Base): any person, any object placed on it, was a work of art for as long as they were on the base: I made a second in Copenhagen: on the third, in iron, of large dimensions, placed in a park in Herning (Denmark, 1962) rests the Earth: this is the *Socle du monde* (Base of the World).

In the month of May '61 I produced and tinned ninety cans of *Merda d'artista* (Artist's Shit) (each thirty grams) freshly preserved (made in Italy)." In an earlier project

I had intended to produce phials of *Sangue d'artista* (Artist's Blood).

From '58 to '60 I prepared a series of *Tavole di accertamento*, (Works of Verification) of which eight have been published as lithographs, collected in a portfolio (geographical maps, alphabets, fingerprints ...).

In music, in '61 I composed two *Aphonias*: the *Herning Aphonia* (for orchestra and audience) and the *Milan Aphonia* (for heart and breath).

Currently ('62) I am working on an electronically controlled "labyrinth" that may perhaps be used for psychological tests and brainwashing.

Piero Manzoni



Achrome, 1962–63,
polystyrene balls
and kaolin,
81.5 × 65.5 cm,
Fondazione Piero
Manzoni, Milan



Achrome, 1960–61,
polystyrene and
phosphorescent
paint, 60 × 46 cm,
Fondazione Piero
Manzoni, Milan

This text summarizes Manzoni's career. The subtitle that has been added in square brackets repeats a typescript by Manzoni from 1962. In addition to being untitled, the text published in the magazine mentioned, edited by Mattia Pinoli, is a drier, abbreviated version of the typescript. Pages 46 to 49 are dedicated to Manzoni, including a series of photos with



Achrome, 1961–62,
fiberglass, 25.5 ×
24 cm



Socle du monde
(Base of the World),
1961, iron and
bronze, 82 × 100 ×
100 cm, HEART,
Herning Museum
for Contemporary
Art

rather imprecise captions; the text *Prolegomena to Artistic Activity* is found on pages 47 to 49 (see 75–80 and 237–41 in this book); a brief biographical profile, a photo portrait with an egg during the *Consumazione dell'arte / Dinamica del pubblico / Divorare l'arte* (Consumption of Art / Dynamic of the Public / Devour Art) at the gallery Azimut in Milan in 1960—but possibly a photograph taken in Denmark that year or on another unverifiable occasion—and an *Achrome* in sewn canvas on page 46; an *Achrome* in gesso from 1957–58 and the *Achrome* sculpture in rabbit skin with a base in charred wood from 1961 on page 47; a photograph of the artist while he was creating the *Linea lunga 7.200 metri* (Line 7200 Meters

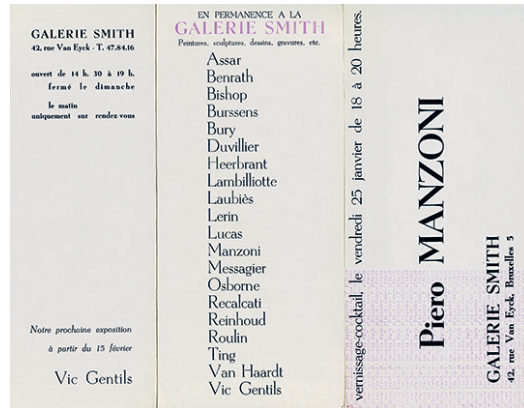
Long) in Herning in 1960 on page 48. It is worth recalling that the “base of the world,” *Socle du monde Socle magic no. 3 de Piero Manzoni—1961—Hommage à Galileo* as recorded on the work, was probably created toward the end of 1961. 1962 is probably the date of its installation in the grounds of Aage Damgaard’s factory.

Manzoni mentions two relatively undocumented performative projects (the *Aphonias*), a new “architectural” project (labyrinth) and the *8 Tavole di accertamento* (Works of Verification), conceived between 1958 and 1960 but published in 1962 by Vanni Scheiwiller with a preface by Vincenzo Agnetti.⁴⁵

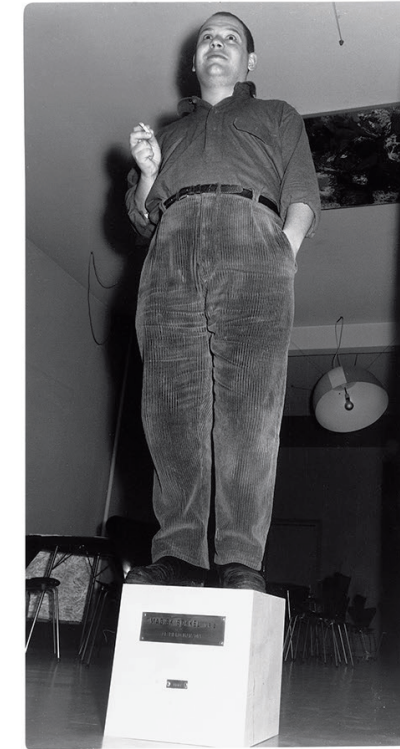


8 Tavole di accertamento
(8 Works of
Verification), 1962,
photolithography
on paper, edition
32/60, 50 × 35 cm

The text, published a few days before the artist’s premature death, is only a pale reflection of the desires and needs expressed in a letter to Vincenzo Agnetti in October 1961: “This year I shall publish a book about myself, about all my experiments, et cetera . . . There will be a text by me with the description of my works and my projects. Nothing else.” The book Manzoni described to Agnetti was never to see the light of day while, shortly after the artist’s death, *Piero Manzoni: Life and Works* was to be published. This “monograph” planned together with the German publisher Jes Petersen



Brochure of the exhibition *Piero Manzoni*, Galerie Smith, Brussels, January 25–February 12, 1963



Piero Manzoni standing on the *Magisk Sokkel n. 2* (Magic Base no. 2), Herring, 1961

following correspondence between 1961 and 1962, took the form of a limited edition object, composed of totally transparent plastic pages; the only writing was on the cover: “Jes Petersen / PIERO MANZONI / life and works / Verlag Petersen Presse—Flensburg/Glücksburg / 1963.” As in the theoretical texts and works with “labels” or “certificates” such as the *Linee* (Lines), *Merda d’artista* (Artist’s Shit), or *Sculture viventi* (Living Sculptures) here, too, there is the totalizing power of the word. In *Piero Manzoni: Life and Works*, however, the word is denied in the body of the book but becomes indicative and generative on the cover, where there is also a play on the idea of “authorship.”⁴⁶ A truly “achromatic” and “absolute” work in which limits and confines are annulled. Everything and nothing.

45 Cf. Zanchetti, “Baltimore è proprio a Baltimore?,” 97–109.

46 Regarding this project see Jack McGrath, “Nel nome dell’Editore: Piero Manzoni *Life and Works*,” in *Piero Manzoni: Nuovi studi*, 27–37.

“Everything leads us to believe that there exists a spot in the mind from which life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the high and the low, the communicable and the incommunicable will cease to appear contradictory.”

—André Breton, “Surrealist Manifesto,” 1926

“Everything leads us to believe that our experiences, in all their diverse directions, announce the possibilities of creating a new moral organism.”

—Piero Manzoni et al., “Albisola Marina,” 1957

The above epigraphs share a rather uncanny similarity of tone and grammar, and they signal a schism in Manzoni’s formation as an artist. While Manzoni maintained an astonishing degree of continuity between the historical avant-gardes and the formation of an Italian neo-avant-garde in the 1950s, by the time he wrote his text “Free Dimension” in 1960, he actually articulated exactly the opposite claims, to declare a historical rupture between the two formations. Thus, for example, in an unpublished letter from 1961–62 to his German patron and publisher Jes Petersen, Manzoni writes: “Least of all would I want to fall into those post-Surrealist or post-Constructivist histories . . .”¹

Yet it is not only this textual evidence that signals the lasting impacts of early twentieth century avant-garde theories and practices on Manzoni's mind. It is also the mixed company of signatories to Manzoni's earliest writings that tells us even more about the diversity, or rather the confusion, of his attempts of the mid- to late 1950s to partake in the project of assembling if not a new Italian culture after World War II then at least a new set of cultural strategies.

Furthermore, as is typical for European post-World War II schizo-culture at large, Manzoni and his generation of Italian Neoavantguardia artists seem to have repressed their memories of their endogenous avant-gardes (for example, avoiding all references to the Fascist affinities of Italian Futurism, or its inversion into the *italianità* of Carlo Carrà or Mario Sironi of the 1920s and 1930s) and were complemented by an equally intense desire to posit themselves within a renewed international visibility after the Marshall Plan.² Nobody had embodied those historical, ideological, and aesthetic conflicts better than Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni's at least temporarily idealized master. After all, he had morphed seamlessly from being a major producer of Fascist propaganda to fronting himself as a literally striking figure in the international projects to spectacularize abstraction (for example, Georges Mathieu and Yves Klein) at the very moment when abstraction's historical bankruptcy was about to become compellingly evident.

Thus, as late as 1958, we find Piero Manzoni cosigning manifestos with a peculiar hodgepodge of peers, ranging from Guido Biasi to the Pomodoro brothers, all artists who were performing a hopscotch of positionings, stepping from a belated Italian surrealization of painting to a panoply of reductivist and constructivist abstractions (neither Surrealism

nor Soviet Constructivist or Dutch de Stijl reductivism ever having been previously received, let alone having become an element in Italian twentieth-century art prior to their belated post-World War II recovery). Thus it is all the more important to recognize that Manzoni's polemical potential as a writer and theoretician (obviously as a consequence of his rude and rapturous epistemological awakening as an artist) was only set free around 1958, when his textual output finally dissociates itself from the conflicting chorus of his *mélange* of peers. It is only at that moment that Manzoni's diction and tone acquire a new polemical clarity and cruel precision, signalling that the artist has finally reached the decisive status of an utterly incomparable and incompatible artistic subjectivity that has to distance itself from all previous aesthetic contiguities. Here is just one sample of his newly found voice:

However, this disadvantage is sufficiently balanced . . . by the absence of the Tàpieses and the Wolses, the Bacons, the Buffets . . . in short, all that artistic flora rather than fauna that so assails and oppresses us throughout the winter in the city galleries.³

Like a few other central figures of the twentieth century before him (think, for example, of Marcel Duchamp's prolonged labors to extricate himself from the bonds of Cubism by 1913), Manzoni seems to have attained this ascetic autonomy only by eventually purging all previous liaisons, recognizing that authentic artistic speech now—perhaps more than ever before—had to originate from a profound sense of a void of devastation and discontinuity. This commitment to an anti-aesthetic far more incisive than anything that his idolized elder Lucio

Fontana, and far more evacuated than his epistemological master, Marcel Duchamp, could have ever conceived, was consequentially enacted by Piero Manzoni in his extremely short trajectory of five years of compounding a career of radical artistic production and its even more radical utter negation.⁴

A truly critical mnemonic reflection (as for example in the work of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò*) might have found itself compelled to address Mussolini's specifically Italian variation of Fascism that after all had eventually joined the murderous racism of German Nazi Fascism in the final four years of World War II.

Rather, Manzoni, in his early affiliations with the Movimento Arte Nucleare (Nuclear Art Movement) in an almost incomprehensible paradoxical strategic stance, chose as his singular historical frame of reference one of the most horrendous man-made catastrophes of the twentieth century, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Not quite incidentally—in the rhetoric of power's supremely sinister cynicism—the American executioners of the first nuclear catastrophe had given their device the name *Little Boy*.⁵

As a consequence the artist insisted that after this event of World War II, any anti-aesthetic offense had to go much deeper, it would have to regress to an altogether primal, archaic stratum of the formations of social and artistic subjectivity. And only such a primal nihilistic impulse could now serve these epochal tasks to prevent artistic production from becoming merely fraudulent or compensatory. With the mnemonic cruelty and perceptual precision of a traumatized infant that will not forget or forgive, the man-child Manzoni seems to have cathected on this event as the decisive historical moment to define all future artistic practices (comparable to the juvenile delinquent in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale

denunciating the nakedness of power and thus instigating its undoing and inviting us to its subversion). Thus another fundamentally schizoid condition determined Manzoni's formation as an artist: as much as the horror over the nuclear bombing by American military and scientific state power might have legitimately fueled Manzoni's increasing anti-Americanism of the late 1950s, his enthusiastic embrace of the American post-Pollockian paradigms of Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns (which he even published in his journal *Azimuth*) would inevitably drive a wedge of doubt into the credibility of his critical geopolitical distanciations.

Obviously we have known earlier forms of extremely radical negation in the artistic practices of the twentieth century, and more than once has Dadaism quite erroneously been diagnosed as a nihilism solely triggered by the experiences of World War I. Yet this earlier postwar nihilism of artistic uprisings had not only aimed at abolishing the credibility of their poetic and painterly Cubist or Expressionist predecessors, whose agents had still presented themselves as transcendental performers, and thus had continued to claim a privileged status within the hierarchies of the imaginary as much as in imaginary hierarchies. By contrast, once the Dadaists had inverted these roles and contested their status as artists, once they had aborted the narcissistic gratifications of an innately hierarchical culture, they aspired all the more to a fundamental equalization of artistic and writerly speech acts and readerly competences. The intensity of their annihilation of cultural pretenses was always meant to be matched with an equally violent claim for collective agency and the radical enactment of a postbourgeois proletarian subjectivity. Manzoni's nihilism is of a different historical order altogether. It appears to have originated in a dual historical insight: for one that nuclear

armaments now had proven that the potential of human self-annihilation was a given, as it had just been sampled for the first time in history. And this insight was matched by Manzoni's intense philosophical pessimism of the intellect that would not want to partake in any future sociopolitical reconciliation under the signs of cultural substitution, least of all with the promises of a future sociopolitical emancipation mediated by neo-avant-garde practices alone.

This argument becomes even more plausible if we compare Manzoni's projects with those of some of his international peers during the transition from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, more specifically with those artists for whom the critical challenges to traditional concepts of artistic production and reception had become the new order of the day. And we are not just thinking of Manzoni's obvious counter figure, his quintessential antidote named Andy Warhol, a comparison with lesser-known figures from within and around Fluxus, for whom the annihilation of conventional forms and spectatorial relations were integral (such as Robert Filliou and George Brecht, or Robert Watts, for example) would prove to be even more productive. Already the simplest passing comparison with Warhol (or Claes Oldenburg in sculpture) would instantly clarify that Manzoni never deploys the icon or the design of the commodity as a formal matrix for the material production of his objects, which had been one of the foundational challenges of Pop art, and thus he refuses to simply map the mass cultural object onto the remnants of a putative and precarious aesthetic autonomy. Andy Warhol's strategies of a negation of the aesthetic lent themselves—intended or inadvertently—to a more or less instant metastatic media production. Even if they initially issued from his own factory

fiction, eventually his products were bound to be taken over by corporate power itself.

Manzoni, by contrast—in manifest analogy to the expanding industrialization of the self, as though internalizing the secretive and sinister hermeticism with which a late capitalist culture industry controls the subject—relocated the resources of artistic production even further and deeper within the artist's own bodily recesses (blood, breath, excrement). Thus the Italian dialectically splits and simultaneously cancels the myths of artistic creativity: sitting as a factory worker under the rotational devices of a newspaper printing press, he is subjected to the merely mechanical production of lines as the spatio-temporal extensions of anonymous sameness, mimicking the collective conditions of extreme alienation (it would be hard to imagine a more devastating travesty when remembering the former ethos of a Soviet productivist avant-garde to join the ranks of industrial labor). And the credibility of its extreme countermodel, celebrating the artist as the compulsive psychopathic prophet (as in the cult of the Surrealist unconscious or in Antonin Artaud) is now reduced to a rather literal somatic downscaling, celebrating the body's most residual matter in a public display and commercial dissemination of the artist's breath and feces.

Yet in almost every subversive move he made since 1958, Manzoni seems to have anticipated that even the most radical gesture of negation would be incorporated into the perpetually revised and newly equipped arsenal of spectacularization. As a consequence, Manzoni focuses on the actually ruling discursive and institutional systems of surveillance and control, as is evident in his epochal *Tavole di Accertamento* (Works of Verification), a portfolio of photolithographs produced between 1958 and 1960, and printed and published as

a series in 1962. The plates literally trace the outlines of the systems of social control—similarly lapidary as he had already demonstrated in the display of a numerical time system in his calendar collage *1–30 settembre 1959*—and map them in conceptual tautologies onto the graphic lines of the artist's actual 'drawings': letters of the alphabetical language system, the actual mapping system of naming and controlling geopolitical spaces (even more enigmatic by the choices of two islands whose utterly marginal post-World War II identities would have appeared as dislocated utopian spaces), and the biopolitical system of the human body itself in the fingerprint. Drawing as the traditional guarantee of the artist's freewheeling invention and visionary anticipation is here manifestly merged in a tight conformity with all of those discursive and institutional structures against which artistic practices had heretofore still attempted to rebel in a variety of never-ending and failing transcendental forms of opposition. This would be precisely one of the distinctions that distances Manzoni from his peers in the Fluxus context. Their optimistic aspirations remained politically far more explicit, engaged as they were in a potential future of collective participation, and the ludic or aleatory performances of an alterity of social relations still formed the horizon of their practices.

Manzoni's dystopian approach to collaboration and collectivity could not have been more poignantly enacted than in the strident production of certificates of artistic identities he started in 1961. Tickets and stubs, professionally designed by the artist, established a hierarchy of statutes and distinctions. These ranged from temporal totality, indicated by a red ticket (a person declared to be a work of art for a lifetime), to strictly enforced limitations offered by the artist for commercial acquisition (only permitting a temporally limited or a spatially

constricted part of the body to be officially aestheticized and authorized). Again—upon closer inspection—the apparent simplicity of the certificates triggers a myriad of consequences for our understanding of Manzoni's anti-aesthetic. On the one hand, Duchamp's notorious prognosis that the spectator/reader would always complete the signification of the work of art, had knowingly engaged viewers in a productive collaborative contract. By contrast, Manzoni annihilates even the last residual hopes for the birth of the reader, arguing that all pretenses of participation will only obscure the actually governing finality of the regimes of economic exchange. Further, Manzoni transforms the once utopian promise of an egalitarian condition of simultaneous collective perception into a literal procedure of viewer subjection. Hierarchically segregating the recipients of his work between freely chosen and commercially indentured subjects, and partitioning their bodies as commodifiable part objects by identifying individual limbs such as legs or arms as aesthetically approvable elements (almost in the manner of a butcher's diagram), Manzoni publicly performs the previously latent processes of fetishization and principles of private property. Enacting these principles on the body of the recipient itself, he exchanges the promises of simultaneous collective reception for the manifestation of total and individuated reification. To add insult to injury, these transactions of the certificates are now properly executed in a color-coded classificatory system, as though color—which in previous artistic production had guaranteed a psychic economy of freedom and of natural indeterminacy—could only sustain a credible function as a device of administration.

The total negation and withdrawal of color, the *Achrome* (not just a white monochrome), had of course been one of the first decisive strategies in the formation

of Manzoni's project of an art of anesthesia. The extreme purity of the *Achrome* paintings had been intensely discomfoting, only to be intensified by their uncommon supports. Either an *Achrome* featured the uncanny organic corporeality of the skin of rabbits, or the disabled corporeal plasticity of bread rolls dyed in kaolin, either it simply displayed a sewn ground of canvas patches, a random tussle of fiberglass or polyester strains, or—most uncannily of all—as phosphorus surfaces (another discomfoting remnant of war materiality) the work generated its own tint and luminescence in utter dependence of its spatial contiguity. Unlike Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* of 1951, which had become notorious precisely because once again they invited forms of perceptual if not even participatory tactility, as when Rauschenberg proposed that they could be repainted at any time by almost everybody, or when John Cage simply called them "... landing strips of motes, dust and shadows," Manzoni's *Achromes* always seemed to insist on the absence of color as a perceptual loss or a sensory deficiency. Their utter lack of color and their extreme alienation of tactile desire more likely approached the condition of a corporeal, if not medical deficiency rather than the characteristic of a modernist triumph of reductivist or ludic self-reflexivity.

Very few artists—only Eva Hesse comes to mind—have literally embodied the most advanced forms of corporeal and psychosomatic alienation as a form of resistance as in Manzoni's *Achromes*. Yet it is precisely the subject's manifest refusal or inability to still connect in any perceptual, tactile, or projective mediation with the social or material world that generates this sense of resistance resulting from the insurmountable distance between subject and object, between subject and corporeal presence, the antinomy of all previous promises of aesthetic gratification.

It is undoubtedly not accidental that Manzoni's project of total anesthesia had literally succeeded for the longest time as an aesthetic of resistance and refusal. Certainly in the American milieu, his oeuvre has been met with indifference, if not with hostile dismissal (after all, more than half a century after his premature death, Manzoni has never had a museum retrospective in any public American institution). One could only speculate that if such rejection or indifference might now be on the verge of changing into a process of reevaluation, it would more likely signal that in the present emergency only the strongest remedies of resistance can be mobilized. Or in reverse, that the time has finally come that even an aesthetic of total anesthesia will finally appear as the most desirable strategy to be embraced since it alone seems to correspond to the intensity of the voids and vacuity induced by the present.

1 The original reads: "je ne voudrais pas tomber dans les histoires post-surréalistes, ou bien constructivistes." Unpublished correspondence available at the Fondazione Piero Manzoni in Milan, cited in Jack McGrath's outstanding—and unfortunately still unpublished—dissertation on Piero Manzoni. See Jack McGrath, "Piero Manzoni: Embodiment between Negation and Spectacle" (PhD, Harvard University, 2015).

2 For a magisterial study of the political history from within which the Italian Neoavanguardia emerged and to which it responded, see Jaleh Mansoor, *Marshall Plan Modernism: Italian Postwar Abstraction and the Beginnings of Autonomia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016). Mansoor's chapter on Manzoni, along with Jack McGrath's dissertation, has renewed and expanded my by now age-old passion for this extraordinary artist, even though I cannot quite follow the instrumentalizing intensity of Mansoor's fictions of political determinism.

Benjamin H. D. Buchloh

- 3 See pages 111–12 in this book.
- 4 Manzoni's discovery of Duchamp's legacies is evident as early as 1958 in his magazine *// Gesto* when he published a photograph of Marcel Duchamp standing in front of the *Large Glass*. It was undoubtedly expanded and gained precision by his steady visits to the writer, publisher, and later art dealer (in 1961) Arturo Schwarz in Milan. Schwarz was not only the most important Duchamp scholar after Robert Lebel, and later the author of the decisive monograph on Duchamp (in 1968), but also the dealer who published and disseminated the replicas of Duchamp's Readymades in the early 1960s. Manzoni's fascination with Duchamp thus occurred only slightly later than the Duchamp reception by Jasper Johns in the United States, which began in the mid-1950s, or the intense engagement with the legacies of Marcel Duchamp initiated by Richard Hamilton in Great Britain during the same years.
- 5 *Little Boy* was the codename for the atomic bomb dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. It was the first nuclear weapon used in warfare. The bomb was dropped by the Boeing B-29 Superfortress *Enola Gay* piloted by Colonel Paul W. Tibbets Jr.

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