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*Drawing and conceptualism. Paradigms, practices,
and international exchanges in Italy (1969-1979)*

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Introduction

Behind the simple binomial of the title of this dissertation, and the clear indication of its general subject matter (Italian drawing of the seventies), this introduction aims to point out the tension that has stimulated the research and makes such a subject engaging. “Drawing” and “conceptualism” are well-established categories in the history of art,¹ and both are used here as preliminary terms. The identity of drawing as a medium is the guiding theme of the historical analysis that follows, so that what is drawing will be constantly rediscussed according to the critical views and artistic practices of the time. On the other hand, conceptualism is preliminary for an opposite reason, as it merely indicates a large, inclusive field of artists, not a group or a movement, that ran parallel to others, while being recognised as the “advanced art” of the period. After all, “concettualismo” could not be discussed as an intrinsic category of Italian art, since the term itself was a reaction to the American “conceptual” or “concept art”, and was used rather late and in a generic way.

The juxtaposition of the two terms generates the tension at the heart of the present study. In the field of what is known as conceptualism, i.e. analytical practices, tendencies toward dematerialisation, processual art and “arte del comportamento” (behaviour art), the status of drawing is problematised and loses its common, traditional or “natural” understanding. New functions of analysis and self-exploration, planning and projection, process verification and performative simulation, entered into a complex dialectic with the persistent characteristics of the medium and its specific materiality, while a complex intermedial expansion inaugurated in the seventies.

This tension also determines the extremes of the chronology of this study. In 1969, the new tendencies of American post-minimalism created a scenario and debate in Europe, through epochal, international exhibitions that involved the Italian artists. An inedited centrality was then assigned to paper material, as notes, sketches, projects, and drawings. On the one hand, such materials was the merely functional vehicle for ideas and concepts, a consequence of the general “deemphasis on material aspects”² and aesthetic values; on the other hand, conceptualist works on paper were considered to be independent or necessary for information, and were given unprecedented visibility and dissemination. The phenomenon was certainly related to the crisis of individualised media; however, in respect to

¹ The recent identity of drawing has been so strong to supports massive theoretical enterprises such as PETHERBRIDGE 2010 (whose roots lie in the author’s practice as an artist in the 1970s as well as in direct precedents such as RAWSON 1969), but also the founding and vital activity of centres such as the Menil Drawing institute (2018), the Drawing Room in London (2002) or the Drawing Center in New York (founded in 1977). Conceptualism is used here in the global sense used in NEW YORK 1999.

² LIPPARD 1973: 5.

painting and sculpture, drawing was paradoxically privileged because of its marginality and its unstable identity as a medium.

After ten years, in 1979, a symmetrical “return to drawing” was called for, in order to openly recover the medium’s traditional characteristics, including an implicit but subordinate position to painting, which was to be famously revived in the eighties. A national critical label, the *Transavanguardia italiana*, was formulated for this purpose by Achille Bonito Oliva, who overwhelmingly occupied the existing debate on drawing.

In 1980, Rosalind Krauss, one of the most radical thinkers of the post-medium condition due to the crisis of the late sixties, admitted that “it seems no accident that drawing should indeed have become a dominant mode in the American art of the last fifteen years”.³ What she called “a linear art of ideation”, stemming from a Duchampian paradigm against the Picassian primacy of sensuousness, was later acknowledged as a central vein in the Italian context of the seventies:

“as further evidence of the inescapability of drawing, it will suffice to recall that even in the moments during which the detachment between artist and work physically understood seemed sharper (just think in this regard of the decade dominated by conceptual art), even in that phenomenon, so unforgettable and in so many ways salutary, drawing was a kind of last resort, a last testing ground where artists could feel themselves an integral and active part of a long chain, of a centuries-old tradition from which, after all, on the level of intelligence the best had never in the least thought of breaking away”.⁴

By considering these early intuitions and the promising tension of conceptualism and drawing, curiosity behind this research project arose; and at the same time is surprising, for the Italian context, the paucity of related studies.

The strategy of focusing on a period of time, trying to investigate why and how drawing had a defining function, may suggest the concept behind an exhibition. In fact, recent exhibitions held in Rome and Milan aspired to outline the identity of the Italian art of the seventies;⁵ more recent attempts have been made to investigate a specific medium, photography, in that decade.⁶ Italian drawing of the seventies had been discussed in an analogous way, by important exhibitions dedicated to larger chronologies, such as *Disegnata* and *Disegno italiano del dopoguerra*, both in 1987. However, on those occasions, it was impossible to focus on the specificity of a single decade, as the exhibitions were ordered as anthologies of artists or traditional groupings, and their respective small selections

³ KRAUSS 1980: 45.

⁴ Vanni Bramanti in FIESOLE 1983: 4.

⁵ See MILAN 2007, MILAN 2012 and ROME 2013.

⁶ See PARIS 2022.

of works on paper.⁷ These shows actually demonstrated how difficult it was, after only a decade, to document, individuate and retrieve (mostly from private collections) the most representative and significant drawings of the seventies. Inevitable distortions and commercial biases characterized other international surveys from the eighties: for example, the Frankfurt *Vom Zeichen* was meant to represent the 1960-1985 chronology, but the German fortune of the Transavanguardia created an evident disproportion in the selection of recent artworks.⁸

The reason for the lack of information in the immediate post-seventies period was probably to the scarcity of comprehensive surveys or exhibitions dedicated to drawing in that decade, which is the first fact that stands out for the Italian case in comparison with that of other countries. In Italy, public institutions and private galleries had produced major exhibitions of video art, photography, public sculpture, and other central themes at the time, that provided starting points for the theoretical and historical understating of the respective phenomena. Instead, the only exhibition devoted expressly to drawing to have a catalog, *Drawing/Transparence*, certainly did not have the stature of the one held in the same months at the Museum of Modern Art in early 1976, *Drawing Now*, which has since maintained an undisputed authority in the field. And not coincidentally, if the second one still sets the tone for the most recent and serious studies of post-minimalist drawing, it would be difficult to recover a similar genealogy for the Italian case.

But the lack of a strong, systematic and paradigmatic narrative of twentieth-century Italian design is also an advantage for future investigations. In the case of *Drawing Now*, for example, Bernice Rose's essay and curatorship had in fact revealed biases very early on. Her critical starting point ("drawing has moved from one context, that of "minor" support medium, an adjunct to painting and sculpture, to another, that of a major and independent medium with distinctive expressive possibilities altogether its own")⁹ was admittedly modeled after the practices of a small group of New York-based artists. Even then, Rose's supposedly international selection of artists was criticized for a marked gender imbalance (on 48 artists, only five were women) and an inadequate representation of non-American artists.¹⁰ It is well known how lopsided the circulation of art information was across the Atlantic,¹¹

⁷ See MODENA 1987 and RAVENNA 1987. In particular, the art historian Pier Giovanni Castagnoli and Flaminio Gualdoni, the director of the Galleria Civica in Modena, were preparing the foundation of the Raccolta del Disegno (Drawing Collection) in the local city museum, now included in the Fondazione Modena Arti Visive. See also GUADAGNINI 1990 and GUADAGNINI, GUALDONI 1993.

⁸ The 15 Italian artists were mostly associated with Paul Maenz (Sandro Chia and Enzo Cucchi, whose works were lent by the Groningen Museum; Francesco Clemente, Jannis Kounellis, Nicola De Maria, Carlo Maria Mariani, Luigi Ontani, Mimmo Paladino, Giulio Paolini and Ernesto Tatafiore). Marco Gastini's works were provided by the Galerie Storms in Munich, while Peter Weiermair lent two 1983 works by Claudio Parmiggiani. Emilio Vedova and Mario Merz's drawings had entered the German market in the previous decades, and came from local private collections, see FRANKFURT 1984.

⁹ NEW YORK 1976A: 9.

¹⁰ The episode of the feminist protests in 1976 and the subsequent alternative exhibition curated by Corinne Robins at the SoHo Center for Visual Arts (see NEW YORK 1976C), see LOVATT 2019: 4-6.

¹¹ See for example Craig Owens' observation about the European art of the early seventies "which we don't hear about in any serious way until 1981. There was a tremendous black-out on information from Europe, stemming from the

and Rose limited her local consultation to Basel and Düsseldorf, ultimately including only nine artists coming from across Europe.¹² Piero Manzoni (who died in 1963) was the only Italian represented in the show, which meant that there was no reference to conceptualism in Italy, with lasting consequences for art historical literature.

If Rose's catalog did little to outline the history of drawing in Italy, it also obscured a lively international debate on contemporary drawing in the sixties and seventies, that was dominated by the United States and West Germany, although Switzerland, the Netherlands and Austria also contributed actively, and which has only recently received systematic attention.¹³ As shown in the **Appendix 1**, *Drawing Now* was one of many initiatives that culminated at the mid-seventies, ranging from critical debates in art journals to exhibitions in public or private galleries. In the following paragraph, this two-decade-long, public discussion on drawing will be traced from the perspective of the Italian contributions.

0.1 An international debate

Two exhibitions curated by Giovanni Carandente in 1961 and 1962 on *Disegni americani moderni* ("Modern American drawings") and *Disegni italiani moderni* ("Modern Italian drawings") for two editions of the Festival dei due mondi in Spoleto provide a convincing point of departure. Both included about fifty artists spanning over three generations, from established classics to some emerging figures. The first was organized by the MoMA and echoed the epochal "export" exhibition of *New American Painting*, and it was centered on Abstract Expressionism (as suggested by the Franz Kline on the cover, **figure 0.1**). As for drawing, the generation of Pollock, De Kooning or Motherwell "brought the issue of finish within a painting to a clear head and thus initiated a rethinking of the possibilities of drawing": by emphasizing the autography, "the personal struggles, the biographic markings", "sketches and paintings could be afforded equal status".¹⁴ This reading could also be applied to Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, who for the first time (respectively, by a transfer drawing and by the famous *From 0 to 9*, **figure 0.2**) represented the latest developments on the American scene. The Italian exhibition of 1962 was considered the "first attempt of such dimensions"

dominance of the American art market and the export market. This was a real issue in European production at the time. There was no equal exchange: we were sending a lot over there, but very little from there was shown here. It was somehow regarded here as derivative from issues that had already been addressed or were being addressed in contemporary American art. It wasn't seen in terms of its cultural specificity or even as a reaction [to] a certain kind of hegemony of American art" (OWENS, STEPHANSON 1990: 58).

¹² Art & Language, Joseph Beuys, Hanne Darboven, David Hockney, Piero Manzoni, Palermo, Bridget Riley, Jean Tinguely. In her acknowledgments, Rose thanked Jürgen Harten from the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Carlo Huber from the Kunsthalle Basel and her homologue Dieter Koeplin, the Curator of Prints and Drawings at the Kunstmuseum Basel.

¹³ See ENCKELL JULLIARD 2015.

¹⁴ Bernice Rose in NEW YORK 1976A: 12.

but appeared more generic; the youngest generation, from the sculptor Francesco Lo Savio to the painters Franco Angeli, Tano Festa and Mario Schifano (whose draftsmanship represented the first Italian responses to Johns and Rauschenberg), was out of focus and still read according to the “existential anguish of our years of crisis”.¹⁵ Since the early sixties, however, the national arrangements have dominated the drawing exhibitions and surveys, especially under the impulse of the American Pop wave. Multiple surveys on (recent) American drawing took place in 1964, establishing many of the most influential draftsmen, from Jim Dine to Claes Oldenburg; Pop drawing also significantly introduced techniques such as frottage, transfer drawing, and retracing, from Indiana, Wesselman and Lichtenstein to Warhol. In 1964 and 1966, Lawrence Alloway organized two important exhibitions at the Guggenheim Museum, dedicated to American and European drawing, respectively. The latter made it possible to observe major differences from the New York¹⁶ scene and autonomous (and indigenous) models such as Paul Klee, who “made possible drawings as a medium for serious statement; he was defender of the scale of drawing, of multiple encoding, and of personal projection in art”.¹⁷ An Italian artist who had just encountered fortune in New York, Gianfranco Baruchello, exemplified Klee’s (and Duchamp’s) “proposal of an art making simultaneous use of more than one sign system” (**figure 0.3**). Other Italian artists represented the “anti-*Informal* European avant-garde” led by Lucio Fontana and Yves Klein. Enrico Castellani and Piero Manzoni (who were excluded from Carandente’s 1962 selection) introduced an “objective art, without formal surprises”, that was exemplified by Manzoni’s lines (**figure 0.4**), already considered “essential in any showing of original postwar art”.¹⁸

Meanwhile, Germany had already begun to establish its own narrative of international drawing. The Darmstadt *Internationale der Zeichnung* was inaugurated in 1964 and while it included many American artists (and a long essay by Dore Ashton in the catalog), the Germanophone curators claimed a North European genealogy for modern drawing (Kandinsky’s “Gekritzelt”, scribbling, and Mondrian’s “Schema”, according to Werner Hofmann), which was expressed in some retrospective exhibitions (Kokoschka and Ernst Wilhelm Nay in 1964; Klee and Egon Schiele in 1967). In the German-centered selection of artists, the Klee line was predominant (**figures 0.5-7**). However, all the editions of the Darmstadt *Internationale* systematically failed to present contemporary Italian art,

¹⁵ CARANDENTE 1963: [4].

¹⁶ “In Europe, drawing played an important part in this general shift of emphasis, far larger than in New York where paintings were, fundamentally, the serious element in any esthetic development or discussion” (Lawrence Alloway in NEW YORK 1966A: 11).

¹⁷ Ibid: 13.

¹⁸ Ibid: 12.

mostly because of the Milanese collaborators, led by Franco Russoli, and the rather conservative private galleries involved.¹⁹

In many cases, the largest international exhibitions of drawings, as well as a number of prizes and exhibitions by private galleries too numerous to list here, in addition to the few that were actually significant for the contemporary debate,²⁰ soon appeared as conservative. Nationality functioned as the simplest parameter, while much space was given to the most decorative, academic and “reassuring” examples of drawing. The criticism that developed on these occasions inevitably reiterated the classical clichés about the medium: its “lightness, the studied caution, the spontaneity of a sudden insight, which constitute the essence of the drawing by hand”, its “transparency” and “psychographic quality”. The quotes are taken from Werner Haftmann’s introduction to the “Handzeichnungen” section of *documenta 3*, an exhibition that points out another major conservative aspect of the large surveys on drawing, namely the continuity with the master drawing tradition in modern art.²¹ “From Picasso to Lichtenstein”,²² drawing has inevitably been accounted for according to artistic personalities and singular, private styles, or “hands”, and a strong tradition that stretched from Ingres to Matisse (“drawing can be as clear-cut as one’s father’s precepts”, in Motherwell’s words).²³ In Italy, in those years, a specific modality of drawing privileged the collaboration between draftsmen and poets. Rooted in a long and highly refined tradition of illustration, the exhibition genre of “disegni e parole” (“drawings and words” – the title of the exhibition of Mario Schifano and Frank

¹⁹ The 1964 edition included 15 Italian artists, the second nation represented after Germany, above USA (9), France (7) and United Kingdom (11). The selection thou was above all retrospective: Corrado Cagli, Bruno Cassinari, Gianni Dova, Lucio Fontana, Franco Francese, Renato Guttuso, Giacomo Manzù, Marino Marini, Giorgio Morandi, Ennio Morlotti, Zoran Music, Romano Notari, Tino Vaglieri, Emilio Vedova and Alberto Viani. Only private lenders were involved, mostly from Milan (see DARMSTADT 1964). In 1967, the second edition included Afro Basaldella, Giuseppe Capogrossi, Arturo Carmassi, Piero Dorazio, Pericle Fazzini, Domenico Gnoli, Luciano Lattanzi, Luciano Minguzzi and Arnaldo Pomodoro, mostly lent by Galleria Il Naviglio and Galleria Toninelli in Milan, or private collector like the sportswriter Gianni Brera and the restorer Aurelio Morellato (see DARMSTADT 1967). The third and last edition was held in 1970 and represented an attempt to freshen up the international survey. Important presences from the USA (Christo, Agnes Martin, Thiebaud, Wesselman, even two drawings by Nancy Grossman), and the focus of the derivation from photographic pictorialism between Richter and Hockney (with artists like Wolfgang Gäfgen, Leonard von Monkiewitsch, Peter Nagel or Gerd van Dümmler, whose a detail from a figurative drawing was isolated on the cover) made the Italian participation all the more awkward: Mario Ceroli, Luciano Cremonini (14 drawings!), Renato Guttuso, Emilio Scanavino, and the young Giuliano Vangi. Again, only two Milanese galleries had been involved in the loans, namely Galleria Toninelli and Galleria Milano, see DARMSTADT 1970.

²⁰ For instance, both Leo Castelli and Ileana Sonnabend organized annual drawing shows, and later Paula Cooper. Castelli’s early selections of artists (for instance, in 1962: Lee Bontecou, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Moskowitz, Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Stella, Jack Tworkov, May 26 – June 30) were influential to later institutional shows, for example for Alloway’s series at Guggenheim.

²¹ On the exhibition see DANIEL 2015. The Modern Italian art canon guided the selection of Boccioni, Carrà, De Chirico, Marino, Morandi, Modigliani, Severini, Sironi, Scipione, and Vedova, see KASSEL 1964. The theme of the Master Drawing tradition is discussed in the introduction of HILDEBRANDT 2017: 12-19.

²² The title of NEW YORK 1966B.

²³ See Robert Motherwell, “Thoughts on drawing” in the very institutional traveling exhibition NEW YORK 1970A.

O'Hara²⁴) sought to underline an “expressive symmetry”²⁵ between poetry and drawing through a shared interest in figuration in the early sixties, the search for structural symbolic forms and hermeticism.

The inherently conservative nature of the drawing exhibitions, often resented by some radical critics (including in the case of *Drawing Now*),²⁶ may be one reason for the absence of major drawing exhibitions in Italy in the late sixties and early seventies. The only exceptions are singular episodes in private galleries, such as Giulio Paolini's first exhibition of works on paper²⁷ or Maurizio Mochetti's debut (both in Rome in 1968), which will be commented on, but they do not make up for the fragmentation of the discourse on drawing at the turn of the two decades. Nor did some innovative and complex critical proposals, such as those of Francesco De Bartolomeis,²⁸ as they remained linked to individual artists of previous generations (Fontana and Scanavino). The most important national and international exhibitions held in Italy, from *Amore Mio* to *Vitalità del Negativo*, from *Conceptual Art Arte Povera Land Art* to *Contemporanea*, rarely included drawings, only occasionally and did not devote specific attention to the medium.

Around 1969, a significant gap can be observed between Italy and other countries, which instead continued to investigate the new forms of drawing as a major turning point in the emergence of conceptualism.²⁹ The new strategy was to focus attention to the “possibilities” and the “functions” of drawing in order to define its identity in the latest trends, from minimalism to conceptual art. Peter

²⁴ On this show, see SCHIFANO, O'HARA 2017 and the papers of the Mario Schifano Study Days held at the Center for Italian Modern Art, New York, in October 2022, being published. The collaboration between Schifano and O'Hara can be ascribed to the fortunate American trend epitomized in the October-November 1965 issue of *Art in American*, for which “22 contemporary painters contribute their visual interpretation of their favorite modern poems”, in which *Skin with a O'Hara* poem by Johns was illustrated.

²⁵ Edoardo Sanguineti in SANGUINETI, CARLUCCIO, GRIBAUDO 1963. This book associated poems and drawings by poets largely from the Novissimi avant-garde group, and artists from various backgrounds that approached the so called “new figuration” (among others, Valerio Adami, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Beppe Devalle, Concetto Pozzati, Gastone Novelli, Achille Perilli, Mimmo Rotella, and Emilio Scanavino). The same selection of artists and drawings figured *Antologia del nuovo disegno italiano* (“Anthology of New Italian Drawing”), presented later in the same year at the large exhibition *Alternative attuali*, see L'AQUILA 1963. Another *Disegni e parole* was published in Milan in 1970, see PIRRO, TONIATO 1970, with a similar selection of artists and poets.

²⁶ See for instance the review by Lizzie Borden dedicated to Elke Solomon's exhibition at the Whitney Museum, *American Drawings, 1963-73* (NEW YORK 1973B): “Large museum group exhibitions tend toward the reproduction and perpetuation of the current norms sponsored in magazines and galleries [...]. Retrograde visual conventions dominate [...]. Today radical works are appropriated into the system before the qualities that differentiate the substance of the work from previous art can be experienced as originaive” (BORDEN 1973: 85, 87, 89).

²⁷ The show was held at the Libreria dell'Oca and was organized by Luisa Laureati. The collages were exhibited in plastic envelopes to be hanged on the shelves of the bookstore, see BERNARDI 2015: 35-36.

²⁸ De Bartolomeis had formed as a pedagogist and wrote two important monographic volumes, with long essays, for the drawings of Lucio Fontana (DE BARTOLOMEIS 1967) and Emilio Scanavino (DE BARTOLOMEIS 1972). His phenomenological and psychoanalytical contributions to the classic theory of drawing were mentioned with appreciation in GRISERI 1982: 191-192.

²⁹ See Enckell Julliard's essay on Swiss drawing exhibitions of the seventies, and Noor Mertens's one on Dutch redefinition of planning and drawing in ENCKELL JULLIARD 2015A. France has not been included in the volume, and to my knowledge, no major international drawing shows are organized in the seventies. See the few exceptions PARIS 1970 and RENNES 1975.

Plagens published a long essay on American drawing in *Artforum* that opened the debate (and began by admitting that “The current state of drawing in America [...] is complex and possibly indecipherable. First, because drawing is difficult to define”).³⁰ The Californian critic pointed out an interesting major difference of drawing in respect to the other media, that by the late sixties had reached the most radical dematerialization:

“Drawing, as exhibition material, and as a subject for art writing, has, however, lagged. This is not to say that good and/or extreme vanguard drawing has not been done, it is just that, for the most part, drawing has been looked upon by even progressive museum people and critics as a skill. One paints, but one *knows how* to draw”.³¹

This entailed, on the one hand, the danger of academicism (into which, by that time, Rauschenberg’s draftsmanship fell, “unadventurous and cloying”); on the other, and paradoxically for the same reason, drawing survived the dematerialized impulse of the new art (“a desire, especially in New York, to get rid of the aesthetic object”).

“The drawing has, self-evidently, no desire to compete with the world-at-large on the world’s terms, and the drawing thus becomes a relatively pure conveyor of information. The drawing asks, rather quietly, to be met on its own ground, a one-to-one contemplative relation in which billboards, jackhammers, laser beams, Happenings, and Techniscope 65 are, by mutual agreement, ruled out. This reduces the static in the mind of the viewer. By extension, the drawing has immediacy: it says what it has to say without benefit (or hindrance) of a technical spectacular”.³²

In this way, the success of drawing in minimal and conceptual art are explained, and exemplified through “[Douglas] Huebler’s points, lines and locations [...] a polite hint at something absolutely fantastic”; and Sol LeWitt, who had directly addressed the medium’s fundamentals: “(1) true two-dimensionality (drawn on the wall, no paper, no frame); and (2) draughtsmanship (the drawing was executed by others through plans drawn by LeWitt) and permanence of the *object d’art*”.³³

The new primacy of the function of drawing as project that was typical of minimalism had achieved a specific quality, which Plagens ultimately associated with the “pragmatic bent; on the frontier – Kentucky or the moon –, useful results are what count”:

“Most Minimal drawings are Constructivist, and most of them are notes, plans, or preliminaries for three-dimensional work. Most of them, though-minded and to the point, are physically quite ordinary and make a point

³⁰ Plagens’s essay was almost completed when it suggested to the organization of the exhibition *Drawings*, opened in September at the Fort Worth Art Center Museum in Texas, see FORT WORTH 1969. The two versions of the essay differ only slightly.

³¹ PLAGENS 1969: 50.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid: 55.

about current drawing: that good drawing and “draftsmanship” are much bigger than dead birds and wash effects, that it can have, once removed from the tyranny of neo-Beaux-Arts-ism and preciousness, a solidity and dignity about itself which is, I think, especially American”.³⁴

The new taste for plans and notes as drawings could also be seen in the typical insertions in art magazines, where drawings were illustrated autonomously, full-page and without textual commentary. Within few years, the decorativeness of Ellsworth Kelly’s vegetals in *Artforum* (February 1966, **figure 0.8**) shifted to the liveliness of the creative process, in the “notebook” series in the British magazine *Art and artists* (like “some leaves from Barry Flanagan’s notebook”, April 1968, **figure 0.9**).³⁵ In 1969, as it will be discussed further in the first chapter, a number of important exhibitions in Europe openly addressed the theme of the “drawing as project”, from the American drawing show organized at Heiner Friedrich in Munich (with an introduction by Mel Bochner that would soon influence the European debate) to *Konzeption/Conception*, organized by Konrad Fischer and Rolf Wedewer. Although the latter was a proper conceptualist show of plans and proposals “incarnated” in the catalog itself, it was decisive for the local debate on drawing: one year later, the Schloss Morsbroich Museum in Leverkusen, directed by Wedewer, inaugurated the series of three shows *Zeichnungen* (1970, 1972 and an American edition in 1975). This series was important because it traveled throughout the country, documenting the most interesting and recent drawing practices in West Germany, from George Baselitz to Gerhard Richter, Hanne Darboven or Samuel Penck. Interestingly, Piero Manzoni’s strong presence in the German market and collecting taste at the time helped to define a kind of conceptualist draftsmanship of “Entwürfe, Partituren, Projekte: Zeichnungen” (“notes, scores, projects: drawings”).³⁶

The most important drawing exhibition of the early seventies, *Diagrams and drawings* at the Kröller Müller Museum in Otterlo, was also conceived around the American, minimalist theme of planning (the title was suggested by Dan Flavin). As early as 1972, however, it was argued that “the term ‘project’ is greatly abused nowadays as a *pars pro toto*”, and that there was a dearth of theoretical

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Grids and graph paper rapidly conquered the panorama of drawing, as showed by the comparison of two quotes from the American debate. In 1964, in front of Larry Poons’ diagrams, Alloway had argued that “repetition [...] is rare in modern art, because of our preoccupation with formal variety and personal touch” (Lawrence Alloway in NEW YORK 1964). In her 1973 review of the Whitney drawing exhibit, Lizzie Borden noticed that an entire category of drawing practice was based on “the grid, by now a conventionalized diagrammatic structure employed for narrative and nonnarrative content. This exhibition indicates the transmission of this device from artists like Eva Hesse, Agnes Martin, and Sol LeWitt, to its current use in the work of Jennifer Bartlett, Arlene Slavin, Loretta Dunkelman, and Elizabeth Murray where, generally speaking, it has been wrenched from its structural foundation. Related to the grid is the use of numerical systems and orderings by means of the alphabet or methods borrowed from science and mathematics” (BORDEN 1973: 87).

³⁶ Such was the title of an exhibition curated by René Block (BERLIN 1971) that may be interpreted as a German response to the American drawing exhibition organized by Rolf Ricke in 1970, see COLOGNE 1970B.

literature on the subject.³⁷ In a remarkable review of various American exhibitions in the spring of 1973, Douglas Crimp pointed out how some practices of the sixties (Agnes Martin and Cy Twombly) had opposed an “anti-drawing” to the “cliché that drawing is private, intimate, revealing of an artist’s true sensibility”. The new course, already championed by Dorothea Rockburne and Sol LeWitt,³⁸ would privilege opposite conditions of the medium, “public rather than private, anonymous instead of revealing”.

“Apart from providing the impetus for those and other new approaches to painting, anti-drawing led to a peculiar situation in the late Sixties for drawing proper, evidenced by exhibitions of the most various kinds of objects whose qualification as drawing had more to do with small size than with medium or approach: photographs, diagrams, maquettes, small paintings, statements and other documents. At the same time, some of the artists involved with radical thinking in their ambitious work still produced intimate, “revealing”, “sensitive” sketches. Such drawings from the hand of an iconoclast seemed a curious contradiction”.³⁹

Along with Crimp’s “anti-drawing” perspective, other critical strategies toward the middle of the decade privileged the “functions” of the medium. This was the title of a second major drawing exhibition in Otterlo, held in 1975, which presented all the drawings in the Visser collections and was curated by Rudi Fuchs (the catalogue cover was designed by Hanne Darboven, see **figure 0.10**).⁴⁰ Fuchs was probably the first critic to attempt to relate classical drawing theory (Vasari) to contemporary art, as he suggested in a 1973 review of Dutch conceptualist artists.⁴¹ With a broad perspective on the new interest in drawing (“an acceptance in the culture of certain implications in so-called Conceptual Art: the shift away from art as the production of objects and toward art as a mental activity, - and the work as a document (presented in aesthetic terms) of that activity”),⁴² he conceived four functions or categories: “drawing as definition, drawing as exposition, drawing as ritual, drawing as exploration”.⁴³ These were theoretical categories (“no artwork has only one, single function”) that were formulated in order to “establish [the drawings’] motive”. *Functies van Teteniken*

³⁷ Rudi Oxenaar in OTTERLO 1972: [10].

³⁸ Crimp’s review organically assembled references to Martin’s first retrospective, Robert Mangold, Sol LeWitt and Twombly’s recent solo shows, as well as Dorothea Rockburne’s first extensive presentation of the *Drawing Which Make Themselves* at Bykert Gallery; lastly, he mentions the important show *3D into 2D*, a show of drawings and plans for sculptures organized by Susan Ginsburg at the New York Cultural Center, see NEW YORK 1973A.

³⁹ CRIMP 1973: 58.

⁴⁰ “The show can also be seen as a sequel to the ‘Diagrams and Drawings’ of 1972” (Rudi Oxenaar in OTTERLO 1975).

⁴¹ “[...] if one relates drawing directly to the working of the artists’ mind, there are possibly only two grand categories: drawing as definition and drawing as exploration. Of these two the latter has always been held in high esteem, probably because it was the kind of free drawing closest to the theoretical reasoning which lifted drawing and the appreciation of drawings to a respectable and almost autonomous level. That theory of drawing issued from the classical argument about painting being the mind’s and not the hand’s work” (FUCHS 1973: 230).

⁴² Rudi Fuchs in OTTERLO 1975.

⁴³ Ibid. Two categories, definition and exploration, had already been indicated in Fuchs’s review of some Dutch shows in 1973, see FUCHS 1973.

travelled to the Kunstmuseum Basel in early 1976, and was accompanied by the publication of a special issue of *Kunstforum international*. With a large selection of illustrations of drawings, Werner Lippert recapitulated the artistic practices that had most defined the medium in relation to conceptualism and its recent critical history, which by then included Rosalind Krauss's Wittgensteinian analysis on "line"⁴⁴ and, a few months later, Jean Christoph Ammann's investigation on a "Mentalität Zeichnung" among young Swiss artists.⁴⁵ Again, however, Italian artists were largely excluded (notwithstanding Lippert's familiarity with Salvo and other Italians represented by Paul Maenz in Cologne). In addition to the usual Manzoni's *Line* as a prodrome, only Giulio Paolini's *Disegni* represented Italian drawing: folded sheets in which the artists had inserted real objects (a pencil, postcards, cutouts, etc.), conceived for a playful happening in 1964⁴⁶ as a provocation à la Manzoni that could be considered as analytical (**figure 0.11**). In addition to important interviews and statements by Vito Acconci and Franz Erhard Walther on their respective drawing practices, the same magazine published a long essay and an interview with Mario Merz, illustrated with many diagrammatic drawings, which will be analyzed in the second chapter.

Indeed, 1976 represented a peak in the attention paid to drawing, and *Drawing Now* stood out for its institutional weight among many other initiatives in the United States and Europe. Though generally acclaimed,⁴⁷ Bernice Rose's show was criticized in *Artforum* by Roberta Smith, who also noted that it was MoMA's largest and most comprehensive survey on contemporary art since *Information*, Kynaston McShine's epochal show on international conceptualism in 1970.⁴⁸ But the ambition for completeness was the main polemical target of Smith's review. She began by linking the 1973-1976 "epidemic of drawing and "works on paper" exhibitions" to "the crunch on both museums' and collectors' budgets, to inflated art prices and to a certain amount of curatorial timidity. (The drawing exhibition provides an inherent mediumistic unity when all else fails)".⁴⁹ Rose's selection of works was "slightly schizoid, a cross between a traditional survey of drawing and an exhibition with a theory

⁴⁴ See PRINCETON 1974, and LOVATT 2019: 7-8.

⁴⁵ See LUCERNE 1976, and ENCKELL JULLIARD 2015B.

⁴⁶ In December 1964, the Galleria La Salita in Rome organized a playful show, *La grande vendita* ("The big sell"), in which Paolini contributed by selling for 1000 £ a folded paper sheet that contained a banknote of the same value (he also weighed each *Drawing*). A television reportage on the happening, in which Paolini appears for few seconds (at minute 00:15), can be found at this link: [https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000059413/2/roma-pop-art.html?startPage=20&jsonVal=%7B%22jsonVal%22:%7B%22query%22:\[%22arte%20contemporanea%22\],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22_perPage%22:20,%22archiveType_string%22:\[%22xDamsCineLuce%22\]%7D%7D](https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000059413/2/roma-pop-art.html?startPage=20&jsonVal=%7B%22jsonVal%22:%7B%22query%22:[%22arte%20contemporanea%22],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22_perPage%22:20,%22archiveType_string%22:[%22xDamsCineLuce%22]%7D%7D).

⁴⁷ "One of the best and most useful exhibitions ever mounted at the Museum of Modern Art "Drawing Now" revalidates the notion, latterly much contested and in truth somewhat in decay, of the Museum of Modern Art as a place in which new and complicated developments in art can be given a defensible armature and studied in depth" (RUSSELL 1976). Rose's essay was particularly exalted ("I cannot, as a matter of fact, think of a better introduction to the new esthetics of the 60's and 70's than hers", KRAMER 1976).

⁴⁸ See NEW YORK 1970, in which five Italian artists took part (Luciano Fabro, Giulio Paolini, Giuseppe Penone, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Emilio Prini), and many more Europeans than in *Drawing Now*.

⁴⁹ SMITH 1976: 52.

to prove about drawing's transcendence of its traditional position". Other "objectionable" biases were the privileging of the New York scene ("the entire West Coast and the intervening territories seems not to "draw now"") and of a few galleries (Castelli, Sonnabend and Weber). Above all, the theoretical basis of drawing as an autonomous medium was openly modeled on the practice of artists (Rockburne, Tuttle, Serra, LeWitt, Bochner, Morris) that were included in the show with site specific installations, but quantitatively minor works, so that they "often look more reduced than they actually are".⁵⁰ Sol LeWitt's historical work and theoretical contributions of the late sixties functioned as paradigmatic,⁵¹ pushing for a narrative of "dematerialization" that was perceived as outdated ("It seems a little late to think that art moves or is moving toward reduction, or that drawing is autonomous"). Alternative readings were already in place. Other exhibitions and critical approaches, although certainly less comprehensive, tended to emphasise the expansion and the hybridisation of the medium or the eccentric definition of its central features such as "line" ("a work does not have to be linear, on paper, or even a preparatory sketch to be considered a drawing – witness Cornell's boxes at the Guggenheim, Beuys's rabbit-blood stains on canvas at MoMA – it seems equally possible that something may not be a drawing just because it is linear").⁵²

The international prestige of *Drawing Now*, however, was easily achieved through the beautiful catalog and the exhibition's subsequent tours between 1976 and 1977 to the Kunsthau Zurich, the Staatlichen Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, the Albertina in Vienna, the Norwegian Henie-Onstad Kunstsenter in Høvikodden and the Tel Aviv Museum in Israel.⁵³ The show also provoked local and national reactions, such as in Switzerland, where the Zurich show was accompanied by *Zeichnungen von 10 Schweizer Künstler* and followed a few months later by *Mentalität Zeichnung* in Lucerne. In Italy, finally, *Drawing/Transparence* (curiously edited with the same format of the American catalog) can be seen as an indirect response to the same conjuncture.

The high point of 1976 was followed by an apparent decline in the parable. Although numerous exhibitions echoed in the more provincial venues of the United States, no strong criticism was formulated to correct a generic perspective to drawing, now a mere and trendy genre of work. By 1979,

⁵⁰ Ibid: 59.

⁵¹ In particular, Rose admitted her debt toward Lawrence Alloway's 1975 attempt to connect LeWitt to sixteenth century theory on drawing, see ALLOWAY 1975. See also her contribution to LeWitt's important retrospective at MoMA two years later, see ROSE 1978.

⁵² FOOTE 1976: 55.

⁵³ Zurich October 10 – November 14 1976; Baden-Baden November 25 – January 16 1977; Norway March 17 to April 24; Tel Aviv May 5 – June 30 1977. When Janet Kardon organized *Drawings: The Pluralist Decade* at the American Pavillion at the Venice Biennale, she probably referred to *Drawing Now* as a negative model, "the large-scale exhibition, often misinterpreted as esthetic imperialism" (Janet Kardon in VENICE 1980: 10).

“the recent demand and proliferation of exhibitions of “works on paper” has significantly altered the meaning of drawing for both the viewer and the artists. What was essentially a study medium has become a medium to be studied. It is virtually impossible for artists’ drawings to ever again regain the freedom that anonymity affords. Without this sense of anonymity competition extends into even the most private art endeavor”.⁵⁴

The best writing on drawing in Europe came from studies and exhibitions of individual artists (mostly Americans, except for the very influential publication of Joseph Beuys’ *The secret block for a secret person in Ireland* in 1974), such as Dieter Koepplin’s exemplary catalog of Donald Judd’s works on paper or the first retrospective of Serra’s drawings at the Stedelijk Museum.⁵⁵ In 1977, one last, large attempt at a systematic survey of drawing practices in contemporary art was unanimously regarded as a failure: the *Handzeichnungen* of *documenta 6* section was intended to return to the 1964 edition by selecting only drawings made by hand (as opposed to graphics and other uses of paper).⁵⁶ Some 700 drawings were divided into nine categories and spanned “from Picasso to Douglas Huebler” as the two extremes, in which the tension between hand autography and conceptual reduction still functioned as a theoretical principle.⁵⁷ The vastness of the show prevented from any clear discourse on drawing and only obscured the highly unbalanced national participation. This was, of course, the case with the Italian artists: virtuoso copies of Old Masters by (Old Masters) Renato Guttuso and Giacomo Manzù (both born around 1910!) figured in the section “Kunst über Kunst”; Paolini was the only Italian artist under the “Konzeption” label; the term “constructivism” worked the diagrams of Mario Merz as well as for the optical structures of the sculptor Marcello Morandini. Artists of an older generation who were well known in Germany, such as Baruchello and Carlo Alfano, still illustrated the use of “ciphers” in drawing; Kounellis was represented by (probably backdated) drawings from 1960; and a minor, figurative sculptor like Giuliano Vangi was inexplicably included in the disparate “Menschenbild” section along with Hockney, Baselitz, and even Beuys. Similarly, most of the Italian participations of the various drawing international exhibitions in Central Europe in the late seventies seems of minor importance.⁵⁸

The persistence of an inadequate representation of Italy, if it had obvious causes in the internal lack of organization and discussion of drawing, was probably a significant reason for the sudden and irresistible success of the Transavanguardia in exhibiting and bringing to market a large number of

⁵⁴ Donald Sultan in NEW YORK 1979.

⁵⁵ See KOEPLIN 1976 and AMSTERDAM 1977.

⁵⁶ See KASSEL 1977, vol. III.

⁵⁷ See the introduction by Wieland Schmied, *ibid*: 11.

⁵⁸ It the case for the inclusion of the young Bolognese artist Omar Galliani as the only visual artist at the 1. Internationale Jugendtriennale “Zeichnung Heute” in Nuremberg in 1979, in a selection curated by Ernesto Francalanci, professor the Academy of Venice, who included mostly architects and graphic designers (Carlo Augusto Talamona, Gian Franco Gasparini, Giuseppe Rampazzo, Marco Sambin, Cesare Reggiani, Alvisse Vidolin, Francesco Boniolo, Leonardo Rampazzi, Pier Luigi Grandinetti), see NUREMBERG 1979: 120-145.

works on paper. “Italian drawing”, which in the seventies had been little known or completely excluded from the discussion of the medium, was now at the center of the liveliest criticism and innovative debate.

What followed in the eighties, in terms of exhibitions, critical readings and historiographical reconstructions, has not really rediscussed the thesis and the canon of artists of *Drawing Now*. In 1992, Rose herself organized a second major exhibition of drawings at MoMA, “as an extension and re-evaluation of the premises of *Drawing Now*”, admitting that “many of the basic grounds for that phenomenon and its implications were not yet entirely clear. It is now apparent that the shift from the narrow confines of a traditional medium into an expanded field, of which the change in drawing was both a symptom and a cause, was part of the transition from modernism to what is now characterized as postmodernism”.⁵⁹ Such a retrospective interpretation was obviously determined by the postmodern wave in criticism and the general “turn of the eighties” and favored artists who debuted in the following decade. The late seventies began to be considered only as a preparation for the following decade, a historical bias that strongly influenced the eventual inclusion of Italian artists (in 1992, Francesco Clemente and Jannis Kounellis).

I have already mentioned that the exhibitions of the eighties and nineties on contemporary Italian drawing can only be preliminary, as partial or too general overviews of the problem at the center of this study. The vast amount of material was selected more for its quality rather than for its historical importance, and it was organized according to traditional groupings of artists. A first operational perspective was conceived in 1990 by Enrico Crispolti in his essay on Italian drawing in the twentieth century, where he formulated three categories to frame the identity and status of the objects.⁶⁰ Finished drawings, working drawings and illustrations, are all relevant for the drawing of the seventies: the first two appear frequently in the critical debate of the time; while it could be effectively refreshing to use the historical category of illustration in order to frame the function of drawn images in conceptualist, photography or text-based artworks, or artist books. However, only a few short essays have discussed the Arte Povera and conceptualist years in terms of drawing.⁶¹

The methodological asset behind this research is then modeled on the more critical literature on international post-minimalist drawing, which addressed its specific features such as process, spatial dimension, performance, intermediality and so on.⁶² Two recent volumes, very different from each

⁵⁹ Bernice Rose in NEW YORK 1992: 6. Her selection was declared to start from 1976 but it included Nancy Spero’s 1971 Codex Artaud (which by the way had been exhibited at Robin’s *Drawing Now: 10 Artists!*).

⁶⁰ CRISPOLTI, PRATESI 1990: 4.

⁶¹ See DE MARCO 1992 and Antonello Negri in ZUCCA ALESSANDRELLI 2018: 274-285.

⁶² See LOS ANGELES 1999 for process art and drawing; FOÀ, GRISEWOOD, HOSEA, MCCALL 2020 for performance drawing. Many other aspects of contemporary drawing are resumed in the recent CHORPENING, FORTNUM 2020.

other, were the direct interlocutors of the present study, namely Toni Hildebrandt's *Entwurf und Entgrenzung: Kontradispositive der Zeichnung 1955-1975* (2017) and Anna Lovatt's *Drawing Degree Zero. The Line from Minimal to Conceptual Art* (2019). The former is a highly theoretical, wide-ranging discussion of postwar drawing as a deconstruction of the medium's "devices" or paradigmatic functions and modalities. The latter focuses on the early careers of five fundamental American artists who defined drawing in the late sixties and seventies, LeWitt, Bochner, Rockburne, Richard Tuttle, and Rosemarie Castoro. Interestingly, the starting point for both is a discussion of *Drawing Now*. Lovatt explores in depth the practices of the artists who were paradigmatic for Rose in 1976, confirming their canonical importance, but also discussing the contradictions of a reductionist reading: the "degree zero" of drawing does not exclude the phenomenological complexity of artworks and their richness of sources and philosophical references. Hildebrandt interprets Rose's exhibition as a counterprogram to the previous discourse on "Master Drawing", which culminated in Pierre Rosenberg's *Great Draughtsmen from Pisanello to Picasso*. Her theoretical operation paralleled the development within the art practices of counter-devices that deconstructed the traditional categories of the medium (gesture, touch, handiness, line as vector, and the very notion of drawing). Hildebrandt's text is an impressive synthesis of Western drawing theory, from Pliny to Derrida, and some of the concepts articulated in it will be discussed in relation to Italian drawing practices. The theoretical focus, to which half the volume is devoted, is also the historiographical limit of this study. Contemporary debate and geographical contexts are hardly mentioned in the discussion of some art practices from 1955 and 1975, which is limited to well-known American or German artists, whose works sometimes date beyond the chronological limits. Inevitably, Italian art theory on drawing, from Dante Alighieri to Vasari and Zuccari, is discussed at length, only to erase any reference to contemporary Italian art.

Instead, Lovatt's book accommodates a primarily historical and formal analysis, in which theory is instrumental and the result is often the dismantling of the artists' theoretical assumptions in favor of their contradictions and material stratification. At the same time, it shows how the American case is in many respects exceptional, rather than paradigmatic: drawing, in the practice of LeWitt or Rockburne, absorbed almost all of their production, occupied a public dimension, and was supported early on by conscious theorising. Few artists in Italy have isolated drawing to such an extent and with such continuity – one less impetus for a systematic treatment of Italian drawing in the seventies. Lovatt has similarly discussed the relationship between drawing and conceptual art, where the latter term is coherently limited to the historical and original developments of the tendency in New York.⁶³

⁶³ See LOVATT 2020.

It is now time to introduce the methodology that constitutes the following study, also in comparison with the two studies mentioned above. As already mentioned, the chronological segment 1969-1979 serves to focus on the problems of drawing in the conceptualist field. The five chapters are organized around these issues rather than a selection of artists. When considering monographic profiles, only a few years of career are selected in order to match the development of a problem or a larger phenomenon, which is strategically described through the lens of a single practice. However, archival research on individual artists has been the main preliminary approach before structuring the thesis, and has challenged the art historical analysis in many ways. Drawn materials from an artist's private archive are typically a vast mass in which the thread of a coherent research is lost or seamlessly diverges into meanders of unresolved problems, abandoned proposals, impulsive explorations, repentances. Private drawing practices resist the narratives that the public debate on art has developed in the same years. It is the case, to mention the most outstanding example, of the drawings of Arte Povera, which were deliberately erased by the formulation of the label and its ideological persistence in the debate on avant-garde art. And here we come to the second, opposite problem. By avoiding an anthological sequence of individual practices, the challenge was to reconstruct a discourse, whose voices were fragmentary and scattered, hardly definable as a debate. These voices corresponded to critical positions, articles and catalogs, exhibition concepts; or international ideas that were imported and distorted in the Italian debate; more often, however, positions about drawing have to be derived by the practices themselves. The practices may have had a verifiable paradigmatic value for the local context, but they can rarely be reduced to a theoretical coherence. This is a methodological distance from Hildebrandt's perspective: I use historical analysis in an attempt to reconstruct a material, complex and contradictory phenomenon such as the practice of conceptualist drawing; I am not interested in establishing a single narrative, but rather in a critical and mobile framework capable of accounting for the multiplicity of drawing as an historical problem. The fact that the abundant theory of contemporary design has consistently neglected Italian art suggests that we should start precisely from the marginality, from a residual space with respect to the leading ideas and the Western canon, without seeking its center.

For the same reason, a precise contextual definition, both geographical and historical, is necessary. "Italian drawing" is not meant here as an identity, since no nationalist discourse belonged to the conceptualist artists of the time, at least not before the beginning of the Transavanguardia. And as a geographical demarcation, it includes the international exchanges for which some cities, such as Turin, were hubs of European importance. The internationality of the art historical subject of drawing in the seventies should seem obvious in the light of the Western market and cultural system of the second half of the twentieth century. At best, it could be summarized by a very conceptual work by

the Israeli artist Benni Efrat realized between 1972 and 1973. Efrat, who lived in London at the time, sent a letter to John Baldessari, Sol LeWitt, Gilbert & George and Daniel Buren, asking: “Would you please exchange these lines for one of yours to be used in a drawing [?]”. The artists responded positively to the pun, which played on the multiple meanings of “line”. Baldessari sent back two sentences from his list of *Seventy-two Ways to Make Sure of Failure*; LeWitt sent back a random scribble; Buren and Gilbert and George wrote back “just a line”, in affectionate or very polite and formal tones, respectively. In his own final work, Efrat summed up all the “lines” he received by printing them on top of each other in an illegible jumble, and then documented the entire mail work in a catalog (**figure 0.12**).⁶⁴ What is striking in the young artist’s collaborative work is the recognition of the exemplary function, almost as “Master Draftsmen”, of some established conceptualist artists from the international community (two Americans, a French and a British duo). Their “lines” were renowned and paradigmatic even if autography or style were dismissed as parameters of quality.

The formation of this international transatlantic community was fully realized in 1969, when such artists were brought together in such well-known exhibitions as *When Attitudes Become Form* and *Op Losse Schroeven*. The first chapter examines the participation of Italian artists in these exhibitions, where the Conceptual “works on paper” (plans, projects, notes, sketches, proposals, etc.) acquired a new status and inaugurated a new understanding of drawing. Some Arte Povera artists originally explored such a dimension of “progetti/disegni” (“projects/drawings”), in which the devices of process art and the “visualization of thought processes”⁶⁵ pushed for a redefinition of the medium’s fundamentals.

In the second chapter, the theme of planning is considered from an Italian perspective and debate, in which conceptualism was partly interpreted through categories that originated in the sixties. In particular, Giulio Carlo Argan’s theses on the programmed were the frame of reference for the whole problem and the ultimate crisis of the project. This crisis was expressed in artists’ practices either through forms of “explosion” towards reality (in the case of Mario Merz’s drawings based on the Fibonacci series) or through “implosion” within the drawing process itself (as in Beppe Devalle’s reversible studies of images).

The first two chapters deal with the major problem of the relationship between drawings-as-projects and the respective realized artworks and installations. Instead, the autonomy of the medium is the subject of the third chapter, which develops as a dialogue between the two great conceptualist draftsmen in Italy in the seventies, Giulio Paolini and Alighiero e Boetti. This dialog is possible first and foremost because of the paradigmatic character of their work (and not only as an actual influence

⁶⁴ See SANDBERG 1974: 64-69.

⁶⁵ The title of LUCERNE 1970.

on many immediately younger artists). In fact, they produced some of the most complex images of the act of drawing of the decade. Boetti's *Due mani e una matita* ("Two hands and a pencil") appeared in 1976 as a photograph by Gianfranco Gorgoni used for an exhibition poster (**figure 0.13**). It condensed many of the nodes of the artist's practice, such as duality (or "Beihändigkeit", according to Hildebrandt, that was extended to the artist entire persona, since Boetti splitted his name into first "and" last name as two entities, since 1969), delegation of autography, anti-virtuosity and the graphic reduction to symbolic gestures. The image was repeated, copied by a young collaborator, Marco Tirelli, on numerous large works on paper, as a kind of signature or seal of Boetti's "draftsmanship". The analytic impulse in Paolini's research has consistently led to paradigmatic works (see **figure 0.11**). In 1962, he manipulated a drawing by the abstract painter Achille Perilli, by photographing it from a magazine and by cutting it into a grid of squares (**figures 0.14**). His intervention was particularly subtle, since the original source already contained a comic-like grid composition, but it is an elegant illustration of an obvious Klee culture (compare **figures 0.15** and **0.6**). With due distinctions of quality and historical importance, Paolini's operation could be compared with Rauschenberg's *Erased De Kooning*: the Italian conceptual artist responded to the specific taste and autographic quality of the original drawing with a cold, analytical disruption. However, "Rauschenberg's need to literally erase Willem de Kooning [...] does not erase Rauschenberg's debt to de Kooning";⁶⁶ and Paolini's analysis ends up producing a new compositional balance, a new drawing, that remains indebted to the original image. These observations introduce to a major problem for the analysis of conceptualist drawing, which has traditionally been associated with "dematerialization", the indexical production of "afterimages", anti-objecthood and anti-style. Only recent literature has privileged the formal and material analysis of conceptual practices, artworks and documentation, with fruitful and refreshing results.⁶⁷ Such an approach, based on a close observation of the artworks – in which strategies of conceptualization or dematerialization can be established –, seems all the more important for drawing as a light, subtle medium. Moreover, as it will be shown, the reception of Conceptual art in Italy excluded the most radical results of dematerialization or institutional critique, and autographic intervention played a fundamental role. Paolini, who had a strong interest in phenomenology, expressed his position on this problem as early as 1967, in an interview with Carla Lonzi. He called "rhetorical" "any radical attitude towards style [...] When the lack of accessories, of style, to use this term, is even deliberately exhibited, when style is erased ad hoc in favor of the implicit [content]".

⁶⁶ Bernice Rose in NEW YORK 1976A: 9.

⁶⁷ On the problem of materiality and conceptualism, see BERGER 2019. On documentation of a material practice, see BERGER, SANTONE 2016.

“An example might be the critical moments of any avant-garde. At the most communicative moment of any avant-garde, that is, at its inception, there is always this radicalization of meaning in spite of the enjoyability of the work, this reducing of terms to essence. I don’t think you can make a rule out of it: this has its precise reasons at certain precise moments, in certain precise situations. I don’t think you can elect this radicalization of meanings as a custom, without the slightest care for the fulfillment. Exactly: woe to the complacency of the implicit [content] in itself, which, in the end, is more aestheticizing even than the co-presence, instead, natural, of the two things. The aestheticizing complacency is to reduce everything to this essentiality of discourse and, therefore, to the implicit [content] and not to look at”.⁶⁸

It is no coincidence that Paolini’s public image (as shown in a 1977 photographic reportage of his studio by Paolo Mussat Sartor, **figure 0.16**)⁶⁹ emphasized the making, the handmade, the artisanal execution, even though he was considered the most authoritative Italian exponent of conceptual art. Another consequence of the “co-presence” of formal accuracy alongside conceptual content, is the persistence of exchange, exemplary function and direct dialogue between artists in the post-medium condition.

If the analytical practices of Boetti and Paolini produced actual definitions of drawing as a medium, the critical approaches of the time tended to be supported by external, allogenic discourses, above all psychoanalysis. This is the case with Achille Bonito Oliva’s essay in *Drawing/Transparence*, which derives directly from his writings on Marcel Duchamp’s Large Glass. This is also the reason why “transparency” became too general and specious a category to be adopted here, except for its discussion in the fourth chapter. Although almost all of the drawings exhibited at the Studio Cannaviello on that occasion are commented on in the chapters, Bonito Oliva’s perspective is not primarily historical. Rather, it can be juxtaposed with contemporary material examples of transparency in drawing to shed light on a fundamental, if forgotten, turning point of the seventies, that roughly corresponded to the shift to a post-Arte Povera generation. Two case studies from the mid-seventies, Remo Salvadori’s private drawings and Francesco Clemente’s photographic exhibitions, are put into dialogue, as both animated the debate on drawing in 1976.

Chapter 4 thus highlights and gives autonomy to a specific moment, dominated by original interests in performance and intermediality, which was then absorbed into the dominant narrative of the “late seventies” as “prodromes of the eighties”. This happened, of course, because Bonito Oliva then merged his 1976 essay on drawing with the Transavanguardia theorization of almost four years later. The strategy of the last chapter is then to analyze the “returns to drawing” independently of the Transavanguardia discourse, that is, before and without the comeback of painting. Artists who Jannis Kounellis and Pier Paolo Calzolari are discussed here in a genealogy of pictorial drawing that resisted

⁶⁸ LONZI 2017 [1969]: 247.

⁶⁹ See MUSSAT SARTOR 1979.

the “artistic Ramadan”, the severe reduction of the late sixties and seventies, in order to reconnect with the experiences of “return” at the end of the decade. Following recent studies on the rhetorical construction of the *Transavanguardia* as a critical label and the actual sources of the private drawings of Clemente, Sandro Chia, Mimmo Paladino and Enzo Cucchi,⁷⁰ the separate careers of these artists before 1979 will be analyzed as complex strategies that began to incorporate drawing with new “poetic” value and performative functions.

The intention to give a reading of a decade, even if it is deliberately not unified or teleological, and limited to a single aspect such as drawing, should not be confused with a claim to exhaustiveness. There are so many aspects that could have been included in the argument, and instead, for various reasons (of space, of clarity, but also for concrete eventualities in the path of research in these years) have only contributed as implicit terms of comparison. The important theme of “writing-as-drawing”, which is touched upon in some passages although the “*nuova scrittura*” contributed a great deal to the Italian definition of conceptualism. Its analysis, however, would have extended the chronology back to the mid-sixties, and would have included subjects that cannot be reduced to drawing, such as concrete and visual poetry, and the whole question of feminist criticism and artistic activism, which has been studied quite extensively in recent years.⁷¹ The minoritarian representation of women artists in this thesis seems to be a limitation imposed by the general attempt to keep the historical reconstruction in proportion to the debate of the time, which was obviously biased according to a gender discrimination. However, the same historical analysis has made it possible to take into account some gender constructs relevant to the definition of drawing, sometimes revealed through the contribution of female subjectivities. Moreover, women thinkers prevailed in the history of drawing criticism and theory, as proved by the literature evoked in this introduction.

Mirella Bentivoglio, an exponent of *Nuova Scrittura* and a feminist art critic, gave a definition of drawing in May 1970 in her now forgotten introduction to an international Spanish prize. She collected traditional ideas that resonated with her own research (“[drawing’s] lightness, its rapidity, its immediacy, the emptiness of drawing elected it as a means of communication of ideas [...] not anymore the evocation of visual qualities, but their reflection, echo or cast on our thought”). Focusing on the new current importance of drawing, Bentivoglio opposed “classicism” to “primitivism”: that is, a syntonic embrace of reality on one hand; against an age of doubt, marginality and self-criticism on the other hand. The former is expressed through painting and sculpture as full, sensual means of

⁷⁰ See VIVA 2020 and BELLONI 2008.

⁷¹ The earliest systematic surveys on the phenomenon took place in the seventies, see BENTIVOGLIO 1978. To convince me not to expand on the Italian phenomenon of “drawing-as-writing” was also the knowledge of the ongoing doctoral researches by Saskia Verlaan on this subject.

representation; while the latter, which parallels the feminist perspective on the critical marginality of women in the patriarchy, corresponds the dimension of drawing:

“Our neo-primitive culture, a culture of a transitional age, [...] finds in drawing an essentiality which is congenial to it. Primitives, ancient and modern, always tend to be graphic. This is because they question the vision, instead of being satiated by it; there is no culture behind them that has found rebalancing answers. Classicism, fullness of historical epochs, is anti-graphic [...]. [Drawing] becomes a slave to painting and sculpture, seeks their effects. It becomes instrumental, preliminary: the preparatory study, the sketch, only a project, a program. The sense of [classicism] culture is adherence to an assimilated world.

But as the meaning of substance is annihilated, the idea leavens in doubt. The image takes on the value of the word and returns to the mystery of its beginnings: it traces itself. And the drawing is the void it has left in space. A negative. A boundary, a memory. The drawing is the shadow, and this is also one of the reasons for its consonance with our surviving and intellectualistic age; immersed up to the eyes in the creative dimension of absence. On the edge of anguish, but with such uninjured voluptuousness”.⁷²

Drawing in the seventies was inaugurated as negative, a memory and a shadow. And yet it was from this marginal position that it allowed artists to engage with the creative process and its intellectual analysis with renovated, full and “voluptuous” awareness. A medium that could transition from its traditional status of foundation of artistic discourse to become an agent of its deconstruction.

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⁷² BENTIVOGLIO 1970: [7-8].

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Appendix 1 *On drawing: international exhibitions and debate (1961-1976)*

1961	International context Exh. <i>Drawings towards Painting</i> , ICA, London, October	Italy Exh. <i>Disegni americani moderni</i>, Spoleto, Summer Exh. <i>Premio Koh-I-Noor</i>
1962	Exh. <i>Drawings</i> , Castelli Gallery, NY, May	Exh. <i>Disegni italiani moderni</i>, Spoleto, Summer (cat. 1963)
1963	Exh. <i>Drawings</i> , Castelli Gallery, NY, May	E. Sanguineti, L. Carluccio, E. Gribaudo, <i>Disegni e parole</i> . Turin Exh. <i>Alternative attuali. Antologia del nuovo disegno italiano</i>, L'Aquila, July Exh. <i>Disegni di giovani pittori italiani</i> , Galleria Il Punto, Turin, May
<hr/>		
1964	Twentieth Century Master Drawings M. Kozloff, "Notes on the Psychology of Modern Draftsmanship", <i>Arts Magazine</i>, February Exh. <i>Recent American Drawing</i>, Rose Art Museum, Boston, April Exh. <i>documenta 3. Handzeichnungen</i>, Kassel, Summer Exh. <i>American Drawings</i>, Guggenheim Museum, New York, September Exh. <i>1. Internationale der Zeichnung</i>, Darmstadt, September Exh. <i>Modern American Drawings</i> , FAR Gallery, New York, October <i>Art in America</i> , October issue	Exh. <i>Schifano, O'Hara. Disegni e parole</i> , Rome, December Exh. <i>Disegni</i> , Galleria Odyssia, Rome, December
1965	Exh. <i>One Hundred Contemporary American Drawings</i>, Ann Arbor, February Exh. <i>A Decade of American Drawings, 1955-1965</i>, Whitney Museum of American Art, NY, April Exh. <i>Group Drawing Show</i> , Castelli Gallery, NY, December	
1966	Exh. <i>European Drawings</i>, Guggenheim Museum, New York, January Exh. <i>Master Drawings. Picasso to Lichtenstein</i>, Bianchini Gallery, NY, January Exh. <i>Working drawings and other visible things on paper not necessarily meant to be viewed as art</i>, School of Visual Arts, NY, December	
1967	Exh. <i>2. Internationale der Zeichnung</i>, Darmstadt Exh. <i>New York-Los Angeles, Drawings of the Sixties</i>, Boulder, Colorado, June Exh. <i>Drawing Towards Painting 2</i> , ICA, London, October	F. De Bartolomeis, <i>Segno antidisegno di Lucio Fontana</i> . Turin
<hr/>		
1969	Exh. <i>Drawing Exhibition</i> , Paula Cooper Gallery, January Exh. <i>Drawings</i>, Fort Worth Art Museum, September P. Plagens, "The possibilities of drawing", <i>Artforum</i>, October	Exh. <i>Disegni progetti</i>, Galleria Sperone, Turin, May

- Exh. *American Drawings of the Contemporaries*, Galerie Heiner Friedrich, Munich, Fall
 Exh. *American Drawings of the Sixties. A selection*, New School Art Center, NY, November
 Exh. *Pläne und Projekte als Kunst*, Kunsthalle, Bern, November
- 1970 Exh. *Image/dessin*, Paris, January
 Exh. *Using Walls*, Jewish Museum
 Exh. *Zeichnungen Amerikanischer Künstler*, Galerie Ricke, Cologne, March
 Exh. *Zeichnungen 1*, Morsbroich Museum, Leverkusen, June
 Exh. *3. Internationale der Zeichnung*, Darmstadt, August
 Exh. *Drawing*, NY and other
 Exh. *Dessins d'artistes américains*, Galerie Yvon Lambert, Paris, October
 Exh. *Die Handzeichnungen der Gegenwart*, Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart
- 1971 Exh. *Zeichnungen, Entwürfe, Partituren*, Galerie Renè Block, Berlin, March
 Exh. *Zeichnen Heute*, Secession, Wien, November
 J. Elderfield, "Drawing as Suspended Narrative", *Leonardo*, Winter
- 1972 Exh. *Zeichnungen der deutsche Avantgarde*, Galerie nächst St. Stephan, Vienna, October
 Exh. *Diagrams and Drawings*, Kroller Müller Museum, Otterlo, August
 Exh. *Group Drawing Show*, Castelli Gallery, NY, September
 Exh. *[Drawing]*, Oxford Museum of Modern Art, November
 Exh. *Zeichnungen 2*, Morsbroich Museum, Leverkusen, November
- 1973 Exh. *3D into 2D*, New York Cultural Center, January
 Exh. *Deutsche Zeichnungen der Gegenwart*, Bielefeld, March
Das Kunstwerk. Neue Deutsche Zeichnungen, March issue
 D. Crimp, "New York Letter", *Art international*, April
 Exh. *American Drawings 1963-1973*, Whitney Museum, NY, May
 R. Fuchs, "On Drawing", *Studio international*, June
 A. von Gravenitz, "Noch Zeichnungen?", *Kunstnachrichten*, June
 L. Borden, "Art Economics and the Whitney Drawing Show", *Artforum*, October
 Exh. *Drawings and Other Work*, Paula Cooper Gallery, December
- 1974 Exh. *Line as Language. Six Artists Draw*, Princeton University Art Museum, New Jersey, February
 Exh. *Joseph Beuys. A secret block for a secret person in Ireland*, Oxford Museum of Art, April
- Exh. *Progetti di arte povera*, Il Diagramma, Milan, December
- M. Pirro, T. Toniato, eds. *Disegni e parole*, Milan
- M. Bentivoglio, "Il disegno", from *IX Premio Internazionale di Disegno Joan Mirò*, May
- Exh. *Disegni*, Galleria Schema, Florence, March
- T. Trini, "Titus-Carmel La strategia del disegno", Galleria Schwarz, Milan, February.
 Exh. *Ricognizione 73*, Santa Maria Capua Vetere, May
- Exh. *Grafica iperrealista*, Galleria Seconda Scala, Rome, January
 Exh. *Dal progetto all'opera*, Museo di Castelvecchio, Verona, January

- Exh. *Drawings, Disegni, Zeichnungen*, Galerie Annemarie Verna, Zurich, November
 Exh. *Drawings and Other Work*, Paula Cooper Gallery, NY, December
- 1975 Exh. *Mel Bochner Barry Le Va Dorothea Rockburne Richard Tuttle*, The Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, January
 Exh. *Dessins contemporains*, Maison de la Culture, Rennes, March
Exh. *Functies van Tekenen, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, May*
Exh. *Zeichnungen 3, Morsbroich Museum, Levekusen, May*
- 1976 Exh. *Drawing Now*, MoMA, NY, January
- Exh. *Twentieth Century Drawing. Three Avant-Garde Generation*, Guggenheim Museum, NY, January**
Exh. *Line*, School of Visual Arts, NY, January
Exh. *Ideas on Paper 1970-1976*, Renaissance Society, Chicago, May
R. Smith, "Drawing Now (And Then)", *Artforum*, April
***Kunstforum International. Funktionen der Zeichnung*, Spring**
N. Foote, "Drawing the Line", *Artforum*, May
Exh. *Drawing now: 10 artists*, Soho Center for Visual Artists, June
 Exh. *Group Drawing Show*, Castelli Gallery, NY, June
Exh. *Mentalität Zeichnung*, Kunstmuseum Luzern, July
Exh. *Pläne, Diagramme, Zeichnungen*, Galerie Maenz, Cologne, September
- Exh. *Disegni*, Galleria La Salita, Rome, December
Exh. *Revisione 1*, Galleria dell'Ariete, Milan, November
- Exh. *Disegno in USA-Disegno in Italia (Drawing/Transparence)*, Studio Cannaviello, Rome, January**
- Exh. *Disegno / collettiva '76*, Galleria Rondanini, Rome, December
Exh. *La cosa disegnata*, Studio Marconi, Milan, December
 M. T. Balboni, "La cosa disegnata", *G7 Studio*, December

0 Plates

Chapter 1 Disegni progetti, circa 1969

0 Plans and projects as drawings

In November 1969, the walls of the Kunsthalle Bern were “papered” with a linear display of diverse materials such as typewritten mails, handwritten notes, biographies, lists, photographs, plans, diagrams and so on (**figure I.1**). The exhibition titled *Pläne und Projekte als Kunst* transformed the space of the museum again, only a few months after the sensational, chaotic arrangement of the artworks at *When Attitudes Become Form*: this time, the visitors found a dry, busy presentation of bureaucratic documents, hardly enjoyable, since it required them to pay close attention to every single sheet, with even improvised seating for comfort. The sequence and juxtaposition of the artists followed a mere alphabetical order.⁷³ The exhibition concept, to exhibit plans and projects as autonomous artworks as well as homogeneous symptoms of the latest trends in international Western art,⁷⁴ originated from the radical thinking of Harald Szeemann.⁷⁵ It brought further consequences to some aspects of the other 1969 exhibitions that first responded to the recent American experiences of post-minimalism. Such exhibitions were held in important public institutions and pushed forward an early definition of European conceptualism.⁷⁶ In March, some of artists taking part in *When Attitudes Become Form* limited their intervention to “information”, that is, pages of the catalogue containing verbal or photographic descriptions of their work.⁷⁷ At the same time, for the Stedelijk Museum

⁷³ In **figure I.1**, it is possible to identify: from left to right, the letters and projects by Jean Dupuy (the first four sheets), Jorge Eielson (whose name is stamped in bold before his four sheets, with a large, oblique visual poem above), Gernot Eigler (whose labelled name must be covered by the head of the male visitor), Gerd Van Elk (with a letter and two pages of biography, and two larger sheets of projects above) are exhibited. The documents which can be identified among those still collected in the Kunsthalle Archive are: the first three sheets by Eielson, that is, his typed bio, a typewritten project for “Sculptur à lire”; letters by Eigler and Van Elk, probably hanging upon the answers by curator Felix Zdenek. Van Elk’s bio follows in the last two sheets on the right, while above is hanging the “realized proposal for a luxurious streetcorner”, that had already been sent as a drawing for the exhibition catalogue of *Op losse Schroeven* in Amsterdam. I am thankful to Julia Jost for her help in the research at the Kunsthalle Bern Archive.

⁷⁴ For a general discussion of the term “conceptualism” and the relationship between US conceptual art and the European artists, see NEW YORK 1999.

⁷⁵ Szeemann was already thinking about this show at least since December 1968, when he noted down the name of designer David Lee and the possibility to use his Plexiglass sheets in a show titled, *Kunst nach Planen* (see Harald Szeemann, December 14th, 1968, in RATTEMEYER 2010: 179-180). He had already been fired and substituted by Carl Huber, when his idea saw the light of day.

⁷⁶ Above all, Mel Bochner’s 1966 exhibition-work titled, *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art* is evidently at the origin of the concept of *Pläne und Projekte als Kunst*: the artist collected the same type of materials from artist friends, scholars and textbooks, then Xeroxed them and arranged the same format sheets as pages of a book in four copies. See the facsimile reprint BOCHNER 1997 and Bochner’s memories most recently published in CHICAGO 2019: 177-178.

⁷⁷ Jared Bark, Ted Glass, Hans Haacke, Paolo Icaro, Alain Jacquet, Jo Ann Kaplan, Bernd Lohaus, Richard Long, Roelof Louw, Bruce MacLean, David Medalla, Dennis Oppenheim, Paul Pechter, Michelangelo Pistoletto and William Wegman, see BERN 1969A.

exhibition *Op Losse Schroeven* (including many of the same artists),⁷⁸ a rich catalogue was designed in two sections: on one hand, the usual list of artists, documentation and biographies; on the other hand, an anthology of projects under the technical definition of *Lichtdrukken* (“collotypes”),⁷⁹ which was meant as a second part of the exhibition unto itself.⁸⁰ Each artist had received a graphed paper sheet on which to operate, stamped with the museum logo on the bottom right and a pane where the name, title, date and other details like the indication of scale could be inserted.

Finding themselves in front of a “commissioned” project and a standard format, the artists reacted variously showing a vast range of attitudes (**figure I.4**). Some responded to the standard by another standard, simply photocopying previous projects onto the Stedelijk sheet; some directly typed on the sheet a text and then illustrated it with a drawing; Joseph Kosuth typed the description of an earlier work to present it “in the only manner possible: using no actual visible material, this work only exists in terms of the information supplied by its documentation”.⁸¹ Others effectively provided a sample of their planning practice in the making, for instance by rapidly sketching or writing down notes for already planned ideas (for instance, a *Lead Shot* by Richard Serra, a *Tv project for ebb and flow* by Jan Dibbets; a landscape idea by Marinus Boezem), or detailing possible installation works for Amsterdam (a *Soil Mirrors (Netherlands)* by Robert Smithson or an *Amsterdam canal project* by Barry Flanagan); some pages appear as fragments for longer texts to be continued beyond the limits of the sample, and the Dutch artist Hetty Huisman covered two pages with her notes, handwritten and heavily cancelled. A few artists opted for autonomous interventions on the page, apparently unrelated to their practice, like Bruce Nauman’s ink study of a double male figure; or Richard Long’s precise copy of two landscape photographs in ballpoint. Lastly, a large group approached the page in a conceptual, mostly tautological way: by questioning itself as a support (Bruce McLean’s *Project for a catalog* consisted in the tearing of the sheet; Roelof Louw just signed the sheet; Douglas Huebler’s text located the Stedelijk logo “exactly on the surface of this piece of paper”, while “the words within

⁷⁸ On the two shows held respectively at the Stedelijk Museum (March 15th to April 27th) and at the Kunsthalle Bern (March 22nd to April 27th), see RATTEMAYER 2010. Both travelled to other cities: the former was titled *Verbogene Structuren* at the Folkwang Museum in Essen (May 9th to June 22nd); the latter travelled to Krefeld (Museum Haus Lange, May 9th to June 15th) and to London (Institute of Contemporary Art, August 28th to September 27th).

⁷⁹ It is not clear what technique was used to print the photographs of the sheets sent by the artists; Rattemeyer speaks of serigraphy, see RATTEMAYER 2010: 51.

⁸⁰ The projects are bound separately in the catalogue, and it is introduced by the index list of 27 artists (Giovanni Anselmo, Ben d’Armagnac, Marinus Boezem, Bill Bollinger, Michel Buthe, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Gerrit Dekker, Jan Dibbets, Ger van Elk, Pieter Engels, Barry Flanagan, Bernhard Höke, Paolo Icaro, Immo Jalass, Olle Kåks, Hans Koetsier, Roelof Louw, Bruce McLean, Mario and Marisa Merz, Bruce Nauman, Panamarenko, Emilio Prini, Bobo Ryman, Gianni Emilio Simonetti, Frank Viner, Lawrence Weiner, Gilberto Zorio). Curiously, following the indexed artists, 11 further projects were inserted (by Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Hetty Huisman, Neil Jenney, Joseph Kosuth, Richard Long, Robert Morris, Dennis Oppenheim, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson and Keith Sonnier), possibly because of delays in the sending. Altogether, the *Lichtdrukken* included 13 artists who were not exhibiting at the Stedelijk, among which were Joseph Kosuth, Robert Barry, Gerrit Derrek and Gianni-Emilio Simonetti. This section was excluded from the catalogue when the show travelled to Essen. The graph paper cover of the second catalogue was designed by Carl Andre.

⁸¹ Joseph Kosuth in AMSTERDAM 1969: n. p.

the rectangle are located 10 mm ahead of the paper”); by repeating the graphed grid (Robert Ryman traced a square titled after the colour crayon he used, *Eagle turquoise 3H*, despite probably knowing that his page would have been reprinted in black and white; for his *Page project*, Keith Sonnier scribbled in each space of the grid with a felt tip pen); or by pushing the status of the project to a paradoxical dematerialised appearance, like Robert Barry’s blank page illustrating a piece from his *Inert gas series* (but also Lawrence Weiner’s horizontal line cutting the page in the middle).

The new dimensions of practice opened by the creative use of documentation and planning was specifically addressed in *Konzeption/Conception*, held in the autumn in Leverkusen. The curators, Rolf Wedewer and Konrad Fischer, wanted to state the new equivalence between exhibited artworks and their printed documentation in the catalogue, which contained an introduction by Sol LeWitt and assigned five pages of the volume to each invited artist.⁸² This time, in respect to *Op Losse Schroeven*, the results show how subtle and sophisticated the control of the book form and the device of multiple pages already were (**figure I.5**). As in *Pläne und Projekte als Kunst*, the instructions sent by the artists were reproduced in the catalogue too, like in the case of Richard Jackson, Alighiero Boetti, David Lamelas or Emilio Prini (who planned a pedestal for the catalogue to be exhibited as the work itself at Schloss Mosbroich), as well as Nauman’s script for a performance to be executed at the show. Handwritten or typed texts predominate in the volume, both as paragraphed, extensive theoretical writing (like Daniel Buren’s *Mise en garde*, a fundamental text for conceptual art theory) and as iconic, isolated aphorisms (like Robert Barry, or Pier Paolo Calzolari’s photographs of metal lettering arranged on the floor of a gallery). The sequence of pages was obviously suitable to the serial process of numbering and ciphering by Hanne Darboven and On Kawara; but also photographic works occupied in full autonomy the sections of Robert Smithson, Stanley Brouwn, Keith Arnatt, Bernd and Hilla Becher, or Edward Ruscha. Mel Bochner opted for the photographic documentation of the installation of his tape *Measurements* (ironically, a very physical representation of one of the most tautological and rigorous examples of conceptual art), Gilbert & George collected invitations from past shows and greeting cards. Others, such as Adrian Piper, Bernard Venet, Sigmar Polke) documented their work with photographs, sketches and sophisticated diagrams. According to Wedewer, a new status of such practices (“der Entwurf als Endform”, that is, the draft as final form) characterised the materials collected in *Konzeption/Conception* as “no longer directed toward objects that can still be formally defined, but describe instead any process for a possible object”.⁸³

⁸² For a detailed analysis of *Konzeption/Conception*, see LEVERKUSEN 2015. Because of their status as “documents”, the works were sent to Leverkusen without travel insurance costs. The idea had obvious precedents in Seth Siegelaub’s exhibition catalogues between late 1968 and early 1969, although all generally in private galleries. For such context analysis, see ISMAIL-EPPS 2016.

⁸³ Rolf Wedewer in LEVERKUSEN 1969: [1].

Planning corresponded both as a de-objectifying and dematerialised impulse of conceptualism, and as a material practice based on graphic works, from photography to drawings. *Pläne und Projekte als Kunst* recapitulated this paradoxical and yet fundamental aspect of early conceptualism. Held from November 25th to December 11th, the show was organised by the art historian Felix Zdenek who carried out Szeemann's proposal "to arrange an exhibition solely of projects, plans and concepts".⁸⁴ He invited by email more than 100 international artists, of which 94 positively answered.⁸⁵ They were asked to mail their contributions, that were subsequently photocopied "in a very cheap way"⁸⁶ and travelled to Munich, where a second "version" of the show was held at the Aktionsraum from November 19th to December 14th (**figure I.2**). A further stage of the photocopied exhibition took place in Hamburg from mid-February to mid-March: the new title *Künstler machen Planen, andere auch!* ("Artists make plans, others too!") referred to an added section (titled, *Hamburger Bürger machen Pläne*) that collected various "plans" from the local public.⁸⁷ If the Hamburg stage openly defined planning as "a general category of human activity",⁸⁸ and analysed it through political, socio-economic and anthropological lenses, the group of exhibitors invited to Bern also comprehended architects to present an inclusive idea of planning.

In Zdenek's introduction, Leonardo da Vinci's drawings, plans and scientific studies were considered the starting point in order to consider planning as an autonomous practice, independent from the actual implementation of the project: two reproductions of the Vitruvian Man and a plan of Imola

⁸⁴ Zdenek in BERN 1969B: [1].

⁸⁵ Invitations were sent on August 26th for the show, provisionally entitled *Kunst nach Plänen* ("Art after Plans"). The participant artists were: Giovanni Anselmo, Arakawa, Mike Asher, Gabor Attalai, Jared Bark, Jean Claud Bédard, Ronald Bladen, Mel Bochner, Alighiero Boetti, Boezem, William Bollinger, Bernard Borgeaud, Clément Borlat, Robert Breer, George Brecht, Stanley Brouwn, Mark Brusse, Daniel Buren, Donald Burgy, Gianfredo Camesi, Malcolm Calrer, Christo, Paul Cotton, Antonio Dias, Jan Dibbets, Herbert Distel, Jean Dupuy, Jorge Eielson, Gernot Eigler, Ger van Elk, Pieter Engels, Eventstructure Research Group Theo Botschuijver + Jeffrey Shaw, Carl Fernbach-Flarsheim, Stano Filko, Gilbert and George, Karl Gestner, Ted Glass, Lily Greenham, Laura Grisi, Hans Haacke, David Hall, Jeroen Henneman, H. R. Huber, Bob Huot, Stephen Kaltenbach, Jo Ann Kaplan, Edward Kienholz, Alain Kirili, Joseph Kosuth, Bernard Lassus, David Lee, Sol LeWitt, Herbert Lienhard, Christian Lindow, Urs Lüthi, Christian Megert, Gérald Minkoff, Pieter Laurens Mol, Leonardo Mosso, Laura Mosso, Hans Ealter Müller, Peter Nemetschek, Lev Nusberg, Germano Olivotto, Dennis Oppenheim, Paul Pechter, Adrian Piper, Markus Raetz, Martial Raysse, Carl Frederik Reutesward, Klaus Rinke, Allen Ruppersberg, Reiner Ruthenbeck, Marzio and Annamaria Sala, J. M. Sanejouand, Nicolas Schöffer, Jean-Frédéric Schnyder, Bernar Venet, Frank Lincoln Viner, Also Walker, Rolf Weber, Lex Wechgelaar, William Wegman, Lawrence Weiner, William T. Wiley.

⁸⁶ "Aktionsraum 1 was founded by some young people trying to change the old exhibitions into actions. For this reason, most of the documents have been copied in a very cheap way because these young people have much more initiative than money at their disposal" (letter from Zdenek to Joseph Kosuth, November 26th, 1969, Kunsthalle Bern Archives). Kosuth did not let his work travel because of its geographical and temporal specificity, as so did Mel Bochner, Daniel Buren, Edward Kienholz, Robert Huot and Lawrence Weiner.

⁸⁷ In an open letter to the citizens, the Kunsthaus Hamburg solicited the sending of any modification: "Make plans for change: on earth, in water, in air, in the city, in your city, in your place, in the block, at workplace, in your apartment, on the street, at theater, at playground, at restaurant, in the canteen, at the opera, at the post office, at school, in the factory, in the Kunsthaus!" (HAMBURG 1970: [11]).

⁸⁸ Andreas Faludi, "Planung als menschliche Dimension" in HAMBURG 1970: [4]. Other essays by Bazon Brock, Marshall McLuhan and George B. Leonard were dedicated to the public dimension of aesthetic intervention and the "future of sexuality".

were actually hung in the exhibition path, standing as precursor of the “media” used by “present planners” (figure I.3).⁸⁹ He stressed the primacy of a mental approach over visual and aesthetic appreciation of the materials (and their “antivisuelle Optik”), and admitted the difficulty of entering the subjective dimensions of the earliest stages of such conception. Zdenek also tried to formulate a sort of “taxonomy of the project”, based on categories that appear quite generic facing the variety of the materials and the number of artists excluded from the classification: “klassische Projekte” defined traditional, that is, architecture projects, exemplified by Nicolas Schöffer or Leonardo Mosso; “raumliche und ortliche Projekte” (“spatial and topographic projects”) were assigned to Bochner’s *Measurement* for the Kunsthalle itself; “unrealisierbare Entwürfe” (“unrealisable plans”) described Christo packages but Laura Grisi’s projects that were actually realised as works; “Multiplizierbare Ausstellungskonzepte” (“multiplicable exhibition concepts”) for Kosuth’s *Exhibition Simultaneously in Approx[imately] 12 Different Locations around the World*; “Situationsprojekte” (“projects for situations”) describing the Swiss artist Markus Raetz’s 26 sketched objects; and lastly “schriftlich fixierbare Konzepte” (“projects that can be written down”), the most generic category, gathering from George Brecht to Philip Glass, from Hans Haacke to Adrian Piper and Bernard Venet.

The exhibition concept aimed at “freeing ourselves from conventional models of thoughts”⁹⁰ and triggering the audience’s attention, and it was based on the recent paradigm of post-minimalism (still difficult to define by labels: Zdenek himself refers to the “«Attituden»-Leute”). In fact, the production of projects was collateral to conceptual art, as well as to land art, that is, it served to represent something impossible to carry into the museum, either “what is not there but can be imagined”⁹¹ or an earth work.⁹² Some of the fundamental texts fueling the recent debate about conceptualism had highlighted the new role of such working materials. To quote a passage from Sol LeWitt’s already influential *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art* from 1967:

“If the artist carries through his idea and makes it into visible form, then all the steps in the process are of importance. The idea itself, even if not made visual, is as much a work of art as any finished product. All intervening steps—scribbles, sketches, drawings, failed work, models, studies, thought, conversations—are of interest. Those that show the thought process of the artist are sometimes more interesting than the final product” (LEWITT 1967: 83).

⁸⁹ The two reproductions are not listed in the catalogue but were filmed in a television service of the Schweizer Radio und Fernseh (Tagesschau - Téljournal - Telegiornale vom 09.11.1969, Schweizer Radio und Fernseh (SRF), SRG, 09.11.1969; du: Fernsehbestand Tagesschau, Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen, 9304950).

⁹⁰ Zdenek in BERN 1969: [1].

⁹¹ BLOK 1969: 53.

⁹² “Because they [the land art works, ed.] are obviously not transportable, the draft – description or sketch – replace the finished object. The verbal components stand equal to the visual ones of the sketch” (Rolf Wederer in LEVERKUSEN 1969, p. n. n.).

Furthermore, the famous hypothesis of a “dematerialisation of the art object” formulated by Lucy Lippard and John Chandler a few months later had accorded the same importance to planning, but explicitly (albeit concisely) in terms of drawing. After stating that “much recent conceptual art is illustration in a sense, in the form of drawings or models for nearly impossible projects”, they noticed that “the concept of drawing as pseudopainting was banished and drawing was brought back to its original function as a sketch or medium for working out ideas – visual or intuitive”.⁹³ Illustrated by a couple of drawn sketches by Hanne Darboven and Sol LeWitt, the definition of drawing as a “medium for working out ideas” is particularly interesting here, as that would have been the status assigned to the works on paper exhibited in 1969. It avoids a strict, formal category of medium but stressed its “original function”, now at the center of conceptualist interests: “the emphasis on diagrams and projects, on models and working drawings rather than the finished pieces” gives relevance to the process of “translation into visual terms”⁹⁴ of an idea. In the enclosed list of “ultra-conceptual art or dematerialized art”, drawing was in fact a prominent element: from Rauschenberg’s Erased De Kooning, to Christo’s drawn plans for packaging the Gallery of Modern Art in Rome; from LeWitt’s drawn squares as indications of “hidden cubes” to Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin’s “conceptual drawings based on various serial and conceptual schemes”, to Walter De Maria’s “Drawing drawing, a white sheet with the word ‘drawing’ lightly penciled in the center”.⁹⁵ A third 1969 text should be considered in the debate about “plans and projects as art” as it concerns specifically the medium of drawing within an area of post-minimalism. Mel Bochner wrote a short text for an exhibition of American drawings held in the autumn at the Galerie Heiner Friedrich in Munich with a short text titled, *Anyone can draw*, published on a gallery leaflet. Artworks might have been by Bochner himself, Donald Judd, Walter De Maria, Fred Sandback, Dan Flavin, but also Andy Warhol and Cy Twombly, all artists marketed by Friedrich at the time. Facing these materials, Bochner argued that recent drawings could be divided into three categories as well as a conceptual approach. “Finished drawing” is nothing but an autonomous artwork made by techniques traditionally named as “drawing”, which is just a conventional term (“drawing is a noun”). “Working drawings” were considered a “relatively new phenomena” in public exhibitions as they usually remained private: in this sense “drawing is a verb”, or a practice, rather than an artwork itself (“as an object a working drawing can only be described as a piece of paper covered with the random visible jottings of non-visual activities”). Thirdly, “diagrammatic drawings” are something in between the two previous categories, as they exit the private dimension to be entirely communicative through a shared code or “standardised methods of notation”: in this sense, “drawing is a language” and can articulate those

⁹³ LIPPARD, CHANDLER 1968: 34-35.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid: 32-33.

forms of conceptualist art based on “mapping of systems, plotting and recording of data, or conveyance of information pertinent to the installation of works having multiple components”. Interestingly, Bochner’s attention to the material practice caused him to notice the extensive use of commercial graph paper, “not a stylistic phenomenon but a question of convenience” as “graph paper reduces the tedious aspects of drawing and permits the easy and immediate alignment of random thoughts into conventionalised patterns of reading and forming”.⁹⁶

As it is well known, a few years earlier, Bochner had curated an exhibition of “working drawings and other visible things on paper not necessarily meant to be viewed as art”, collecting materials analogous to those sent to Bern in late 1969. His stress on the anti-artistic status of this kind of objects goes hand in hand with a specific attention to their materiality (as suggested by the expression “visible things on paper”), that was further explored in the conceptual taxonomy formulated in *Anyone can draw*. Albeit discarding traditional parameters of analysis such as “style” or “medium”, Bochner nevertheless acknowledged the specific relevance of “drawing” within conceptualism.

However, Lippard and LeWitt’s influential critical frame of American conceptual art aligned “projects” of different levels of formal elaboration and material status in the name of non-objectifying, non-aesthetic novelty of the new art. At the same time that Szeemann and Zdenek tried to account for this trend, the great variety of techniques, materials, visual layouts, degrees of planning details and actual “functions” of the works exhibited at *Pläne und Projekte als Kunst* inevitably opposed the dematerialisation statement; after all, the difficulty to univocally define a project, was noticed by the – mostly sceptical – reviews of the Bern and Munich exhibitions.⁹⁷

In light of this historical and theoretical frame, the subject of this first chapter is the participation of some Italian artists to the European conceptualist exhibitions and their contribution to the development of the related debate. They roughly corresponded to the group that in 1967 the critic Germano Celant had assigned the critical label of “arte povera”,⁹⁸ and in particular three of the most representatives will be dedicated a respective focus, Giuseppe Penone, Giovanni Anselmo and Gilberto Zorio. However, it is largely due to the persistence of Celant’s characterization that drawing and planning have been long overlooked: arte povera’s discourse was all about the immediate and ephemeral presence of objects and matters in space and in contact with the beholder; drawing, was probably seen as intrinsically conservative, as (inter)mediated representation of the work itself. Celant’s mentioning of “libero progettarsi” (“freely planning oneself”) in the 1967 “manifesto” will be discussed in the second chapter, with reference to its own context in the thought of Giulio Carlo

⁹⁶ BOCHNER 2022 [1969]: 180. The title of the short text is a quote from Walter Thomas Foster (1891-1981), the founder of a widely-distributed line of art manuals titled, *How to draw*.

⁹⁷ “So in general the conception of an art that has shrunk to a single plan is only partially correct” (STABER 1970: [1]). See also LÄNGSFELD 1969.

⁹⁸ See CELANT 1967B.

Argan and Herbert Marcuse. Here, instead, at the chronological point of 1969, planning as a practice emerged from the private dimension of studio work into public life, through the artists' contributions to exhibitions and catalogues. An overcoming of some of the assumption of Celant's *arte povera*, this shift contributed in 1969 and 1970 to the interpretation of their work under the general label of conceptualism.

The mere Italian nationality is not used here as the principle to isolate a group of artists, and their relationship to the international context needs preliminary observations. The internationality of *When Attitudes Become Form* shaped the debate about the possibility to group the variety of research composing conceptualist and process art practices.⁹⁹ Scott Burton's essay in the catalogue, titled, *Notes on the New*, discussed explicitly the multiple problems to be faced if comparing the numerous American artists, whose "similarities are less stylistic than intellectual"¹⁰⁰: not style or formal similarities, then, but use of the same materials, post-studio practice and location-based work, time investigation, a general de-skilling and a fundamental "deprecation of art". On the other hand, the current art system guaranteed the reciprocal knowledge among international artists. "Each of these artists is interested of what others do, [...] the discoveries of some have repercussions in the work of others, [...] the same galleries [...] and the same persons [...] follow closely all these researches"¹⁰¹. Burton and Müller were artists themselves¹⁰² and here they might testify to the relevance of international information and its canals, that is, art journals, photographic materials and documentation that circulated above all in private galleries, for the youngest generation of artists.

According to the Milanese critic Tommaso Trini, whose contribution to the Bern catalogue directly concerned the Italian artists, reciprocal knowledge did not imply "influences". Even if "notable correspondences" and "unexpected compresence of fundamentally similar aesthetic experiences lets us think of an expanding 'aesthetic condition'", this condition would not concern language, nor style (Trini spoke of a "linguistic truce"), because "all [the Italian artists] go beyond any specific linguistic feature, whether spatial, perceptual, plastic, symbolic or metaphoric". Even if preoccupied of dispelling the hypothesis of their interdependence, Trini accounted vividly for the reciprocal relationships between young artists:

⁹⁹ Grégoire Müller in BERN 1969A: [8].

¹⁰⁰ Scott Burton in BERN 1969A: [6].

¹⁰¹ Grégoire Müller in BERN 1969A: [8].

¹⁰² Burton achieved a Masters in Fine Arts at the New York University, then entering the milieu of performance, theatre and dance in New York, and debuted as a performance artist himself in 1969. Müller was a Swiss artist and critic who lived in Paris and was close to Daniel Buren and other avantgarde artists.

“when Zorio and Nauman, Prini and Serra, discover a substantial affinity in their works illustrated on the magazines, even if without reciprocal influence and with artworks different from one another, they necessarily recognise themselves involved in the same conditions that brought them to the same options”.¹⁰³

Punctual relationships among artworks exist and can be described in more circumstantiated terms than as an “influence”,¹⁰⁴ but what was indicated as the new, determining condition of the artists’ work was the context itself, characterised by a fast circulation of information and images, that was unprecedentedly perceived as reciprocal within the international community of mostly very young European and American artists that gathered in 1969.¹⁰⁵ Sol LeWitt encapsulated this condition in one of his *Sentences on Conceptual Art*, that were republished in *Konzeption/Conception*: “The words of one artist to another may induce an ideas chain, if the[y] share the s[a]me concept”.¹⁰⁶

I *Italian projects in Europe*

I.1 *Mailed from Turin*

Geography imposes itself as a first reading key of the Italian participation to the European exhibitions mentioned above. Turin was the city from which the most invited artists came (or were represented, like Emilio Prini or Paolo Icaro who lived in Genoa). Exhibiting his work at *When Attitudes Become Form*, Jannis Kounellis alone travelled from Rome, since Pino Pascali died in 1968, but neither of them were represented in the *Op Losse Schroeven*’s “Lichtdrukken” or in *Pläne und Projekte als Kunst*, where only the Greek born Laura Grisi was invited as an artist based in Rome. Notably ignored were artists from Milan too, with very few exceptions.¹⁰⁷ An evidence of the meaning of this geographical distribution are the *Reisebericht* edited by Harald Szeemann who travelled in Italy in order to select the artists included in his show, as well as the web of contacts documented in his and Wim Beeren’s archive.¹⁰⁸ Rather than the critic Germano Celant, who was a leading figure in the

¹⁰³ TRINI 1969B: 10-11.

¹⁰⁴ For a critic of the term which is all the more valid concerning the artists of the sixties and seventies, see BAXANDALL 1985: 58-62.

¹⁰⁵ As a feature of the young generation of artists, this theme thematically entered a 1968 mirror painting by Michelangelo Pistoletto, probably the most internationally represented of the Italian artists of the sixties. *Art International* is a portrait of the son of the Turinese gallerist Margherita Stein reading the art magazine published in Lugano and was very influential at the time. It is possible to identify the pages Maximilian von Stein was reading when he was photographed by Pistoletto for this work, namely the *New York Letter* in *Art International*, January 1968: 55-56.

¹⁰⁶ Sol LeWitt in LEVERKUSEN 1969. The 35 sentences were first published in the first issue of *Art-Language. The Journal of Conceptual Art* in May 1969.

¹⁰⁷ Only one Milanese artist, Gian Emilio Simonetti, sent a project for the catalogue of *Op Losse Schroeven*, without exhibiting at the Stedelijk. The Brazilian Antonio Dias, then living in Milan, exhibited at *Pläne und Projekte als Kunst*.

¹⁰⁸ See MINOLA, MUNDICI, POLI, ROBERTO 2000. For example, Harald Szeemann’s comment about Rom: “As always in Rome, you can only meet people in the evening. [...] Without his [the gallerist Fabio Sargentini] commitment to Pascali,

Italian debate but only furnished documentations for the catalogues, the main Italian interlocutor of the two curators was the Turinese gallerist Gian Enzo Sperone. After setting relationships with Leo Castelli and Ileana Sonnabend for the earliest market of Pop art in Italy, from 1969 on the young gallerist started to host shows of American minimal and conceptual art, thanks to the friendship and sharing of the network of Konrad Fischer.¹⁰⁹ The community of young avantgarde artists promoted by Sperone in Turin favored a privileged information and contact with the international scene. A minor but precise clue indicating awareness of the new conceptualist trends concerning planning, comes from the layout of the invitation cards printed by the Galleria Sperone in 1969 (**figure I.5**). From Anselmo to Merz to Zorio, all had previously used photographs of their installed, often theatrical or shocking works; now, the choice of inscribing the pictures with hand lettering and technical descriptions (even a “side elevation” of the banana leaf in a work by Calzolari) seems to hint to the “conceptual” dimension of planning in their practice.

However, Sperone’s attention to the new visibility of projects is testified by the group show *Disegni progetti* (“Drawings-projects”), the last show held in the venue in Piazza Carlo Alberto, a small, quite bourgeois room with parqueted floor and arched ceiling, before the gallery moved to a larger industrial building. Apart from the invitation card, informing about the exhibition title and the artists involved (Boetti, Anselmo, Calzolari, Merz, Zorio and Penone), no documentation of the show has emerged to date. Even in the almost complete ignorance of the artworks exhibited, which may not have corresponded to works on paper or graphic plans at all, the equivalence between the two terms, “drawings” and “projects”, defined a precise season.

On the other hand, at the moment of their participation in the European exhibition about conceptualist planning, the mentioned artists ordinarily drew and planned on paper in their studio practice. For some, this daily exercise could represent a sort of legacy from their academic training, as in the case of Penone and Zorio. At the Accademia Albertina di Belle Arti in Turin, in the sixties, drawing from life was taught differently than the other courses:¹¹⁰ every morning, a model from the Accademia posed for nude drawing in a class without professors. Anatomy was also taught through drawing from life (**figure I.7**), and included animal anatomy and various notions of art history, anthropology and

who unfortunately died too young, and Kounellis, Rome would hardly have been worth visiting” (Szeemann in RATTEMEYER 2010: 186).

¹⁰⁹ See among the main exhibitions in Sperone Gallery in those years were: Christo (May 27th to June 1964), Dan Flavin (from February 14th 1967 in the Milanese space of the gallery; then in a group exhibition in Turin at the end of April; and in a solo show in Turin from March 14th 1968), Robert Morris (March 30th to April 1969), Carl Andre (September 29th to October 1969), Kosuth (November 9th 1969), Weiner (December 3rd 1969), Robert Barry (December 30th to January 1970), Bollinger (January 24th to February 1970), Bruce Nauman (February 25th to March 1970), Douglas Huebler (March 24th to April 1970). About Konrad Fischer’s important role in spreading the conceptual trends in Europe, see DÜSSELDORF 2016.

¹¹⁰ In the late sixties, the Accademia Albertina offered the following teachings: painting (two courses), decoration, set design, sculpture, engraving and history of art. I am thankful to Pino Mantovani for sharing his memories.

even choreography, as shown by a textbook by Giorgio Dei Poli who was a physician as well as a professor at the Turinese academy. A drawing of bats by young Gilberto Zorio was published among the illustrations, together with other works by the students (**figure I.8**).¹¹¹ Moreover, the paper materials from the studio could have a merely practical function within the realisation process, in the form of support for notes and measurements or as scale models. For instance, a large work on paper related to Mario Merz's 1968 *Hagoromo*, now in the collection of the Staatlichen Museen, Berlin, was recently declassified from "self-standing drawing" to mere "working paper material" for a neon sign.¹¹²

Sending such graphic materials to publications and exhibitions, they moved into public visibility a practice hitherto confined to the studio. Clearly, this gesture involved some changes in the artists' approach to drawing, as it emerges from a panorama of these various approaches in the context of 1969 international conceptualist shows.

I.2 *Sheets for a "Witness Room"*

It should be remembered that the section of phototypes in *Op Losse Schroeven* catalogue was ideated by the Turinese artist and theorist Pietro Gilardi.¹¹³ In some letters to Beerem sent in late 1968, Gilardi referred to the collection of projects as "the Witness Room" and hypothesised a "unique show",¹¹⁴ but he regretted the eventual hierarchical relation with the rooms at the Stedelijk. Gilardi was probably the most informed artist in the city and it's easy to imagine him sharing his expectations with his local colleagues.¹¹⁵ The title of *Witness Room* remains quite obscure but inevitably sets a voyeuristic dimension, since it literally recalls the space adjacent to the electric chair execution room. In general, the sheets sent for the catalogue show how the Turinese artists adopted the already typical means for conceptualist projects, like hand-lettered instructions (Icaro, as well as Robert Morris) or

¹¹¹ Zorio attended the Accademia Albertina from 1963 to 1970, and his first show in 1963 included "sculptures and drawings", probably including clay works (he had attended an art and ceramic school) and watercolours, see RIVOLI 2017: 170. Piero Gilardi, a close friend of the artist, wrote a text for the leaflet: "immediate yet precise, the many drawings integrate the spectator's view of the sculptures, taking the meaningful chromatic proposals of the latter into an almost marbled interplay of cold, gemlike tones. This light/colour shading, consistently rendered by the translucency of the materials used, evokes the artist's brilliant background in ceramics" (Piero Gilardi, 1963, now in RIVOLI 2017: 171).

¹¹² See BERLIN 2007: n. I am thankful to Dr. Andreas Schalhorn for the information.

¹¹³ His essay on *Microemotive art* had already been translated in Dutch and published in the *Stedelijk Museumsjournaal* (vol. 13, no. 4, 1968, p. 198), which explains why Gilardi was in contact with van Elk and Jan Dibbets, and then with Beerem and Szeemann. Szeemann discarded his definition of "microemotive art" as "incomprehensible" (Harald Szeemann, December 13th, 1968, in RATTEMEYER 2010: 178).

¹¹⁴ Pietro Gilardi to Wim Beeren, February 22nd, 1969, *ibidem*: 48.

¹¹⁵ Giuseppe Penone remembered in a recent interview how in 1969 he and Zorio went to Gilardi to show his early work and to seek an opinion, see PENONE, BASUALDO 2018: 31.

typed text (Calzolari,¹¹⁶ as well as Dennis Oppenheim). In comparison with their international colleagues, whose use of the writing mostly corresponds to what Benjamin Buchloh called the “aesthetic of administration”, the Italian texts are markedly more “esoteric” in their contents or resulted closer to the visual poetry.¹¹⁷ For example, Prini’s handwritten *Intenzioni* (“Intentions”) appeared at first sight as the typical theoretical proposals of a conceptual artist, was actually a list of short bracketed phrases about other themes of his work (“Identical (to himself), alien (to the world)”, “antitopological condition”, “utopian space”), and he curiously indicated the “scale” in relationship to the actual work (“dimensioni reali”, see **figure I.4**). The “project” then is considered in its own materiality: in 1968, Prini had already included in an exhibition some sheets scattered on the floor, with such writing as “appunti” and “disegni progetto degli oggetti” (“notes, drawings project for objects”), which stressed the physical presence of the planning material (**figure I.9**). Or, in a 1969 work also in the form of notes, the body of text (a sequence of instructions about filming) operates a physical pressure around a collaged graphed sheet with childish scribble in colored crayons (**figure I.10**)

Mario and Marisa Merz’s “project” stands out for its approach to writing which uses text as an expressive material. Bypassing the vertical format of the sheet, they wrote in dark ink the sentence *Rubate tutto quanto c’è in vista* (“Steal everything in sight”, **figure I.11**); below, in a hardly visible transparent material, they added *e anche ciò che non è in vista* (“and also what is not in sight”). This invitation to an illegal activity such as stealing echoes quite evidently the tone of the “walls of Paris”, that is, the graffiti inscribed by the revolting students in May 1968.¹¹⁸ Some played with the word “voler” (which means both “to steal” and “to fly”, for instance: “On achète ton bonheur: vole le” or “Volez planez jouissez”), and could easily trigger the couple’s support of the student and workers’ protests in the same months.¹¹⁹ In this case, the sibylline order shifts from the political to the phenomenological, as it draws the attention to the possibility of reading-as-appropriating the visible

¹¹⁶ Calzolari typed on the Stedelijk form an untitled text, later partially republished with the title, *La casa dell’Arte Povera* (“The house of Arte Povera”), see CELANT 1988: 23.

¹¹⁷ Felix Zdenek noticed this feature as a recurrent characteristic of the projects sent to *Pläne und Projekte als Kunst*: “Sometimes is it extremely difficult to find access to these projects without a written indication of the artists. Some of these sketches appear to be so esoteric, that without an explanation by the artist it is not possible at all to grasp their inner meaning. The immediate involvement of the artistic I, the identification of the artist with the idea of her work, appear in some cases to conduct to an absolute subjectivism, whose limits it is not possible to cross from the outside” (Felix Zdenek in BERN 1969B: [1]; translation of the author). For the aesthetic of administration, see BUCHLOH 1990.

¹¹⁸ A collection of the sentences graffitied around the city was edited in Italy in 1968 and titled, *I muri di Parigi*, see PESCE, LUCCO 1968. In May 1968, the poet Nanni Balestrini covered the walls of the Gallery La Tartaruga with graffiti quoting the French ones in an action entitled, *I muri della Sorbona* (“The walls of the Sorbonne”), within the important show *Il teatro delle mostre* (“The theatre of the shows”).

¹¹⁹ Mario Merz has already quoted the graffito “Solitary / Solidary”, which quoted from Albert Camus’s novel *The artist at work*, in his neon work *Solitario/Solidale*. On Mario Merz’s involvement with the Autonomia movement, see MANGINI 2016.

as well as the invisible (inevitably echoing Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Le visible et le invisible* edited in Italy that year).¹²⁰

Zorio and Anselmo's projects illustrated the mounting and mechanism of two unrealised works (**figure I.12**). The very basic elaboration of the images and texts makes them look like the merest working sketches, typical of other artists too,¹²¹ like those appearing in some letters sent to Szeemann with instructions about how to exhibit their works in Bern. Considering the drawing ability, technical richness or detailed precision characterising the two artists' intimate drawings and projects, the lowering of formal qualities appears to be intentional. A certain impassivity in specifying technical details with clarity and simplicity, can be also found in Laura Grisi's contemporary projects, such as *Cerchi concentrici* ("Concentric circles", **figure I.13**), possibly identifiable with one of those sent to *Pläne und Projekte asl Kunst*. Her objects, also dedicated to physical reactions and transmission of light, water and heat here, required "the development of planning or design, but referred to the process and not to the object anymore".¹²² The same category of technical schemes, with almost childish captions in block letters and intentionally deskilled, includes Zorio's sketch published in the catalogue of *When Attitudes Become Form* as the project for a work titled *Cenere* ("Ash") or *Trasciniamo un po' di...* ("Let's Drag a Little...", **figure I.14**). The artist added verbal descriptions in such simple drawings as "the key to decipher the final work",¹²³ which consists in a complex process difficult to understand from the mute representation of the objects and structures involved. The work illustrated in the Stedelijk catalogue belongs to the 1969 series of these works, the public could speak in a funnel or a pipe and the voice would pass through alcohol and therefore get "purified". The Witness Room exemplar required water instead of alcohol and a height of four metres, so that it could be mounted on a balcony, "a window sill, or a terrace, or the rampart of a castle".

¹²⁰ See MERLEAU-PONTY 1969. Mario Merz could also have known and read the original French edition of 1964.

¹²¹ See, for instance, Pier Paolo Calzolari's sketches for works, made in felt tip pen, ballpoint pen and black marker and pencil, in which his usual, highly sensible draftsmanship compromises with a mostly informational content, measures, captions etc. The work they refer to, often presenting preliminary variants or developments from the original ideas, date all 1968 or 1969. However, no documentation has been found of this kind of drawings before 1988, when they were published as insertions in CELANT 1988: cover, 13-14, 26-27, 37-38, 49. Two such sheets from 1968 and 1969 have been also published in VADUZ 2010: 116, 118. A set of 28 drawings on paper, now in the collection of Lisa Russo, has been exhibited in Naples as a single series and dated 1960-1970 (a generic time span which contrasts with the evident material coherency of the same 46 x 56 cm format paper, despite the great richness of techniques, from photographic collage to staples, salt, crayon, feather), see NAPLES 2020: 376-403, 479.

¹²² Giulio Carlo Argan in COLOGNE 1970A: [6]. *Cerchi concentrici*, one of Grisi's objects of the time, was a basin in fiberglass, two metres in diameter and filled with water on which drops fall from a suspended metal tube. The description matches with the title of one of the projects sent to Bern, namely "Relazione tra elemento movacante [sic] e tempo di provocante", described as the "behaviour of a liquid mass (water) for the input of the same element in equal quantities (drops) in different times", see BERN 1969B: [3]. The other two projects, also sent as photocopies and photos, corresponds to objects exhibited in Cologne in 1970, that is *Rifrazione. Progetto di presentazionalità* and *Tempo di fusione. Punto luce – colore su latta di piombo*.

¹²³ GUZZETTI 2019A: 251.

From these examples, of unequivocal and functional clarity, it may be hypothesised that Zorio limited his selection for the 1969 catalogues with a careful avoidance of any virtuosity, richness in materiality and traces of his academic training, in order to match the expectations for a dematerialised practice. To understand the gap from Zorio's materially rich, most experimental works on paper of the time, the same performance *Trasciniamo un po' di...* was studied in a work on paper with collages of cloth, hair and a metal thread (**figure I.15**). Such projects, although directly related to executed or performed works, may effectively have run the risk of distracting from them if exhibited contextually; therefore, they mostly remained private or were acquired by Galleria Sperone as a more constant and marketable production from the contracted artist.¹²⁴ Executed with ink, gouache, but also resin, liquid rubber or aluminum powder, their material richness often contributes to visualise the processes of various substances taking place in the work: just see the dramatic apparition of fire in the middle of a project for an exhibition in which many works were coordinated (**figure I.16**) or the ink and tempera nuances meant to describe the accumulation of dust on a circular bundle of electrified rice paper. Quite other than a dematerialising approach, the necessity of an accomplished *mise en page* that goes beyond a function of "working out ideas" did not contradict Zorio's processual and conceptualist practice, although it may have been "censored" in the drawings sent to the 1969 exhibitions. In this sense, he can be compared to other prominent international artists such as Bruce Nauman. As Trini quickly noticed in 1969, Zorio was well aware of the Californian artist's work, and especially of his drawings. This is also suggested by the fact that in May 1969 the Italian artist, travelling to New York for an exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum, was involved in the purchase of a 1967 drawing by Nauman from Seth Siegelau on behalf of the Milanese editor Carlo Giani.¹²⁵ Probably a graphite and wash study for Nauman's plaster sculpture *From Mouth to Hand* (**figure I.17**),¹²⁶ it could testify an interest

¹²⁴ For Zorio's drawn projects, see VADUZ 2010: 302, 307; and their first extensive publication in RIVOLI 2017: 86, 88-93 and cover flaps. Collected by Pier Luigi Pero or the artist himself, they refer mostly to unrealised works (for instance, an "asbestos band holding a fluorescent plastic casting"; a "rubber bridge on a concrete basin [...] in the shape of a upside-down pyramid"; "circle of very electrified rice paper so that it catches a lot of dust [...] suspended 90 cm from the floor"; "an evaporation platform [in which] under the sheet there will be large containers of boiling water, the steam will pass through and form a light cloud"; a "wall made with concrete, 40 x 20 x 20 cm blocks [of which] the upper part is covered with asbestos hiding gas lamps that emanate white light"; a "soft and touchable square of sky"; and two performative installations, such as a "chiselable wall [in which] placing the chisel on the wall results in engraving + mental action + the two energies"; and lastly, **figure 12**, "the sky becomes the earth [as] the beholder will hear his own words amplified and repeated numerous times: each sentence will stay physicized. Blocks serve as seating") with few exceptions (the "wire mesh basket [...] the bottom [of which] consists of a hot plate designed to receive five sheets written in sympathetic ink, the ink in contact with the heat becomes evident", that was installed in 1968 at *Arte Povera + Azioni povere* in Amalfi, now in the collection of Lia Rumma, see RIVOLI 2017: 137, and in a squared cage variant at the Deposito d'arte presente in Turin and at the Galleria Sperone in 1969, see MERZ, ZACCHAROPOULOS 1982: 66-67. The drawing *ibid*: 84-85 was probably made in 1982 to illustrate the work *Ghigliottina* ("Guillotine") that was exhibited at the Galleria De Foscherari in Bologna in the 1968 group show *Arte Povera*, as it is captioned "this work has never been photographed").

¹²⁵ See GUZZETTI 2017: 182-3, in which two letters of the Siegelau Papers at the MoMA are discussed.

¹²⁶ Gabriele Mazzotta, who was close friend and main collaborator of Carlo Giani at the time, remembered in a telephone conversation with the author (June 6th, 2020) that Giani had purchased and collected a large drawing by Nauman representing an arm. In his memories then, Zorio was only an intermediary (in fact, the sales receipt is directed to Giani).

not only in installations and sculptural works with many points in common with Zorio's practice, but precisely in a shared practice of private drawing that could appear anachronistic as it is based on great ability and draftsmanship. In Szeemann's *Reisebericht*, a "long discussion" with Nauman is remembered, in which "he differentiates clearly between 'private and public pieces'".¹²⁷ However, although with a different status of art pieces, Nauman's private drawings and plans circulated in Europe at least since 1968 and were well known. In all likelihood, they constitute a stimulating term of comparison for the Italian artists, not only Zorio.¹²⁸

Anselmo's *W* (that is *Viva*, "Long Live!", **figure I.12**) is the project for a sculpture of (cadaveric) pieces of "fresh meat" joined with a stainless-steel wire that forms the letter of the (lively) title. The interpretation of this paradox as an ironical play on the cliché of "bringing life into art",¹²⁹ at the time typically attributed to neo-avantgarde and Arte Povera, may be extended to the formal rendering of the project itself. The few known earlier projects show a more complex coherence between the meaning of Anselmo's objects and the projects. In *Progetto per "Direzione"* ("Project for *Direction*", 1967, **figure I.18**), the traced perspective lines indicate the direction as the fundamental theme of the work (that could be realised in different measures), while the accurate detailing of the magnetic needle and the porous concrete surface underlines the object-quality of the sculpture.¹³⁰

The dimensions of the sheet reported in the receipt coincide precisely with those of a study for *From Hand to Mouth* catalogued in BASEL 1986, n. 50 and indicated in an Italian private collection in Genoa.

¹²⁷ Szeemann in RATTEMEYER 2010: 178.

¹²⁸ Nauman's work was first introduced in Europe through Konrad Fischer, and his works were exhibited at *documenta 4* and *prospect 68*. His drawings circulated as instruction and projects for performances and installations. See the memory of Konrad and Dorothee Fischer referred to the artist's stay in Düsseldorf in 1968: "Bruce, here you have paper and pencils. You should make drawings and not just sit around" ("Bruce, hier hast du Papier und Bleistofte. Du sollst Zeichnungen machen und nicht einfach nur herumsitzen", DÜSSELDORF 2016: 75). On Nauman's reception in Europe, see a memory documented in 2014 from the art dealer Anny de Decker about a drawing room at *documenta 4*: "Nauman was still quite young at the time of *documenta 1968*, with drawings in a space that required a key for entry, only one visitor at a time allowed in. After a few days the room was just completely locked, because this agreement hadn't been kept to" (BLOEMHEUVEL 2017: 29). Drawings played a central role in Nauman's acknowledgment in Europe, as the purchases by Martin and Mia Visser attest from 1968 to the early 80s.

¹²⁹ Concerning Anselmo's later participation to *Pläne und Projekte als Kunst*, his *Progetto per un'emozione* ("Project for an emotion") listed in the catalogue as a drawing is known only as a verbal description. "Projekt für eine Gefühl. Querschnitt 1:1 von Rund- und Flacheisen um einen kubischen Käfig 4 x 4 m zu konstruieren. Man kann sich darin im Meer unter den Haien aufhalten, oder auf dem Land unter hungrigen Tigern und Löwen um ihnen mit den Händen Nahrung anzubieten" (Project for an emotion, 1:1 cross-section of round and flat iron to construct a 4 x 4 m cubic cage. One can stay inside in the sea among sharks, or on land among hungry tigers and lions to offer them food by hands) (AKTIONSRaum 1969: [1]). A handwritten version of this text was part of Anselmo's contribution to the catalogue of the biennale show *Gennaio 70*, held in Bologna in January 1970: "Mi piacerebbe costruire una grossa gabbia di ferro in cui, protetto, potermi immergere negli oceani tra gli squali più feroci ed affamati e porgere loro il cibo con le mani come se fossero affettuosi" (I'd like to build a large iron cage in which I could dive protected into the oceans among the most ferocious and hungry sharks and hand out food by hand as they were mild, see BOLOGNA 1970: n.p.). This work shows an ongoing reflection about feelings that was present also in *W*, where animal meat is treated as a material with disquieting (albeit ironical) relation to life and death. It can be hypothesised that the drawing of *Progetto per un'emozione* could have an analogous, deskilled layout. Neither of the 1969 drawings have ever been discussed in literature about Anselmo, see BERNARDI 2016.

¹³⁰ See also the analogous drawings illustrated alongside the photographs of two respectively 1967 and 1969 sculptures in BASEL 1979: 54, 96.

II *Giuseppe Penone's projectual draftsmanship*

The following paragraphs are dedicated to the early drawing practice of Giuseppe Penone from 1967 to 1970. Among Anselmo, Zorio or the other Turinese artists dealing with the new trends of conceptualism in 1969, the case of Penone allows for a special point of view. Firstly, *progetti* is his first documented exhibition, which positioned him directly at the core of the issues at stake in the international context and in this chapter. Put under contract by Sperone, he took part in *Konzeption/Conception* and *Prospect 69*, with works directly contributing to the definition of the problem of conceptualist planning in 1969. Then, Penone was the youngest artist included in Celant's *Arte Povera* and the only one whose work was illustrated by a drawing, in a volume that privileged photographic documentation or texts for the 36 American and European artists selected. Thirdly, and more importantly, his drawing practice has been constant throughout his whole career and a quantity of works on paper is now documented and preserved in his archive (he has recently admitted to usually "destroy little"¹³¹). From the eighties, dedicated exhibitions and catalogues (always supervised by the artist himself) have discussed this aspect of his practice and in recent years Penone has repeatedly allowed interviews specifically about his drawings, determining the reception and interpretation of this practice.¹³² In my analysis of his graphic work, I will try to position independently from such narratives, following a strictly object-based analysis of the materials that can be certainly dated to c. 1969.

"[...] my first drawing practice was when I was a child. I have always drawn; I don't remember how I started".¹³³ Often claiming his own lack of academic background that allowed him to approach drawing unconventionally, Penone was gradually losing interest in his classes in the Accademia Albertina in Turin, when he started to elaborate those which he nowadays refers to as his own first artworks. He realised them away from Turin, in his home village Garessio, in the Maritime Alps, and in his family's terrain in the woodland mountain nearby. Hypothetically, Penone's first sketches and drawings had been made in his tiny studio in town, imagining and projecting his works at a geographical distance.

II.1 *Landscape projects*

One of the first works to be developed through sketches, projects and drawings, although it remained unrealised, is a *Terrazzo di terra posto a 10 metri per raccogliere dei semi* ("An earth terrace located

¹³¹ PENONE, GUZZETTI 2020: 536.

¹³² See NEW YORK 2004: 29-72 and PENONE, GUZZETTI 2020.

¹³³ PENONE, GUZZETTI 2020: 518.

10 metres high in order to collect seeds”, see **figures I.19-21**). Of eight works on paper, three can be considered actual projects, traced in felt tip pen and noted with technical details such as the scale of the prospect (“cm 2 = 1 metro”), the height and materials of the terrace (which had to be supported by concrete pipes filled with earth), even possible variants of the execution. All are sketched on quite large sheets (45 x 75 cm) and present marks of folding. A marginal note, “da mettere in una radura” (“to be put in a glade”) introduces a different interest in Penone’s planning – one that included landscape in his conception. In fact, the mechanism itself of the *Terrazzo* implied the environment as an active intervention, a necessary condition of the realisation of the work. Then, landscape is represented in two studies that reduce the shape of the terrace to a “pi”-like sign and collocated it among windblown trees, at different distances. Here, Penone resorts to a standard representation of the wind as curved lines traced with a French curve. The last three drawings are characterised by coloured material, which stands for a further formalisation of the elements of the work, now interacting at a pictorial level. One in particular, executed on the same 45 x 75 cm format but with a very different *mise en page*, pointing out a more unifying intention, shows an interesting representation of the seeds carried on the canopies of trees as yellow ink dots, to be transported on the elevated and sterile earth. The words “seme” (“seed”) and “terra” (“earth”) are inscribed multiple times as the two agents of the work. In the two most autonomous drawings, the large format allows a dramatic effect of perspective and dexterous use of the brush (**figure I.20**); or an elegant synthesis toward abstraction, in which the word “terra” is substituted with actual earth glued on the paper, so that a flat outline of the terrace is traced against a background of a myriad of curves (**figure I.21**).

The presence of incongruous material directly incorporated in the drawing, as well as the kinds of industrial supplies for the planned construction (concrete pipes, asbestos, metal grids), indicates the early example of Zorio for the younger Penone, who in fact had first experimented with chemical reactions and the physical quality of such materials in his earliest, now lost works (for instance, a *Scala d’acqua* (“Water stair”) sketched on a page dated to August 1968, was made by black pitch, iron and anti-rumble paint). However, already in 1968, Penone’s painterly effort privileges not the quality of industrial material but the natural forms of wind, earth and the seeds in an abstract way.

As the first sign of Penone’s turn to nature, the landscape projects for the *Terrace* appear “both radical and pastoral”, “rational yet picturesque”,¹³⁴ symptomatic of the broader trend of utopistic architecture and those theories that first integrated urbanism and environmental dimension. For instance, Paolo Soleri’s “arcology” (architecture + ecology) had wide resonance in the Italian debate of those years

¹³⁴ BUSBEA 2007: 3. In describing the distinctive features of the French utopistic projects, Busbea also listed some present in the *Terrace*: “Stylistically, there seemed to be a desire for structures that were suspended above the ground on pilotis, a very clear love for engineering structures and technical details [...]. Programmatically, the themes of portability, transportability, movement, and adaptation were of key importance” (ivi: 35-36).

as it developed an “eco-utopia” and the “neonature man”.¹³⁵ However, Penone’s ideas never reached complexity of structure or urbanistic ecology that animated such large architecture debate. His “ecological consciousness, an awareness of the interdependency of human and nonhuman, depends on close, long-term observation and sensual experience of nature”,¹³⁶ as scholar Emily Braun argues. Penone’s both deferential and strong-willed approach to nature – one that favors natural processes like seeding, but impacts the landscape with a ten-metre-high concrete terrace, correspond to a visionary visual elaboration; the fascination of visionary architecture would be alimeted mainly in visual terms. Obviously, Penone was not trained in architecture, his graphic system remaining approximate, and rather depending on the specific branch of “monumental planning” that in the late sixties had been most importantly exemplified by Claes Oldenburg’s dramatic and dexterous watercolours (**figure I.22**).¹³⁷ In 1968, as a section of the XV Triennale in Milan (which got occupied by student protests), 35 artists had contributed by imagining the installation of public works in the landscape or within cities all over Italy. Zorio participated with a “large plastic floating machine with a huge handle in the middle to be launched on Lake Avigliana near Turin”, an example of the general modality of artificial interruption of the landscape, “imaginative, or ironic, or satirical, or paradoxical, or surrealist, or Popartistic, or even provocative, creating contrasts, or injecting a paradoxical or absurd drug into well-known scenarios”.¹³⁸

Nothing could be more different from Penone’s interventions, which, since their graphic elaboration, were integrated into the landscape. His first realised project merged literally within Garessio’s woodland: “In a brook I make a basin out of cement; on the outside of the basin, which is exactly my height and as wide as my arms, I imprint my face, feet and my hands. Then I girdle the area of the basin with a plastic net”. The text inscribed on the drawing, that was sent to Celant as part of the material to be published on *Arte Povera* in 1969, assumes the diaristic style characterising his six-page documentation in the book (**figure I.23**). Photographs of his action, taken by the local photographer Claudio Basso, were illustrated around short entries, all dated December 16th to 20th, 1968, that typically described what the artist had done (“I have grasped a tree; I will hold it tight with an iron hand”) and then, in future tense, the effect of the growth (“The tree will continue to grow

¹³⁵ SOLERI 1969: 18.

¹³⁶ BRAUN 2018: 119.

¹³⁷ See in particular GRAHAM 1968, where Oldenburg’s projects are read in anthropologically with references to the myths of “Nature” and an ecological awareness analogous to that of the young Penone: “The traditional monument, as distinguished from all other things that are present, has been meant to endure forever. However, Oldenburg has altered this in proposals, which, rather than attempting to “withstand” or ‘make their mark’ on Nature, are temporal through their contingent interrelationship with a specific environment” (GRAHAM 1968: 37).

¹³⁸ Mattiacci planned some “corrugated sheet metal tubes coloured in red to break up the character of Piazza dei Miracoli in Pisa”; Pino Pascali would have positioned “gigantic bachi da setola made of brushes tied together, of very violent colours, crawling on the lawns of the Boboli garden”; the most Oldenburgesque intervention would have been Fabio Mauri’s “enormous model of electric torch, 25 metres long, with solid light ray, to be arranged in the pond of EUR in Rome” (VERDONE 1969: 297-298).

except this part”).¹³⁹ On the basis of the existent photographs of the construction of the basin and its installation in a brook, this first intervention can be dated in the summer or early autumn, while the abundant snow in Basso’s photographs confirms the winter execution of most the interventions on trees, later known collectively as *Alpi Marittime* (“Maritime Alps”). “[...] photographic pages of a shamanic journal about an attempt of personal contact with nature”,¹⁴⁰ the series was also exhibited in large prints and later (in 1970) it also appeared inscribed by hand with the analogous short texts describing the artist’s actions.

The photographic documentation also served Penone to introduce his work to Gian Enzo Sperone, who “hung them on the gallery wall, just like that, as information, not like a show” – where Celant first encountered them too.¹⁴¹ Projects and documentation achieved in this sense are of fundamental importance and show an analogous relationship toward the actual work. On one hand, they share a non-synchronic, collateral relationship with the actual work planned or documented; on the other hand, more importantly, the *Maritime Alps* intrinsically project the actions in a future, as a process that will be carried out with the growth of the tree, only then corresponding to the artist’s idea.¹⁴² Circumventing the status of art objects,¹⁴³ and nevertheless being exhibited in crucial exhibitions of the time, such as *Prospect 69* in Düsseldorf,¹⁴⁴ Penone’s photographs, often inscribed with his texts, conveyed his original processual-projectual practice.

Further, numerous archived drawings that can be related to the series testified to a typical drawing process of further elaboration, ideation of variants and conceptual expansion of the themes involved through writing. Although most works on paper have been dated later and accordingly to the work

¹³⁹ CELANT 1969: 10, 168-173.

¹⁴⁰ BONITO OLIVA 1970: 75.

¹⁴¹ “[...] and as it happened, Germano Celant saw these images, because he was in Turin preparing his book on Arte Povera. Germano asked me if he could include them in his book. Germano is from Genoa, but his family – I’m not sure if it’s on his father’s or on his mother’s side – is from a town called Leca D’Albenga, which is a little town in Liguria that is very close to Garessio, so he knew the place, and he was probably amused, or at least curious, that there was someone from Garessio doing these things” (PENONE-BASUALDO 2018: 31).

¹⁴² “The work is projected in the future, it is tied to the growth of the tree, to its existence. The work is in the making; to possess the work it is necessary to live next to the tree which is the actor. The mutation, the growth process of the tree is the experience of the artwork” (PENONE 2009 [1969]: 22).

¹⁴³ On the possibilities opened up by documentation as artistic practice, and “a meaningful way for artists of the 60s to question the traditional notions of the work of art and established uses of media such as photography, text or drawing”, see BERGER, SANTONE 2016: 207.

¹⁴⁴ “I brought [to Düsseldorf for Prospect ‘69] in my luggage my works, six photographs of the works I made in the woods of Garessio. I was bringing to Germany the trace of a place that was the scene of the partisan fight. [...] The works documented in the photographs did not refer to a past time, but projected themselves in the future through the growth of the trees already present in the wood 25 years earlier. Entered the Kunsthalle, I met Konrad Fischer who curated the arrangement of the exhibition. Konrad indicated the space destined to me, not so satisfying. [...] After realising that there was not much to do or complain about as the works I presented were small, I entrusted them to Konrad and left for Amsterdam in the company of Giorgio Griffa, who had also been invited to the exhibition. [...] I returned to Düsseldorf a day or two before the opening and installed my photographic works one on top of the other, a small set of six photographs. Konrad was watching me, and he must have liked my intervention, since a few months later he invited me to Leverkusen for the exhibition ‘Konzeption/Conception’, which grew out of a project he had shared with Sol LeWitt” (PENONE, ELKANN 2022: 84-85).

they refer to (that is, 1968), it is impossible to state whether each single work on paper precedes or follows the execution and documentation moment; however, some material aspects indicate possible circumstances for a ruminating practice. This is the case of a series of 15 drawings, all of which are executed on 30 x 40 cm white sheets, still carrying the holes on the side by which they were torn from a block, and are realised in China ink, with occasional pencil traces and one case of addition of watercolour (**figure I.24**). The material coherence and the thematic afferece to *Alpi Marittime* suggest a chronologically unitarian execution, that might have occurred later in the artist's career.¹⁴⁵ In fact, the drawings show fully accomplished and balanced images, sometimes echoing the photographic documentation of the works, as well as an elegant composition between text and image, very different from the technical notes of the sketches. Interestingly, in some cases the artist added ideas to the ones already executed;¹⁴⁶ or he tried out visual solutions to draw the temporal dimension of growth.¹⁴⁷

II.2 Leonardesque drawings

¹⁴⁵ The series is now in the artist's collection (after some transition at the Galerie Renn in Paris), apart from one exemplar, *Sento il respiro della foresta* ("I feel the forest's breath", see NEW YORK 2004: 50) which was purchased in 1992 by the Musée d'Art modern et contemporain de la Ville in Strasbourg. Interestingly, the same image of *Sento il respiro della foresta* was repeated in a 50 x 75 cm collage drawing (see WINTERTHUR 2013: [85], n. 38), also dated 1968, that nevertheless carries the watermark of Fabriano paper, that was first designed in 1971 by Carlo Cattaneo. This might be a proof of the artist's habits to date back to the original work's date the drawn material that refers to it, even if realised years later. However, the series remained unexhibited until 1991, see STRASBOURG 1991: 61-63.

¹⁴⁶ For instance, *Progetto per scultura all'aperto – Sale* ("Project for outdoor sculpture – Salt") planned an inscription on a lawn obtained by putting salt in a lead sheath underground that would impede the grass from growing. Another drawing represents an ocarina, a musical instrument that Penone elaborated in some 1969 projects but never realised, inserted in a tree to be played by the wind. However, the strongly bended tree closely resembles a picture the artist took in Sardinia in 1972 of a maritime pine bent by the wind, that appeared on the cover in an edition of his 1977 book *Rovesciare gli occhi*. Among the many senses involved in Penone's osmotic communion with the trees, the sight is curiously excluded. The artist never "sees" the growth, he can only touch or hear it. It can be interpreted as a paradox, since these projects are just visual representations of the works. Penone took this paradox to the extreme in *Progetto per la lettura dell'albero* ("Project for the reading of the tree"): the action illustrated consists of the progressive enlargement of writings inscribed on the trunk due to the tree's growth. The growing trunk then "delineates the conic beam that projects [the writings] into the void": in the drawing, the vertical lines growing from the tree are cut obliquely by the "conic beam", revealing that it is the tree that "reads" the writings, projecting its own sight into the void. Penone represented this reversion of gazes by juxtaposing an eye which projects its own "sight beam".

¹⁴⁷ In some drawings of this series, the rapid ink hatchings reserved for naturalistic representation of the tree and the stones slip into a rather abstract representation of the time process of growth, bended into a less figurative than processual function. In one case, the *Progetto per lo sfruttamento della spinta ascensionale, dovuta alla luce, dei vegetali* ("Project for the use of the upward thrust, due to the light, of plants") the sapling is transfigured into a silhouette of arrows - or better vectors - representing the thrust toward up. However, the most common way to visualise the time of growth in these projects is to resort to a "natural" processual drawing, that is the tree rings. Not by chance Penone once spoke of them as "il disegno del legno" ("the drawing of wood", PENONE 2009 [1968]: 105). The rings visible in the vertical or horizontal section of a trunk are translated into straight or circular lines, which are meaningful as far as they are put in sequence, beating the time of growth. The actions are always an encounter between the tree and the artist, and the "growing" lines absorb and swallow obstacles (like a herm, opposing a figure of culture to nature, in a drawing titled *L'albero conserva nella sua crescita la memoria del contatto*, "The tree preserves the memory of contact in its growth") or the artist's hand casted in iron or bronze.

Penone's work included in *Disegni progetti* pointed out how inclusive the term "projects" was in 1969: using a carved linoleum stamp realised a few days before the show, he covered a wall of the gallery repeating the sentence "8046 giorni nel cielo" ("8046 days in the sky"). The number of the days from the artist's birth (when he started to occupy "sky" meant as everything that burdens the earth – therefore the space around us too), multiplied on the wall in front of the beholder and simulating the metaphorical writing of the days within sky.¹⁴⁸ In an important text, one of the few published at the time and which first appeared in German translation in the leaflet of Penone's participation to Aktionsraum in 1970, the artist explained that:

"the grooves that exist in the sky made by everything that is not sky, form a large script that makes the sky an available and highly perceptive page. [...] There is, however, the possibility of increasing one's writing in the sky by prolonging one's action and intensifying time beyond life".¹⁴⁹

The idea of sky as a "highly perceptive page" accounts for the elaboration of a 1969 series titled, *Progetti per Leonardo* ("Projects for Leonardo", see **figures I.25-26**), in which Penone drew directly onto the photographic reproduction of a drawing of a tempest and air gods by Leonardo da Vinci, or limited himself to write short titles like *Una piccolissima parte dei miei giorni nel cielo* ("A very small part of my days in the sky").¹⁵⁰ Two exemplars from this series were published in catalogues in 1970,¹⁵¹ while three entered the collection of Pier Luigi Pero, an associate of Sperone at the time. Here, the impossibility of the projects¹⁵² goes hand in hand with the fantastic tones of the short texts associated to the images, like *Pilastro di terra regalato al vento* ("An earth pillar gifted to the wind"); or *Una lunga sbarra di ferro che forse servirà all'albatros* ("A long iron bar that perhaps will serve the albatross"); or the very diagrammatic scheme of an ocarina played by the stormy winds titled

¹⁴⁸ An unpublished project, edited as a photograph of a mountain woodland with ink inscriptions, translated the same idea in a landscape project of massive scale. By using ammonium sulphate, the artist would have improved the growth of some trees until they would have been taller than the rest of a wood and their apices would have written the sentence, "8046 giorni nel cielo". In this sense, an exchange might have intervened with Giovanni Anselmo's 1969-1970 work titled *Cielo accorciato* ("Shortened sky"), an iron bar positioned vertically to shorten the distance between earth level and sky.

¹⁴⁹ See MUNICH 1970. Penone had made a work with the same three-pages typed text and three photographs of the father's vineyard. His performance for the Aktionsraum involved the realization of one of his debarked trees and was documented in the section "Neue Leute" in the magazine *Interfunktionen*, 5, November 1970.

¹⁵⁰ The drawing then represents how "the movement of the body in space causes a swirl of air" (PENONE, GUZZETTI 2020: 528).

¹⁵¹ They were included in the catalogue of the important exhibition *Conceptual Art Arte Povera Land Art*, curated by Germano Celant at the Galleria d'Arte Moderna in Turin the following year, see TURIN 1970B: 156-157. Another one figured in the conceptual issue of *Studio International* published in the summer of 1970, also curated by Celant for the Italian section, see STUDIO INTERNATIONAL 1970.

¹⁵² In some other 1969 works, he started to draw by hand directly onto photographs and xeroopies. Some little signs are made by pen in two recently published photographs taken on the river Tanaro, which remind of the wild forestland locations of the *Alpi Marittime*, see VADUZ 2019: 212. On the back of the first photograph, a text explains the presence of an ink spot on a stone of the river: "I hid some gold in a stone. Maybe one day there will be gold in the Tanaro". The vertical line on the second picture (dated to December 1969) illustrates "a water bar that goes to the sky".

Progetto per una lunga suonata (“Project for a long sonata”).¹⁵³ Some of these references can be partly understood with the help of the artist’s writings: a 1968 personal note describes albatrosses as able to “exploit the upwards thrusts of air”;¹⁵⁴ another from 1969 can be discussed here for the same lyrical and cryptic imagery, though revealing that “days” are associated to “memories”:

“I will allow all kinds of birds to fly in my house. I will never close the windows and the wind will always wrap my steps. In the room of memories, I will put my days. Who wants to talk to me can enter my house after playing the ocarina of my first day. If they will not tread upon my birds and my days, I will gladly speak with him. My whole house will be one colour, only my room will have a wall of a different colour that will be a bit like the colour of the time”.¹⁵⁵

Analogous tones, and punctual figures such as the house divided into rooms and inhabited by symbolic animals, can be found in Pier Paolo Calzolari’s text published on *Op Losse Schroeven* catalogue (**figure I.4**). A fantastic trend in the imagery of the Arte Povera group, significantly departing from the tautological and material attitudes of the earliest years (1967-68), can be detached in 1969, typically in titles and writings that add estranging features or hermetic meanings. In this sense, Anselmo’s recent works could be compared to Penone’s *Progetti per Leonardo* as they extend time to a massive scale, through titles like *Per un’incisione di indefinite migliaia di anni* (“For an engraving of indefinite thousands of years”), *Trecento milioni di anni* (“300000000 years”) or *Verso l’infinito* (“Toward infinity”). In some cases, it is even possible to think of this spritely Arte Povera group trend as an original response to the early information, documented by extraordinary photographs, of American land art – for instance, De Maria’s *One mile drawing*.¹⁵⁶

However, Penone’s appropriation of Leonardo’s drawing involved original problems and can be read at multiple levels. On one hand, it has already been pointed out how Leonardo’s writings might have found direct correspondence with the current interests of the young artist, above all for the constant relationship between man and nature and the direct contact that animated his scientific investigations.¹⁵⁷ On the other hand, Penone showed a specific interest in Leonardesque graphic language. An unpublished notebook, that can be dated to 1969, contains preliminary sketches for the series, that first document how this and other tempest drawings (that could have been easily found in

¹⁵³ The identification of the object was only possible thanks to a direct question of Guzzetti, see PENONE, GUZZETTI 2020: 528-529. The title, however, relates to a page in the mentioned notebook that thematises waiting and boredom, in which a Piemontese proverb is quoted: “tena d’a cunt l’archet che la sunada l’è lunga” (“spare the bow that the sonata is long”).

¹⁵⁴ “The ability of stones to raise from the ground, as for the albatross which with their wingspan exploit the upwards thrusts of air, is conditioned by climatic factors, by the habitat in which they rest, by the fauna and flora which surround them and by the kind of activity these elements carry out” (PENONE 2009 [1968]: 19).

¹⁵⁵ PENONE 2009: 220.

¹⁵⁶ The US and European artists dealing with earth works were first largely discussed and illustrated in TRINI 1969A.

¹⁵⁷ See GUZZETTI 2018: 230-231, note 47. Penone could read Leonardo’s writings in a 1968 anthology curated by Anna Maria Brizio.

an art publication of the time), were first copied by hand in pencil.¹⁵⁸ The dense tangle of lines that represent the movements of fluids, rain and wind, responded to Penone's need to represent the idea still present in his imagery of the *Terrazzo*, now "to be put at 20 metres from the ground" and the air masses' "irresistible strength and such sweetness"¹⁵⁹ (**figure I.27**).

On a third level, the interest for Leonardo can be put in relation to the context in which the young artist was first introduced, that is, the Galleria Sperone, and in particular his friendship with the same-aged artist Salvo Mangione, who started his career in the same years as named as Salvo. In particular, the first dated drawing by Penone is a quite large graphite portrait of Salvo, captioned "Salvo benedicente visto il 16 febbraio 1969 da Giuseppe Penone" ("Blessing Salvo as seen by Giuseppe penone on February 16th, 1969"). The result of a playful competition between debuting colleagues, the portrait assumed the blessing iconography formulated in numerous self-portraits begun by Salvo that year. They are drawn with painstaking patience, often in coloured pencils, with a curiously scholastic meticulousness, and carry a "T" diagram of the blessing gesture of the hand, and a "modest" description: "riproduzione approssimativa di Salvo benedicente eseguita da lui stesso" ("approximate reproduction of blessing Salvo the series of *Salvo benedicente* executed by himself") staged a double performative appropriation of the museum tradition, both as anachronistic, improbably ingenuous style and a Renaissance iconography. A year later, Salvo directed to Leonardo his impersonating performances, also expressed through a graphic work, that is a transcription (in a childish, impeccable calligraphy on a school exercise book) of the famous 1482 letter to Lodovico il Moro,¹⁶⁰ in which the artist candidates himself to the Milanese court presenting his abilities and a sort of "curriculum". Salvo addressed the letter to Sperone, in a sort of playful institutional critique on the system of community, contractual dependency and friendship into which Penone entered too. A few months after Penone's homage to his peer played with a dexterous exercise of sfumato and magniloquence, the artist also impersonated the hand of Leonardo by appropriating the tempest study, possibly testifying reciprocal exchanges, conversations, attentions and sharing between artists. The most typical layout of Turinese artists's projects, elegantly orchestrating dense lines of texts and drawing, all in ink or graphite, echoes the fascinating studies of the Old Master, broadly published at

¹⁵⁸ Paper fragments now belonging to the series in the Pero collection is the most accomplished copy in graphite of the drawing.

¹⁵⁹ Here's the transcript of the cancelled text inscribed on the same page (**figure I.22**): "the masses of sky move very quickly or very slowly from one side of the globe to the other or rotate over a very small area of the globe, creating an irresistible force of such sweetness that the earth".

¹⁶⁰ See ARCHIVIO SALVO 2023: 531. Salvo similarly impersonated another champion of Italian classical art, namely Giotto, in his proposal to Eva Madelung for his participation (together with Alighiero Boetti) to Aktionsraum. Salvo had sent to Munich a questionnaire filled with a circle drawn by hand, "which I consider to be a work and to which I gave the title *Io come Giotto*" (ibid: 532). Salvo was stopped at the Austrian border at Brenner in possession of Marijuana and never reached Munich.

the time; and after all, the self-measuring basin in the brook had evident “Vitruvian” references already in 1968.

Penone’s eventually decided to use photographic reproductions of the original drawing and to intervene on them with tiny, rather clumsy schemes of the earth pillar, the long iron bar or the terrace. The intentional deskilling appears a coherent move in relation to the expectation of the international context of exhibitions about conceptualist planning (the series, as in the cases of Anselmo and Zorio. An interesting comparison, in terms of deskilled but visionary graphic projects, is offered by a work by the Swiss artist Markus Raetz, probably known by Penone as it was published in the catalogue of *Prospect 69* and dedicated to a rope “longer than the human viewing area” or a “7 metre long stainless” wedge (**figure I.28**).

II.3 Frottage

In the same notebook, on the page following the studies for the *Terrazzo* in Leonardesque wind, Penone frottaged the same surface multiple times, with an unidentified, textured object (possibly a wax block?)¹⁶¹ that contained the carving of an illegible scribble (**figure I.29**). It might have been a form of intentionally unreadable writing, just like the signs on top of the same page. The ballpoint ink drawing of a wedge, similar to the installations of the *Progetti per Leonardo*, undoubtedly refers this page to the work *Scrivo, legge, ricorda* (“Writes, reads, remembers”), conceived and executed around the summer of 1969 in Garessio. There, Gilberto Zorio took some pictures of the action in the wood: with a hammer, Penone stuck an iron wedge, with alphabet and numbers in relief, into the trunk of a tree. According to the artist, the tree would have somehow assimilated the knowledge of language, in terms that can be better understood through Penone’s already mentioned 1969 text about his grandfather and father’s workforce on land: “this is almost always assimilated and expressed through the action and language of time. Time in itself is already a type of action that allows things to express themselves and act humanly, just as wind, rain, flowing water, wedges or other bodies that they can assimilate can also be a human expression”.

The role of frottage for the early conception of this work has never been highlighted, but its presence in the notebook would suggest that this drawing practice had a crucial role in visualising the otherwise invisible idea. In fact, in other parts of his block, Penone described a “project to write a book in a wood using trees instead of pages” – which was also presented as his contribution to the catalogue of *Konzeption/Conception* (**figure I.30**) and exhibited in Leverkusen in late October. The young artist

¹⁶¹ The frottaged object could not be the wedge later casted in iron (in five exemplars, 6.5 x 4.2 x 40.5 cm), as the image measures only about 20 cm. In the following page, the frottage is executed so as to obtain a cuneiform shape.

played with the notion itself of book's pages: the exhibited object was an iron matrix and five frottage drawings of about the same dimension of the final catalogue (22 x 19 cm). The text in relief on the matrix appeared rubbed in counterpart and described the project of the work, again referring to the number of days from his birth: "8161 pages of a book written in rows on iron wedges; driven into an equal number of trees, these will grow, assimilating the wedges and expressing their content". In the sequence of drawings, a second image slips gradually from the right and it is a wooden frottage inscribed in dark letters with the same text. As a book intervention, the frottage (reproduced in life size) served to identify the actual pages as the surface of the action, which is first and foremost a contact between the growing tree and the iron matrix. Additionally, Penone's virtually "sculpted" pages can be juxtaposed to Alighiero Boetti's contribution for the German volume, as the Turinese only requested to edit two pages of a special paper weight in the catalogue, without exhibiting any work at Morsbroich castle.¹⁶²

Asked about possible Surrealist sources for his early resort to frottage, Penone recently pointed out a fundamental distance in his intention: "For Ernst [the inventor of the term], the frottages were used as a means of representation, while for me the frottage was like a tactile document of a surface".¹⁶³ In the same interview, Penone also commented on later works on paper made with an ink imprint of his skin, saying "it's not a drawing, it's an imprint".¹⁶⁴ In both cases, the artist stresses a reduction of drawing to indirect, visible trace of a contact, to an ultimate negation of the "medium" as a mediation. A rich literature already exists about the artist's frottage and imprint drawings (the main survey to date about Penone's drawing is titled not by chance, "the imprint of drawing").¹⁶⁵ Here, in order to

¹⁶² The organisers were unable to realise Boetti's request and the artist's letter itself was published instead, as his contribution to the catalogue. In it, he explained "In the kingdom of Olinam [that is Milano], it is forbidden to publish books with pages of less than 500 grams per square metre thickness" (see GUZZETTI 2019B: 103). The episode caused a polemic between Boetti and Konrad Fischer, documented in the former's letters now at the ZADIK Archive in Cologne.

¹⁶³ PENONE, GUZZETTI 2020: 533.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. Penone's use of typographic ink for printing his fingers on paper concerns, for example, projects or freer "graphic translations" of the work *Gli anni dell'albero più uno* ("The Years of the Tree Plus One", 1969). The 1969 sculpture was executed at the Sperone Gallery in December 1969 as documented by a photograph (see LANCIANI 2018, IV *To Unroll One's Skin*: [1]) and consisted of the coverage of a trunk by a layer of wax, therefore adding a year of life to the dead tree. The corresponding drawing shows thumbprints on paper arranged to draw a circle that corresponds to the year around the section of the tree: in the very execution, then, Penone performed again the gestures of adding material (wax or ink) with his fingers. Interestingly, some exemplars are executed on tracing paper and are inscribed with the indication "1/1", maybe corresponding to the first idea for a multiple.

¹⁶⁵ See NEW YORK 2004. Literature has built upon Rosalind Krauss's notion of indexicality and by definition intrinsic to procedures like frottage, imprint but also casting (largely used by Penone as well). For a broad discussion on frottage in contemporary art, see LOS ANGELES 2015, which includes Penone's *Albero – Il suo essere fino al 49mo anno d'età in un'ora fantastica* ("Tree-Its being to 49 years of life in a fantastic moment") a 1972 handmade multiple of 30 exemplars, which are immense frottages of a trunk measuring 700 x 21 cm. From trunk and bark to his own skin, Penone explored the possibility to produce automatic images (to "draw" them) by contact of the bodies and the paper. A lot of paradigms got turned over by this experimentation. Starting from the etymology of *disegno* ("drawing"), it seems now to move from a meaning of compositional, visual and mental ordering to a kind of "sign" characterised by its indexicality and "blindness", see WHITE 2014. In this sense, Penone has already been the object of an essay by George Didi-Huberman, who accounted for the temporal and philosophical dimension of the imprint, not only in regard to his works on paper. He noticed how "skin is a paradigm: wall, bark, eyelid, nail or snakeskin, on which, on the *knowledge through contact*,

account for the earliest documented examples of such practice, it may be worth pointing out how with frottage the conception of planning in Penone's practice gets further complicated and drawing achieves a new specific function. His projects based on texts and drawn images not only represented visually the artist's work but also worked as an amplification, by its projection into geographical distance, temporal progression (of growth) and their further conceptual implications. Instead, *8161 pagine di un libro* reminds us to view the work not so much as its "document" nor as "a witness to an anteriority"¹⁶⁶ (as the work is still projected in an impossible future – that is, it is not the matrix or the pages but the book), but as an analogic process. According to Penone's invention, it is the tactile contact (or "lettura tattile", "tactile reading", as he titled his experimentation of frottage of the tree bark, often reaching enormous dimensions) that allows the tree to express the text of the book by assimilation; analogically (that is, by the same principle found in different situations and objects) and not representationally, the drawing process illustrates this contact by repeating it between paper and graphite. One of the main features of frottage, that is, its 'same-scale-ness' with its object, pushed Penone's drawings to unprecedented dimensions, sometimes reaching the overall extension of a tree bark, "read" in strongly vertical paper rolls (up to almost 10 metres long) or in paratactic displays of single fragments.¹⁶⁷ Despite the complexity of the process on such a scale, the technique preserves the instantaneity in "finding" the image, a detailed texture; in this sense, Penone's contact with the tree through paper is specular to his excavation of the wooden beams, in the coeval works *Alberi*, in which the sculpting process receded in time by finding a younger shape of the tree.¹⁶⁸

appears to orient itself most of the sculptural phenomenology established in Penone's work" (DIDI-HUBERMAN 2008: 69). Briony Fer has spoken of a "tactile vernacular" founded by Penone, and has traced it back to Piero Manzoni application of fingerprints on objects and drawings. She also recalled Didier Anzieu's epistemological observations about the "skin-ego", See ANZIEU 1989. To put it in terms of drawing, Penone literally substituted the hand (that grasped around the trunk, but also the one drawing with pencils on the sheet) with the skin, in order to state a completely different notion of "autography". This shift brings to a new "aesthetic of reciprocity and mutuality of impact" with the sheet of paper, which "makes its own contributions to the contingencies and particularities encountered in the act of drawing" (TUMA 2004: 73). As the subtle but determining role of the paper grain has already demonstrated, the support ceases to be a blank, flat field and it looks more like sculpting material. The artist now aims "to find, literally, the points of pressure and contact between [...] different kinds of surface [...] to occupy the spaces between surfaces that he had called 'interspace'. And rather than think of this as an empty abyss between things, in Penone's work, it is mapped out as a volume, just as the thinnest layer of drawing might create a kind of tactile space" (FER 2004A: 96).

¹⁶⁶ IVERSEN 2020: 258. Margaret 257-270.

¹⁶⁷ For instance, *Lettura tattile della scorza di un albero* ("Tactile Reading of the bark of the tree"), dated 1969, is made of 60 elements of frottage on sheets of paper, each about 35 x 25 cm. The first, 8-metre-long debarked tree, titled, *Il suo essere nel ventiduesimo anno d'età in un'ora fantastica* ("His being in the twentieth-second year of his age in a fantastic hour") was frottaged in correspondence of its knots (the branches' origins) on paper sheets that were then pasted together on a single, 920 cm-long canvased paper roll. The tree has been then damaged at the X Quadriennale in Rome in 1973, where it was on loan from the collection of the editor Giulio Einaudi.

¹⁶⁸ The first *Albero* was described by Mirella Bandini in December 1969, together with the opposite work ("to age another long tree trunk for a year by covering its entire extension with a thin layer of wax"), that she had probably seen installed at the Galleria Sperone (where they were photographed). Penone and the other artists of the gallery used to present their new works in the gallery to Sperone, to the colleagues and the (rare) collectors. It is worth noticing that in a group show in October 1969, Pier Paolo Calzolari exhibited a work containing the writing "il mio 25 anno di età" ("my 25th year of age") with bronze letters.

Although parallelly maintaining a private production of representational drawing as projects,¹⁶⁹ Penone elected this modality as his principal intervention in the catalogues of the most important national and international exhibitions defining conceptualism in 1970, from *Gennaio 70* in Bologna to *Information* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. For instance, for the Tokyo Biennale in May 1970, he sent for his page in the catalogue a frottage of the parqueted floor of his room (**figure I.31**); other frottages of this kind, published in the catalogue of the group exhibition *Processi di pensiero visualizzati* (“Visualised process of thoughts”),¹⁷⁰ were defined as “Bleistifabdruck” (“pencil print”) by Jean Christophe Ammann. The exhibition title may help directly to also understand Penone’s works on paper as “visualisation” of an invisible process like magnetisation, which is nevertheless also based on contact (even on scrubbing) like frottage. In 1970, Penone had effectively realised a series – under the title of *Magnetizzazioni* (“Magnetisations”) – that actually corresponded to the complete frottage of an object (a door, a chair) on little pages, which were then piled and compressed between two magnets. In a note wrote in February 1970 on his agenda (on the day he terminated his performance at Aktionsraum in Munich), the artist formulated the following idea, explaining his adoption of the technique:

“I possibly found the words to say the things I thought in the past days. I think that frottages can be done of all things houses palaces tables chairs cars rivers streets telegraph poles [...] I will use frottage because it is the only technique which beyond taking more or less faithfully the surface of things, it unifies them making them all similar [...]”.¹⁷¹

II.4 Imprint

A work that could have first triggered in the young artist his use of frottage as evidence of the process (a technique which ultimately distinguished Penone among his close companions) is Jasper Johns’

¹⁶⁹ It is the case of the majority of studies for the series of *Alberi scortecciati* (“Debarked trees”), realised by sculpting industrial wooden beams in order to restore them to the shape of the (younger) tree hidden inside. This “dendron-archeology” is translated into drawings which appear to be *d’après* rather than projects, since they might depend on the early, strongly perspectival photographs of this action-sculpture, see for instance PENONE 1977: 40-51. In a sense, the temporality of these drawings proceeds contrary to the trees’ growth, as they render visible the younger age of the tree hidden inside commodities and industrial objects, like chairs, tables or even vessels. The outcomes are distinctly imaginative but also characterised by simple and static objective quality of the works, quite an exception within Penone’s drawn corpus. In relation to the metamorphosis of everyday objects, it plays with a typical Surrealist device, and some paradoxical images invented by René Magritte come to mind. As an unavoidable component of the Italian avantgarde culture of the late sixties, Surrealism could provide thematical as well as formal models for an artist like Penone, who was looking for alternatives to the academic teaching but remaining in the field of figuration.

¹⁷⁰ See Jean Christophe Ammann in LUCERNE 1970: [2]. On the show see GUZZETTI 2022.

¹⁷¹ The note goes on with an idea of a frottage of frottage: “I think that I could then have an iron plate made on which to write “naturale”, for which after I cut in small pieces all the frottages, I will execute a frottage of this or that plate according to the dimension of the cutouts with which I will complete the work” (Giuseppe Penone, notebook, February 15, 1970 c., Archivio Penone, Turin).

Skin, which the young artist probably saw in spring of 1969 at the Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna in Turin. The exemplar was the gift from the American artist to Ugo Mulas, whose famous photographs of its execution in Edisto Beach in 1965 (with Johns' rotating his head onto the paper hanging on the wall) might have helped in reading the complex material process behind the disturbing image (already known as a lithograph)¹⁷² in which hair, eyebrows, lips and skin are scattered (**figure I.32**).¹⁷³ Johns' technique mixed imprint (left by the oiled surface of his body) and a frottage-like rubbing of a charcoal bar. Although imprint and frottage are techniques chosen specifically for the possibility to circumvent the intervention of style and hand, and Johns and Penone have been already compared in this sense (with a perplexing results),¹⁷⁴ the Turinese seemed to respond to the process of "unfolding" of skin when he first approached imprint, that is, for his intervention on the catalogue of *Gennaio 70* (**figure I.33**). The life-size imprint of his entire arm crossed four contiguous pages, dismembering his skin in baffling fragments of shades. Also, passible of hints to American art was the shoe print, realised with mud on a paper and sent to the MoMA, that appeared on his page in the catalogue of *Information* (**figure I.34**).

Over a few years, Penone developed an original draftsmanship directly based on materiality: the systematic production of imprints involved the preparation of his own body, by covering his skin with printing ink or his sole with mud. Since 1970, he arranged a complex procedure using printing or graphite pigment and adhesive film, which allowed him to catch the slightest altimetric variations of the skin, including hair. In this way, imprint brought drawing into a sculptural process. In a working note that echoed his universal frottage project a few months later, the vocabulary for this drawing practice ("to press" or "to cover" – obviously never to draw) follow each other until Penone formulates *Svolgere la propria pelle* ("Unroll one's skin"), the title of the photographic series of work, an edition published in 1970 and his first artist book.

"Skin. Human skin, press the skin of the thumb finger against water, press the skin of the thumb finger against the air, press the skin of the thumb finger against the earth. Strip of skin, a strip of arm skin covering part of a room. Covering the surface, of a pond with the skin of the thumb finger covering an entire tree in all its smallest details with a piece of arm skin. Unrolling the skin of a finger on the walls of a well, unrolling a piece of skin on a rock wall. Unroll one's own skin on a concave surface, unroll one's own skin in a valley, unroll one's own skin on one's own house unroll one's own skin on other people's skin unroll one's skin on stones unroll one's skin on cars unroll one's skin on a km2 of land on the steps of a cathedral, unroll one's skin on the wire mesh

¹⁷² *Skin with O'Hara Poem* was illustrated as a two-page insertion in the poets and artists issue of *Art in America*, October-November 1965.

¹⁷³ See JASPER JOHNS 2019: 312, D132.

¹⁷⁴ See PARIS 1999 and the review by Richard Shiff, who defined the work by Penone as "graceless", SHIFF 1999.

surrounding a garden unroll one's skin on one's eye. Dot, skin dot on the water line, tree dot on skin dot, wall dot on wall dot, you dot on you dot".¹⁷⁵

In the following pages of the same block, Penone sketched numerous objects and furniture items (a chair, a door handle, a knife, a glass, a telephone) on which writing indicated where “the skin of the thumb finger” would have been pressed. The imaginative impulse of the artist’s text corresponded to a sophisticated effect of the imprint. Penone often edited the resulted imprint image, manipulating the effect of direct contact he wanted to present. This is the case with an imprint integrated as a project/drawing of *Rovesciare gli occhi* (“To reverse one’s eyes”, **figure I.35**), for which the artist wore a pair of mirroring contact lenses, conceived in June and first documented by photographs from September 1970. Before sticking it to a paper sheet, the adhesive film with the imprint was cut with surgical precision where the eye opens (the cut started from an edge of the film), so that Penone could draw the image of the reflection of the lenses and the upper lashes. Here, drawing is pushed to an effect of objectivity in competition or collaboration with the mechanical reproduction used by the artist himself, that of the imprint, the reflection or the photograph. The drawing is dated 1972 and titled, *Toccare e vedere* (“To touch and to see”), possibly both later additions, but it is a good example of dismissal – on a material basis – of a purely indexical interpretation of Penone’s adoption of imprint and frottage. In other words, to the photographic paradigm indicated by Krauss in her discussion of index in the seventies, it could be argued that Penone’s practice contrasts dialectically as a drawing paradigm, as the devices of manipulation intervening in a more complex articulation of the work on paper.

This technique anticipated and then paralleled the molding experiments and the series of works with plaster cast of body parts, on which the colour diapositive of the same area was projected. Together with an exemplar of this series, that is, six casts of eye sockets (taken from various acquaintances of the artist) and the respective projections installed at the Galleria Schema in Florence, a suite of proper drawings was displayed for the first time in a show by Penone. Titled, *Leggere l'aria* (“To read the air”), eight imprints of the eye sockets were realised on a very light, translucent paper, that got slightly crumpled in the process (in a subtle visual echoing of the skin around the closed eye under the pression of the imprint). Other drawings related to the series of body casts are surprisingly finished and made on such large formats that they might have been thought for exhibition too. In them, Penone translated a specific motif of the casting technique that originated an individuated series, *Peli* (“Hairs”), that is, the capture of some actual hairs during the process of plaster molding. The drawings represent body fragments of the chest, the nipple or the head, represented with the finest execution in

¹⁷⁵ Giuseppe Penone, notebook, 1970, Archivio Penone, Turin.

pastel. Then, Penone had perforated the sheet of paper and inserted real hairs one by one, taping them on the back (**figure I.36**). These drawings coincide not by chance with the phase of the first great success of hyperrealism in Italy after *documenta V*, and the choice of isolating the nipple inevitably addressed a long Duchampian lineage, still relevant during these years thanks to the most recent works of Jasper Johns.¹⁷⁶ In this case, the disturbing presence of real elements of the body triggers a different observation of the silky quality of the pastel technique, a sort of repetition of the thin, soft and translucent surface of skin.

III *Redefining fundamentals. Analogical drawing*

In the practice of Penone, Anselmo, and Zorio, a fundamental distinction stands between planning and documentation on one hand, and the realisation of the actual work, installed in a room and perceived by the audience, on the other. At a certain point, this alternative was felt to be a problem – in Penone’s words:

“In respect to the real work, these means achieve an autonomy that poses the problem of representation in art instead of eliminating it. The identification of the works in these mediums annuls their physical reality and it gives back only their aesthetic and formal aspect. We need to search for new instruments and new images so that they are the work itself, its necessity, its idea”.¹⁷⁷

Written in 1972, this observation can be read in the context of the first experiences in systematic realisation of multiples by the Arte Povera group of artists, coordinated by Giorgio Persano and his gallery in Turin, Multipli. Short run editions, “typically artisanal works, multiplied directly by the artist with the proper materials” were conceived from 1971 to expand the market of the same group of artists. Some of the works edited by Multipli could be considered as drawings, as they were executed with various material on paper, like Giovanni Anselmo’s *Linea terra* (“Earth line”, **figure I.48**), or simulated graphic projects like Gilberto Zorio’s *Spiaggia cambia colore* (“Colour-changing beach”, **figure I.37**), a two-metre long drawing on canvased paper (showing a squared, benched “beach” put in perspective and fading into the “sea” as the background), covered with coloured sand treated with cobalt chloride that changed colour from blue in daytime to pink in nighttime. Such works on paper occupied a lateral dimension in the artists’ practice, “mirroring” major works: “in

¹⁷⁶ From *Prière de toucher*, the famous latex breast used for cover of the *Surréalisme* catalogue in 1947, to the abundant casts of Johns, and in particular those in true colours (breast, heel, plays: details all chosen as well by Penone for his plaster casts) present on the right panel of the large *Untitled*, exhibited at the biennial of the Whitney Museum at the beginning of 1973.

¹⁷⁷ PENONE 2009: 44.

[the multiple] the artist has the right to defend his language, his materials and why not, the mythic, rare aspect of his work”.¹⁷⁸

An analogous discourse can be made for the development of a different relationship between the drawings/projects and the related works, that took place when the same artists started to regularly publish and exhibit drawings. To follow up to paradigmatic direction of Penone’s draftsmanship and its Leonardesque roots, it might possible to suggest a category like analogy in order to frame this relationship. Analogical thinking has been studied in Leonardo da Vinci’s texts and drawings as the association of two elements on literal, heuristic or metaphorical basis.¹⁷⁹ The second function in particular explained texts like the one in which the movement of water is compared to hair, as well as the similarity among drawn studies on both subjects. This theoretical approach may be translated into the artist practice. Drawing in the form of frottage and imprint refers analogically to the processes of debarking, magnetizing or “unroll one’s skin”; in other words, the execution process of the drawing follows the same principles of the respective work. Furthermore, Penone explored and redefined *de facto* a fundamental of the medium, namely, “tocco” (“touch”), by reducing his draftsmanship to an elementary gesture of hatching on textured surface or a literal contact with the sheet. Italian processual drawing, expressed by the projects of the arte povera trio Penone, Zorio and Anselmo,¹⁸⁰ may be read according to such duality, the analogical relationship with the projected work, on one hand; and on the other hand, a counter-definition of the traditional fundamentals of drawing as a medium.

III.1 *Line, violence, border*

In late 1969, Zorio and Anselmo were meditating together on the idea of tension, in terms of finding a minimum place that would conduct a maximum amount of energy. Both such dialogue and intent of concentration are evident in a project by Zorio captioned, “omaggio a Giovanni Anselmo / e da una sua idea” (“Homage to Giovanni Anselmo / and from an idea of his”), now preserved at Kunstmuseum Winterthur, dated 1969 (**figure I.38**). The quite large white sheet is traced with a horizontal line in the low half, and a couple of cable ends (copper threads wrapped in plastic) is attached to the overall frame for the work. Another caption states: “Si possono toccare i fili / dell’alta tensione” (“It is possible to touch the high voltage wires”), so that it becomes possible to interpret the black horizontal line as the detail of a wire. The relationship with the already mentioned Anselmo’s late 1969 interest in danger and psychological uncanniness is evident, but Zorio appropriated this

¹⁷⁸ PERSANO 1974: 64.

¹⁷⁹ The distinction is articulated in NOVA 2016.

¹⁸⁰ For a first assessment of the meaning of drawing in arte povera, see PORTO ALEGRE 2014.

motif and carried it further all along 1970, up to his work titled, *Confine* (“Border”, a long incandescent resistor suspended in a dark room), first installed at *Vitalità del negativo*, the important group exhibition held at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome in November 1970 and curated by Achille Bonito Oliva.¹⁸¹ The idea of a dark room had first been studied in a complex project on paper, dated 1970 and dedicated to a “progetto di mostra” (“exhibition plan”) for the Galleria Sperone, titled *Le idee vincono* (“Ideas win”): articulated as a plan of the gallery, it shows two white graphite lines that run on the floor and write the two elements of the title, before meeting at the centre, where a spotlight is directing white light onto the entrance of the gallery.¹⁸² The white lines then describe neons or the cables entering the spotlight (that were made with a collaged light-pongo, a phosphorescent material), in a further example of the connection between line and tension in Zorio’s imagery.

The artist meaningfully departed from the representational premises of his projects for his contribution to the catalogue of *Processi di pensiero visualizzati*, where he staged a sequence of thoughts through notes and sketches on four little sheets torn from a graph paper pad and taped onto the pages (**figure I.39**). The first note, “the mercury gas lamp is the evidence of violence: eyes, teeth, nails”, is probably addressing the possibility for Wood lights (based on mercury lamps) to lighten the body parts that also typically express aggressive behaviour. The next two little sheets are crossed by an irregular tear, and captioned by the title, “confine” (“border”) and its definition: “il confine è quella linea immaginaria che si concretizza con la violenza” (“the border is that imaginary line which is concretised through violence”). The source of Zorio’s expression might have been a mixture of philosophical thinking and psychoanalysis, such as Norman O. Brown’s *Body of Love*, edited in Italy in 1969: this volume represented a typical reading for the generation of Arte Povera artists, for it articulated major philosophical themes associating quotes from disparate culture fields and a surprisingly broad spectrum of subjects. In fact, in a chapter titled *Confine*, the Freudian theory about the delimitation of the self and external world is reformulated with many references to “hating”.¹⁸³ The impulse to tear the paper, instead of tracing a line to represent a border, could be interpreted as analogical as the breaking gesture conveys energy for disruption, like incandescence and violence. The fourth and last taped sheet carries the caption, “il comportamento ci fa delimitare il freddo, il caldo e i confini” (“behaviour makes us delimitate cold, hot and borders”) and a very synthetic sketch of the unrealised work *Caldo/Freddo* (“Hot/Cold”). In another 1970 sketch published in the catalogue

¹⁸¹ See RIVOLI 2017: 145.

¹⁸² The drawing is illustrated in RIVOLI 2017: 93.

¹⁸³ For instance: “Contrary to what is taken for granted in the crazy state called normality or common sense, the distinction between being and the outside world is not an immutable fact, but an artificial construction. It is a borderline; like all borders, not natural but conventional, based on love and hate” (BROWN 1969: 170).

of the Tokyo Biennial,¹⁸⁴ the same installation was planned as two steel wires crossing horizontally a room at the height of 150 cm from the floor, one heated to 80 °C and the other cold, meant as a mortally risky device (“spreading your arms you can die”).

The sequence in the Lucerne catalogue shows how the ideational materials, informally staged as notes and quick sketches, served to “visualise a thought process”, without stiffening it into a form. Conversely, Zorio operates a reduction of the actual works to a line, of which the status as incandescent wire is not so much that of a process trace (especially compared to some immediately preceding works, such as *Odio* (“Hate”) in which the word itself had been written with hatchet strokes on a wall of the Sperone Gallery in late 1969),¹⁸⁵ but rather of an apparition that “materialises” and determines the behaviour of the viewer. Indeed, for *Caldo/Freddo* Zorio imagined the glowing cable appearing in the dark as a red line, producing a modification of space and its fruition by the viewer. *Confine* was verified in numerous drawings that should be considered as finished works rather than projects, made parallelly or *d’après* the work as portable, saleable (and innocuous) translations of the dangerous installation, that were not exhibited to the public until later.¹⁸⁶ One can read in them the effort to restore the energetic tension and violence of the line in small and minor formats, by the use of supports like wax or slate slabs that are engraved by the coloured lines; or in the case of rice paper, the ink Irregularly spreads and emphasises the crispy internal structure. The analogical idea of “crossing the surface” of the drawing, finding resistance in the support, is dramatised further in the series of *Confine* on vellum, in which the quality of skin is visible and translucent.

The works on paper made during these years are stably positioned in a collateral sphere in respect to the installations. “The work starts from the idea, then goes to the realisation, which must have total adherence to the idea”:¹⁸⁷ In 1972, Zorio had emphasised the conceptual rigor of his work, which he also considered “more purified as far as materials are concerned”. Although they may have been executed after the first studio experiments, the drawings belong to the same rarefactive dimension. The first exhibition of Zorio’s drawings, held at Sperone’s in Turin in October 1974, presented “20 drawings-project of the multi-environment with javelin and neon”, that is his new works on the star made with incandescent wire (not neon) and actual javelins, exhibited for the first time in late 1973.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ Published on the catalogue of the Tokyo Biennale, see TOKYO 1970.

¹⁸⁵ A second version of the work was exhibited at *Processi di pensiero visualizzati*, as a block of lead in which a rope was hammered and wrote the word “odio”, see RIVOLI 2017: 143.

¹⁸⁶ No drawings are documented in any of Zorio’s solo exhibition until 1974, when Galleria Sperone in Turin opened *Gilberto Zorio Disegni* on October, 4th. Interestingly, photographic documentation of some of his works of paper is in the Galleria dell’Ariete Papers at the Getty Research Center, as they were probably sold in the context of his solo show.

¹⁸⁷ ZORIO, DE SANNA 1972: 20.

¹⁸⁸ Zorio first presented the *Stelle incandescenti* in two contemporary shows in Turin, at Sperone’s, and in Bruxelles, at Galerie MTL, see MERZ, ZACCHAROPOULOS 1982: 53, 55, 101-103. The system of metal threads from the ceiling and on walls on which the incandescent wires and the javelins were suspended determined a complex, sometimes intricate lines system that could be compared to spatial installations such as Fred Sandback’s (also influencing in the same years the Italian sculptor Teodosio Magnoni).

The review pointed out the finished quality and conceptual autonomy of the works on paper, as constructions of lines:

“the stellar construction of the javelins, finished *à la Jim Dine* in a very fine drawing [*“dineamente rifiniti in un finissimo disegno”*], completed, for the missing side, by a red thread delineating the spatial occupation (the mental projection of violence enclosed in a static five-pointed star) of the design-symbol. Zorio, as already in the environmental construction, achieves in these drawings the maximum of programmatic cohesion between idea-concept and flat graphic representation. Autonomous and self-sufficient, not a compendium of the previous one, this solo exhibition shows what new possibilities the antiquity of drawing can offer to expression through mental images”.¹⁸⁹

The drawings of this series, dated to 1973 and 1974, show a graphic rendering of the star diagram as an intersection of straight lines, each prolonged to the edges of the sheet, and virtually beyond; one of the lines is substituted by the image of a javelin, drawn in black ink with tiny details like the handle and the shadows (**figure I.40**). For these geometric drawings, traced with ruler and Indian ink, Zorio also used slate boards, parchment, squared paper, and one exemplar was even made on vellum paper, and then framed between two glass plates to be visible on both sides: so that the transparency of the support makes the linear pattern appear as if suspended in air.¹⁹⁰ The *mise en page* of most drawings of stars was also carefully thought out, as the image appears on the bottom part of the sheet and leaves a large surface blank, in order to produce a dramatic, temporal dimension connected to the path of the thrown javelin. This device is brought to an extreme effect in an almost four-metre-long drawing (also held at the Kunstmuseum Winterthur, **figure I.41**): the image depicts a horizontal javelin on the side, reaching four more on the other side to form the star, running along a line drawn in red. Eloquently, the massive expansion of scale affects not the small figures but the distance, so that it is the purely linear element that is emphasised; furthermore, line stands not only as an image of violence (the energetic movement of the javelin) but as the paradigm of the temporal sequence. It is not by chance that in a few months Zorio substituted the incandescent wire and the javelins with red laser, which gave the artist’s conception of violence (and line) as energetic fluidity actual three-dimensionality and a literal movement of light.¹⁹¹ The corresponding work, *Stella di giavellotti* (“Star of javelins”), was first presented in June 1974 together with *Evviva di giavellotti e lampade* (“*W of javelins and lamps*”), which echoed Anselmo’s 1969 already mentioned project of the same name.

¹⁸⁹ GIBIERRE 1974: 174.

¹⁹⁰ This is the work from the Bertolini collection donated to the Museo del Novecento in Milan, see BALDACCI, GIACON 2015: 213, inv. 130, where, however, by mistake the work is referred to as ink on glass. Careful viewing of the work has made it clear that it is a sheet of tissue paper, heavily yellowed, between the two panes of glass in the frame.

¹⁹¹ The first *Stella laser* (“Laser star”) was installed in 1975 at the Galleria dell’Ariete in Milan. The exhibition leaflet contained for the occasion a set of seven tracing paper sheets, each containing dots and lines in red ink, as fragments of the star.

The two works merged in the single *Evviva-stella* sent to Cologne for the international exhibition *Projekt '74. Kunst bleibt Kunst*.¹⁹² In the catalogue, Zorio staged the ideation process of the work's linear construction (**figure I.42**), corresponding to a triple equivalence reported in the caption: "energy / ewiva / star = energy / vitality / star". Page after page, the single horizontal line of *Confine* is doubled as the intersection of two lines (like the two cables of *Caldo/Freddo*); then, the "W" of javelins is superimposed, composing the image of the star.

III.2 Tromple l'oeil, tone, time

For his *Progetto per Direzione* (**figure I.18**), Anselmo apparently indulged the features of a design project: his object (a block of concrete oriented according to the magnetic needle carried on its top) is showed in a perspectival diagram; a sample of its scabby surface is accurately described; an enlarging detail of the compass pointing to north is collocated beneath the image; and captions are punctually distributed on the drawing. The artist was self-taught; he had some experience as a graphic designer before debuting in 1965, but never learnt a refined or expressive draftsmanship. And yet, the elements depicted in this drawing are as informational for a plan as meaningful for Anselmo's conception: the vertiginous perspective lines visually express "direction" as the main theme of the work, and the accurate detailing of the different materials highlights its irreducible object-quality. The image of the compass was then isolated in numerous drawings also dated to 1967, appearing life-size on blank paper sheets in square little formats or very large dimensions. The project fashion, texts and details, are abandoned in favour of a direct translation of the meaning of the work into a drawing-only device. In fact, the sheets are meant to be orientated according to the drawn compass (in the same way of the mighty Formica block in the installed sculpture), so that the two-dimensional *tromple l'oeil* (accurately depicting the oriented compass and its shadow) triggers the observer to consider the sheet as a three-dimensional object in space. In a 1970-71 exemplar titled, *Nord*, the tiny compass appears on a one-by-two-and-a-half metres paper sheet, to be lain on the ground between plexiglass and pointing to north.¹⁹³ The contrast in scale, that can be associated to Penone's massive frottages or Zorio's large formats dating few years later, trigger the conceptual possibility to activate such a huge surface by the information from an illusory drawing. The drawings¹⁹⁴ of *Livella* ("Level") work analogously (**figure I.43**): the work on paper is a translation of a photograph, that was taken in turn

¹⁹² See MERZ, ZACCHAROPOULOS 1982: 103.

¹⁹³ See EYES WIDE OPEN 2014: 284-285.

¹⁹⁴ See the exemplar at the Centre Pompidou (*Dessin*, 1966, 90 x 64 cm, inv. AM 1980-3) and the one from the collection of Mario Bertolini, now at the Museo del Novecento in Milan (104 x 75.5 cm), see BALDACCI, GIACON 2015: 64, inv. 540.

from the original 1966 piece, the object in question positioned to detect the horizontality or verticality of the supporting surface – a sort of spatial tautology. Anselmo drew the carpentry tool and its shadow in life size along the vertical, left edge of the sheet, with the usual inexpressive precision and with an effect of *trompe l'oeil*, were it not monochromatic and fading rapidly at half of the image. Above all, the careful *mise en page* (in which the depicted object occupies a relatively small portion of the drawing) pushes the gaze to glide to the large blank surface of the paper sheet as an object, as its verticality is the conceptual target of the work. For the composition and theme of *Livella*, Anselmo might have dialogued with models of sophisticated draftsmanship, above all Jim Dine's gouaches and etchings of tools, that were made by silhouetting actual objects on the sheet and sometimes incorporated real, three-dimensional elements, like screws, in a self-referential play between illusion and reality.

Anselmo's ruthless control in drawing did not serve to deviate or distract from the conceptual mechanism of his works, and he demonstrated a meticulous dependency on photographic images (and – it is worth highlighting – independently from the earliest examples of hyperrealism). Nevertheless, the photographic and drawn versions do not coincide fully, as claimed by Amman in respect to *Lato destro* ("Right side", **figure I.44**).¹⁹⁵ In addition to being a subtle disruption of the objectivity of photography (mirroring right and left sides) and therefore a doubling *trompe l'oeil*, it is a rigorous exercise of chiaroscuro, in the traditional sense, that is "the graduated hues that achieve the relief" and the "gradual transitions of tones from light to shadow" are entrusted in the effect of sensitive perception in the viewer.¹⁹⁶ Another notion of draftsmanship present in textbooks of the time, "bruciare" (burning), illustrates the relation of the chiaroscuro technique to photography, as it evoked the process of developing a photographic plate, and the gradual darkening of the tones to be carefully stopped in order not to get to too dark hues.

"In drawing, as in the process of plate development, care must be taken not to burn out the darks: it is well to preserve to the drawing the airiness proper to drawings taken from life, relating the darks and remembering that even the strongest dark is hardly black, while it is capable of detecting to the attentive observer those transparencies of colour which, filtered through the atmosphere, lighten it in aerial perspective. It will be the same pencil mark that holds the air in its interweaving, that keeps itself open even from a technical point of view in the successive passages and progressive superimpositions of the darks".¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ "Die Arbeit besteht sowohl als Zeichnung als auch als Fotografie. Da mir die Fotografie aufschlussreicher erscheint, möchte ich mich im folgenden ihr widmen" (Jean Christophe Ammann in BASEL 1979: 11).

¹⁹⁶ "Chiaroscuro will, in fact, give the representation of volumes, light and also atmosphere; if one knows how to rightly analyse the lighted and shaded parts, if one correctly graduates the tones of the foreground figure from those of the background, one will be able to make one feel in an external subject that, between one building and another, between a tree and a hill, there is air, and one will be able to immerse the parts of the subject in the atmosphere itself, whether bright with sunshine or evanescent with mists" (DE FIORE 1967: 243).

¹⁹⁷ DE FIORE 1967: 215.

In the academic training, it was recommended to carry forward the overall chiaroscuro while keeping the right proportion of tones constant. In a quite radical drawing series started in 1969, Anselmo appears to overturn this principle and force chiaroscuro in the single tone definition of an isolated detail. *Particolari di infinito* (“Details of infinite”, **figure I.45**) are described as “visible and measurable” details of the “infinito”, that is, parts of the letters composing the word itself. All executed on a 25 x 25 cm sheet, they are distinguished by the indication on the back of the position of the detail within the word itself (for instance, a title is *Particolare del lato in alto della prima I d’infinito*, “Detail of the upper side of the first I of Infinito”) and the date of execution, spanning up to 1975 (when they started to be displayed on the wall within complex installations;¹⁹⁸ and an artist book published by Sperone collected 116 details).¹⁹⁹ A number of exemplars are fully, uniformly covered in graphite, others show white spaces (details from margins of the letters). The possibility of identifying the austere, monochromatic surfaces of graphite as “details” is only mental: the exercise of imagination in front of ambiguous forms recalls the conceptual drawings by Douglas Huebler, for instance, those published in the *Xeroxbook* in 1968 (**figure I.46**). Mere lines and points on the pages were captioned by Huebler to open to a conceptual imagination of their spatial position (some are “located 1000000000 miles behind the picture plane”), their movement (two points are described as “the ends of two lines located at a 90° angle to the picture plane moving back in space to infinity”) or their actual dimensions (a set of lines is said to measure one inch but is “located four inches ahead of the picture plane”, and therefore appears only few centimeters long). Huebler’s strategy operated through visual reduction (to the basic elements of drawing, dots and lines) to show how expansive is the mental dimension. Anselmo on his part reduced his intervention to that of a Xerox toner (printing the word “infinito”), but the handmade, dense execution captures the material tension of the hatching on the surface of the paper. Although he zeroed the articulation of different nuances into a single tone and the opacity of the surface, the artist’s effort to maintain a perfect homogeneity echoes the difficulty of chiaroscuro as a constantly open “interweaving” of the right tones.

The analogic working of Anselmo’s chiaroscuro may appear most clear in the series of diagrammatic drawings made after the 1965 episode that inaugurated his work as an artist, visually documented by the photograph known with the title *La mia ombra verso l’infinito dalla cima dello Stromboli durante l’alba del 16 giugno 1965* (“My shadow toward infinity from the summit of Stromboli during sunrise

¹⁹⁸ The artist himself remembered in April 1975: “In February this year, in Florence (Galleria Area) and in Genoa (Samangallery), in addition to the projections (*Particolari del Tutto*), I had the opportunity to show a series of drawings made in pencil on paper that I began in 1969 and to which I currently devote myself with some assiduity. These drawings are visible and measurable details of infinite at an angle, or a side, or a circumference, or the centre of each letter of the enlarged writing” (ANSELMO 1975).

¹⁹⁹ See GUZZETTI 2022: 277-279.

on 16 June 1965”). While elaborating a now lost video piece with the same title presented at *Gennaio 70*, Anselmo translated the work into some drawings,²⁰⁰ for instance, in a 1973 large-format collage also known as *Teoria dell’ombra* (“Theory of shadow”, **figure I.47**). Beneath the colour photograph of the 1965 event, glued on the top left corner, a diagram is traced in graphite on the bottom margin: two cones of shadow depart from the tiny figure of the artist. As the sum of the two superimposing, same-tone shadows, a triangular area is covered with a darker tone. Here, the painstaking balance of tone (reaching printing-like effects) stands for the time-based movement of projected shadow toward infinity, as the extension of the graphite area arrives to the edge of the sheet (a compositional strategy that was used by Zorio as well).

In other drawings from 1970, Anselmo’s approach to the medium reveals further points of contacts with Penone’s frottages and imprints, as well as with Zorio’s focus on line. In particular, both the former two considered paper as an object or material for direct intervention rather than as support for projection. Anselmo’s contribution to the conceptual issue of *Studio International* in the summer of 1970 consisted in a photograph of a paper surface engraved with the title “2095 years” (**figure I.48**):²⁰¹

“standing in front of the blank page, I etch with a sharp point on the paper the years of the paper's life. Paper is an idea that has materialised [“concretizzata”] since 123 B.C.; it was discovered in China and brought to Europe by the Arabs; so great is the energy of this idea that although men continue to disappear from generation to generation, it continues to materialise through us and will continue to do so after us as long as paper is used. Because of all this consistency, I could not help but think of engraving a sheet of paper as one would engrave on a stone or iron”.²⁰²

The idea of “concretizzarsi” (“to materialise”) recalls Zorio’s ideation of *Confine* and is further proof of the close relationship between the two artists and their sharing of many thought constructs. Nevertheless, when confronted with the theme of line in his work *Linea terra* (“Earth line”) in 1971, Anselmo appeared to interpret it as the opposite of a boundary or a dangerous threshold: the earth line stuck on the wall parallel to the soil level represented “the point where earth connects in that moment with myself, with my action, my energy, my considerations [...]. It is earth + glue + wall + me”.²⁰³ Coherently, with this metaphorical and material function of connection of his work, the artist

²⁰⁰ The series includes: *La mia ombra verso l’infinito dalla cima dello Stromboli durante l’alba del 16 agosto 1965*, 1969 (see VADUZ 2010: 63); *Proiezione della mia ombra verso l’infinito*, 1973, Sammlung Goetz (see NEW YORK 2017: 120); *Untitled*, 1972-74, Collection Banca Intesa (see PIROVANO, TEDESCHI 2013: 204, n. 323).

²⁰¹ “If Anselmo consciously works with paper as medium, as in the case of this catalogue, then it has his special meaning. Already in 1970, he arranged a page for *Studio International*, in which he, according to his own words, “carved the life span of paper itself”, because of it being invaluable in its cultural meaning of support for ideas, for energy” (Jean Christophe Ammann in LUCERNE 1974: [3]).

²⁰² ANSELMO 1971: 55.

²⁰³ Ibid.

posed in the act of touching the line (**figure I.49**). Zorio's wires were instead fathally untouchable, but also from an operative point of view the act of gluing earth powder on the wall (that is to visualise a sort of horizon) has nothing to do with tearing rips or tracing lines. Moreover, the title *Linea terra* simply echoed the standard term of "linea di terra" ("ground line") in the vocabulary of geometrical drawing, referring to the plane as always parallel to the horizon line onto which the objects rest.

I Plates

Chapter 2 *Developments of the project*

0 *Defining project as a genre*

A much-discussed work when it was exhibited in 1970-71, Sergio Lombardo's *Progetto di morte per avvelenamento* consists of vials of mortal substances accompanied by a sealed letter, with the instruction to open it only after the death of the poisoned user.²⁰⁴ Presenting an impractical process, and its meaning being obstructed both by the idea of death and the unrevealed contents of the letter, the work pushes back the observer into the suspension of the "project" as a claustrophobic dead end. Lombardo, a former exponent of the Roman pop painting, addressed and jeopardized the "new fortune of the project", by a provocative use of the term, as well as the deadpan material presentation of his work (a sort of patent with instructions and objects waiting to be "used"). Such fortune was acclaimed in January 1970 and featured distinctively all along the first half of the decade.²⁰⁵

As exhibitions like *Pläne und Projekte als Kunst* demonstrates, the category of "project" was not only elusive to strictly define in terms of a medium, but it was also theoretically available to the most disparate ideological discourses. In this chapter, then, I suggest considering *the project as a genre*. Going back to a traditional art historical definition, a genre is "a 'kind' of painting produced by a specialist for a particular 'kind' of taste",²⁰⁶ that is, a category of practice and artworks circumscribed by its socio-cultural pertinence. From a plain and practical point of view, projects can be individuated as a specific element in the art system – a kind of art object intentionally created by the artist for a specific circulation within the art system: projects occupy a rhetorical role and spatial position in exhibitions (traditionally, a collateral one in respect to the realised works), cover specific areas of the market (being less expensive and therefore available to a wider audience, as well as dedicated collectors)²⁰⁷ and are (rarely) discussed in the critical debate. The new autonomy of the project,

²⁰⁴ The work got a (predictable) great visibility between 1970 and 1971, when it was reported that someone got hurt by the substance visiting an exhibition in Vienna organised by the Galleria d'Arte Moderna di Roma, causing a Parliament interrogation too, see ATTI PARLAMENTARI 1971: 27409.

²⁰⁵ In 1971, Tullio Catalano reviewed a show of 19 projects by artists Sergio Lombardo, Rodolfo Aricò, Mel Bochner, Nicola Carrino, Giancarlo Croce, Lorenzo Indrimi, Giulio Paolini and Vettor Pisani (held at GAP – Studio d'arte contemporanea in Rome, from December 21st, 1970 to January 23rd, 1971) and pointed out a specific "attitude that contemporary art urgently makes its own, definable in the still poorly diagnosed area of the idea of planning, verified in its detailed basic, ideological and sociological faculty, relating in any case to the all-encompassing meaning, and the procedure implied in it, of a peculiar operation, more comparative (if not alternative) of the common processes – and results – of image". He also could easily acknowledge the market dimension of this attitude, corresponding to the "inertial saturation" of the art object "at least in the consequent and mediated diversion carried out by the art market" (CATALANO 1971, p. 51).

²⁰⁶ THE OXFORD COMPANION 1970: 466.

²⁰⁷ The most important Italian art collector of the time, Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, was developing an eloquent section of works on paper (usually not displayed in his home). It reflected first and foremost Panza's interests in minimal and conceptual American art. The category of "works on paper" included not only graphic diagrams, technical instructions for assembling sculptures and installations, typed texts of projects, mail art but also certifications for the purchase of

expressed eloquently in Lombardo's *Progetto*, does not erase these features, but manipulates them and makes them matter for expression. The vantage point of this preliminary definition is not to lose a material take on the objects titled "projects" despite their inconsistency in terms of medium, technique or meaning.

Appendix 2 proposes a synthetic resume of the most interesting international exhibitions that established the identity of the genre of the project around 1970. The first Italian exhibition on the theme, but titled *Disegni* ("Drawings"), opened in March 1972 as the second show of the new Galleria Schema in Florence. The director Alberto Moretti was an artist who was directly interested in conceptualist drawing and collaborated with avantgarde galleries like Toselli, Sonnabend and Sperone. The selection included major exponents of international conceptualism, both Italians (Boetti, Fabro, Merz, Paolini) and Americans (Andre, Bochner, Judd, LeWitt, Marden, Morris, Nauman, Ryman, Weiner, and the "American" Hanne Darboven). The few works documented in some room views suggest that the category of drawing was inextricable from the one of "project" (**figure II.0**): for instance, a two-part 1970 study in crayon on graph paper for the *Measurement Series* by Mel Bochner;²⁰⁸ or more eloquently, one of the original drawings (*Burning petroleum*) for the 1969 lithographic portfolio *Earth projects* by Robert Morris.

The project "as a genre" is in fact traditionally rooted in the practices of architecture drawing and industrial design, that is, the disciplines *par excellence* related to planning and to the production of materials such as models, instructions, drawn projects etc. As such, the notion of project was taught in Italian art schools at the time:

"Project is the set of graphic (and not just graphic) works by means of which we project onto plans all the constituent elements of the invented space, that is, breaking down the unitary idea into elements through which we can then reconstitute it in its spatial totality".²⁰⁹

Formulated in Gaspare De Fiore's 1967 *Dizionario del disegno*, this definition of "progetto" might appear obvious; though it reveals not only the graphic paradigm behind planning, regardless of

unrealized ideas. Some of the few Italian artists were also represented by this kind of materials, as in the case of the numerous handwritten *Carte di autenticazione* ("authentication papers") by Maurizio Mochetti. Other artists represented by works on paper in the Panza collection are: Vincenzo Agnetti, Carl Andre, Art & Language Robert Barry, Stanley Brouwn, Victor Burgin, Hanne Darboven, Walter De Maria, Jan Dibbets, Hamish Fulton, Gilbert & George, Douglas Huebler, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long, Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Mangold, Jean Tinguely, Ian Wilson, see KNIGHT, PANZA 1988: 164-165, 168, 174-175, 178-179, 182-185, 210-233, 238-247, 250-258. From 1972, other artists entered the collection with projects and drawing, namely Richard Nonas, David Tremlett, James Turrell, Cioni Carpi, Agnetti, Lucio Pozzi, Robert Irwin.

²⁰⁸ This work was later exhibited in Santa Maria de Capua 1973 is also visible in the room views of a show by Penone held in late 1974, hanging at the rooms contiguous to main exhibition space.

²⁰⁹ DE FIORE: 427.

whether the project is actually a drawing, but also a less definable instance of “decomposition” into elements, which is central to the conceptualist appropriation of the project (and applies well to Lombardo’s set of objects in *Progetto*). In the critical debate, projects appeared as a symptomatic device to escape medium, style and objecthood, in a time when “the moment of the formal definition [...] is not valid anymore”.²¹⁰ Nevertheless, the formal tools of architecture drawing, technical design and other scientific disciplines shaped the practice of artistic planning too, providing the observer with important keys to read the conceptual working of a project. It is not so often noticed that Italian “licei artistici” (art schools) included courses of architecture and technical drawing, and such training was meant to prepare both for artistic and architectural curricula (and quite often, students enrolled at the Accademia di Belle Arti attended the faculty of architecture too). The index of Marcello Petrignani’s textbook, *Disegno e progettazione*, first edited in 1967 and then reprinted in 1970, can give an idea of this background: notions of visual perception and history of the aesthetics were tied to descriptive geometry, up to the most sophisticated techniques of perspective and projection. Even regardless of the actual competence of the artists trained in this way, the genre of project was characterised by a “koiné” of technical drawing and diagramming, as a standard visual culture susceptible of appropriation and manipulation.

An essential theme of this chapter is the relationship between the project and the executed work, and it comprehends a broad range of possibilities from the complete autonomy of the two to their ultimate identity. A special attention will be given to projects for spatial installations: such drawings relate to space not only in terms of projected representation, that is as “image of space”, but also, in some interesting cases, they can share the same room of the installation and provoke various conceptual consequences. A fundamental precedent to this theoretical issue was the exhibition, *Lo spazio dell’immagine* (“The space of image”), that crowned the diffusion of environmental art in Italy. A celebration of the identity between the artwork and its environment, the critical approach²¹¹ on that occasion eloquently oversaw the problem of planning, apparently integrated within Programmed, Kinetic and optical art practices. No plans were exhibited, and technical working drawings appeared in the catalogue in place of the photographs of the environments by Kinetic artists Gruppo MID, Gruppo N or Gabriele De Vecchi. A more interesting issue of continuity between notes on paper and installations was to be found in Lucio Fontana, included as an international pioneer of environmental art: his free-handed and little-detailed sketches, printed on the full page in sequence with beautiful photographs of his *Ambienti spaziali*, stated less a functional role than a pouring from the paper signs

²¹⁰ PISTOI 1970: 36.

²¹¹ See FOLIGNO 1967 (the catalogue was exceptionally translated in English). Alongside established and emerging Italian critics (from Giulio Carlo Argan to Germano Celant and Lara Vinca Masini), the presence of Christopher Finch and Udo Kultermann is particularly relevant.

to the space-time continuity through the artist's enigmatic gestures (**figure II.1**).²¹² The following season of conceptualist tendencies would privilege Fontana's drawings' possibility to express an idea of space.

The sections of the chapter follow the relationship between projects and spatial works, in order to highlight the major consequences for the medium of drawing and its developments within the multifaceted trend of conceptualism. The first paragraph is dedicated to a particular kind of project practice (a sub-genre, so to say), that is sketching. Resistant to formal interpretation as statedly anti-technical and de-skilled, sketches emerged from the private studio work and got published or exhibited as carriers of a precise conception of immediate ideation on paper, importantly linked to the early fortune of Arte Povera. In a symmetrical contrast to this conception, the second paragraph outlines a reliance on technique, promoted by some exhibitions and critical predilections for "neo-constructivism", a rather generic definition that gathers various sculptors and painters. Positioning Maurizio Mochetti's early projects within this area of work highlight his conceptualist appropriation of technical drawing. Thirdly, the ideological theme of planning is analysed as a function in the post-May '68 Italian art debate. In particular, the criticism of Giulio Carlo Argan appears as an unavoidable point of reference, even shaping the theoretical frame of distant positions, such as Celant's. This debate ended up pushing the issue of planning against the apparent "absence of project" in Arte Povera and against conceptualism as a form of planning for its own sake, therefore making it liable of arbitrariness and utopia. Such generalisation and the factions that originated from it do not allow us to get into the concrete problems posed to artists who consciously adopt the *genre* of project. Therefore, the last two paragraphs juxtapose two artists considered little less than opposites at the time, in order to force the militant debate and to push it against the two artists' actual practices. Mario Merz, the Arte Povera international champion, pushed the limited status of the project toward spatial expansion, redefining draftsmanship through the act of counting, the transparency of the support and the conceptual dilation. In the same years, the painter Beppe Devalle operated a reduction from three-dimensional painting to a practice on paper that stated an original equivalence of project and drawing. From the marginalised position of Devalle's in the main debate of the time, it is possible to notice how the *genre* of project fundamentally conditioned the status of drawing in the Italian context at large.

²¹² In the 1967 catalogue, G. C. Argan explained this reading by the "notion of field" (taken from Pierre Bourdieu's *champ*) "Space originally signified by the plane and the sphere becomes field; and we know that the notion of field, as an area defined by a certain dynamism of interacting forces, is one that overcomes instinct and relation and instead posits the identity, indeed the indistinction, of space and time" (Giulio Carlo Argan, "Lucio Fontana," in FOLIGNO 1967: 58).

I “An art of discreet signs”: sketching and its rhetoric

The 1969 exhibition *Disegni Progetti* might have accounted for a new tendency of the art scene directly in dialogue with the instances of international debate shaping Western conceptualism at the time. Less than a year later, the Bolognese biennial *Gennaio 70* included the term “projects” in the subtitle *Comportamenti Progetti Mediazioni* (“Attitudes Projects Mediations”) to acknowledge a dimension of work already current in the Italian scene at large.²¹³ The practice of planning was then considered as equally important as “attitudes”, a term directly heired from Szeeman’s 1969 exhibition,²¹⁴ and “mediations”, that is the technological means influencing the artistic research according to the reading of McLuhan.²¹⁵

The responsible for the exhibition, the Bolognese critic Renato Barilli, commented on planning in this way:

“The uncontainable need for physicality leads to exit from all the conventional institutions of the work of art (painting, sculpture, plastic object); but when one passes from the physical sphere – through successive enlargements – to the noosphere, to «utopian» behaviour, in the proper sense of the word, as it is now incapable of being hosted in a geographical-territorial «place» or too expanded to be able to embrace one in concrete ways; then all that remains is «drawing», in a traditional and classical sense of it. Drawing as something moderately physical (some slight trace, some light background) to mentally plan spaces and larger bodies, to acquire a freedom of behaviour within the imagination. In short, this is the new fortune of the «project», in an art of discreet signs, of ideograms that are anything but valid for their intrinsic elegance, but rather for the transcendence they justify, for the impulse to go further, to be executed, even if only ideally, «in large»”.²¹⁶

Although only two artists were named as examples for this passage, the Bolognese artist Giuseppe Del Franco and Antonio Dias, a Brazilian based in Milan,²¹⁷ the original editing of the catalogue exemplified the “new fortune of the project” among the majority of the invited artists. In fact, the volume can be considered as the first Italian echo of the “conceptualist” catalogues of *When Attitudes become Form* or *Konzeption/Conception*, since the invited artists operated directly on their respective

²¹³ The exhibition carried the anachronistic title of *Biennale della giovane pittura*, although already the previous edition accounted for a post-medial approach to the theme *Il tempo dell'immagine*.

²¹⁴ “Rather than on something done, the emphasis now falls on the doing itself: on a behavior, that is, an attitude, that intends to propose itself directly as a form, to borrow the evocative title of last spring’s Bern exhibition” (Renato Barilli, “Coincidenza di opposti,” in BOLOGNA 1970: 12).

²¹⁵ “Technological civilisation”, which has reached its peak with the massive spread of electronic communications, miraculously escapes an apparent fate of systematic automation and reverses itself into its opposite, into a newfound age of capillary contacts, of direct communications, of almost tribal relations: the maximum of impersonal mediation generates by itself, by contrast, a return to times of immediacy (in the proper sense of the term, *ivi*: 13).

²¹⁶ *Ibid*: 16.

²¹⁷ Both the artists used “planning” and the project form in finished works: Del Franco exhibited *Icaro*, which transferred on the room scale the collage-like of chemical formulas, words and diagrams also presented in the pages; Dias’ production of the time consists in an enlargement of the project form too (specifically, the plan) to the canvas size.

four to six, squared pages. Like the European precedents, the approaches' results are so various that it is impossible for them to match Barilli's definition of an "art of discrete signs". Quite the contrary, artists like Vasco Bendini, Lucio Del Pezzo, Gino Marotta and Del Franco himself cluttered up the pages with dense photomontages and collages; and the majority of contributions consist in photographs of executed works. Others manipulated the pages more cryptically, disrupting the idea of the project's possibility to explain a work: such is the case of Luciano Fabro (who left his pages empty), Alighiero Boetti, Marisa Merz, Mario Merz or Giulio Paolini, all which will be discussed elsewhere. However, a general tendency was to coordinate text and images or photographs, in order to simulate private notes or a working diary – the most obvious dimension for the mental and visual process of invention and planning. Such sketching, often executed with simple felt tip pen, is openly de-skilled, formally careless and most informative; a graphic simplicity allows autographic notes to interact with typed text, collaged photographs or geometric diagrams, besides being suitable to be printed in black and white (examples are the pages dedicated to Anselmo, Gino De Dominicis, Livio Marzot or Carlo Bonfà).

Despite their unmindful, perfunctory execution, and indeed because of it, these sketches could carry a non-casual, specific rhetoric of Arte Povera in the moment of its greatest fortune. By 1969, photography or text had been chosen by Germano Celant as the most direct documentation of the new art: "the energy, the idea, the fact, the subversive drive, the active entity, the natural or human or political or artistic dimension [...] do not represent, but present".²¹⁸ For instance, in the book, *Arte Povera*, Penone's already mentioned project is the only drawing included, an exception that proves the rule: it is no coincidence that the sketch is printed without indications of the support, floating together with the texts – not an object in itself, but the most direct image of the artist's creative thought. Furthermore, Celant's conception of planning as the "libero progettarsi dell'uomo" ("mankind's free planning") connected to the ideological discourse of Argan and Marcuse, and such a philosophical vision did not consider planning as a material practice in itself, let alone a "genre".

In order to make a counter-reading of such a "koiné of the sketch" spreading around 1970, that is isolating the contextual rhetoric charged on it and acknowledging its concrete dimension of making, I will take into account the published "sketched corpus" of two artists, who were close to Celant's group: the Rome-based Eliseo Mattiacci and Jannis Kounellis. Both were invited to *Gennaio 70* as exponents of the behavioural and Arte Povera faction of contemporary research, and they had already published sketches in the catalogue of the 1969 exhibition *Al di là della pittura* in Benedetto del Tronto (**figure II.2**). More likely proposals than actual working materials, such drawn notes represent cursory views of the artists' sculptural or environmental works, but inform less about the actual

²¹⁸ CELANT 1969: 225.

realisation than some subjective reference behind the invention,²¹⁹ such as the dedication of Mattiacci's *Zatteronmarante* to Pino Pascali, who prematurely died in 1968.

The use of coloured crayons, which had curiously been typical in Pascali's works on paper, is a constant trait of Eliseo Mattiacci's drawings from the mid-sixties on. In numerous works related to *Tube*, installed at *Lo spazio dell'immagine* in summer 1967, brilliantly coloured, swirling lines expressed the movement and luminous quality of the 150-metre yellow pipe that was freely spread in a room in Foligno. A rare photograph of Mattiacci's workshop dating to the late sixties shows a little drawing of this kind lying among raw materials (**figure II.3**), encouraging us to think of it as a "working drawing" that merged directly into the creative process. However, similar drawings were also executed in large scale and printed as elegant posters, and their early market circulation is documented by two exemplars given to the Brescian collector Mario Bertolini in April 1969.²²⁰

The role of drawing in respect to Mattiacci's work changed in the sketches variously published in 1969-1970. For instance, in the poster of his important solo show at the Paris gallery, Alexander Iolas in December 1969 plays with a notes-like display, as it shows a sort of summary of sketches referring to the installations and sculptures presented in the gallery (**figure II.4**). Nevertheless, they are evidently drawn *d'après* and maintain a joyful expressivity, while their technical details are scarce or intuitive. Mattiacci's own captions denote rather his will to position himself by a timing appropriation of imagery and lexicon already clearly associated to Arte Povera.²²¹ All along the first half of the

²¹⁹ In **figure II.2**, Kounellis gathered in a single sheet two sketches for unrealised works and one related to the *Untitled* executed at the exhibition (a door blocked by a wall of stones, on the page is captioned "porta murata per metà", "half-walled door"). Some figurative elements and references are communicated despite the hasty execution, like the curling cable of the "bidone di benzina con foro" or the reference to his own war experience in Greece ("Finestre con scoch [sic] come ai tempi di Guerra", "windows with tape like in war times"). For the same catalogue, Mattiacci sent a sketch and a proposal for *Zatteronmarante*, realised on the occasion, and a short text with similar figurative and subjective notes ("float a raft made of wooden logs connected by rings, following the waves of the sea, anchored a short distance from the shore. It will be painted all black because I like the wooden sleepers you put under train tracks").

²²⁰ See LA DONAZIONE BIANCA E MARIO BERTOLINI 2015: 152-3, inv. 3, 4, both untitled. On the back of the smaller drawing (inv. 4), executed on a 34.2 x 24.5 cm thin paper sheet, a letter/text by Mattiacci contains whereabouts of his current activities for the solo show that will open in Paris in December 1969 and interesting information about the prices of this kind of material. "Dearest Mario Bertolini, I hope you will come back to Rome soon, so we can spend some time together and I can show you the new work at the new studio. In this period, I am working a lot, I have to prepare the exhibition in paris [sic] at Iolas, and then I will let you know the exact date. I chose you these 2 drawings I hope you like them. I wish you all the best for the Easter holidays. Bye I hug you. The price of the two drawings would be 80,000 each but for you who are a friend I am fine with 60,000 each (send me the one you want bye)" ("Carissimo Mario Bertolini, spero che presto ritorni a Roma, così possiamo stare un po' assieme e farti vedere il nuovo lavoro allo studio nuovo. In questo periodo sto molto lavorando, devo preparare la mostra a parigi [sic] da Iolas, e poi ti comunicherò la data precisa. Ti ho scelto questi 2 disegni spero che ti piacciono. Ti faccio gli auguri per le feste di Pasqua. Ciao ti abbraccio. Il prezzo dei due disegni sarebbe 80,000 ciascuno ma per te che sei un amico mi va bene 60,000 ciascuno (mandami quello che vuoi ciao)" (Eliseo Mattiacci to Mario Bertolini, April 1st, 1969, transcript and translation of the author). A drawing from the series of the *Tube* was printed as a poster for a solo exhibition at Galleria La Tartaruga in May 1967.

²²¹ In the 1969 poster (**figure II.4**), a glass work is captioned as "a diamond-like cone, fixated on a wall, a glass plate is leaned on the cone. Attention, is very fragile", where the apparently common word "appoggiato" (leaned) echoes Mario Merz's work *Appoggiati*, that had been exhibited at *When Attitudes become Form* few months earlier. Other occurrences of arte povera typical "vocabulary" can be found in Mattiacci's sketches sent to Jean Christophe Amman for the catalog of *Processi di pensiero visualizzati* in early 1970: the one referred to the exhibited work *Semina* ("Sowing") might prove Mattiacci's prompt interest in Giuseppe Penone's illustrations in *Arte Povera*, as it repropose a self-body silhouette

seventies, Mattiacci's drawings were typically translated into graphic editions, and only few are attested in exhibits.²²²

As in Mattiacci's case, Jannis Kounellis' sketches published in 1969-70 are formally self-conscious to a point that prevents from considering them as the original impulse to the ideation of the works. More likely, in them the Greek-born artist staged a fascinating contrast between the economy of means (supposedly linked to the immediacy of thought) and a highly refined *mise en page*. His contribution to the Bolognese catalogue consists in elegant compositions of rarefied signs, that can dialogue with the most sophisticated graphics of the time. A comparison with illustrations by the graphic artist Magdalo Mussio (**figure II.5**), for instance, points out the awareness of Kounellis' play with the flat support and allusions to spatial depth: as a generic representation of a gallery room, 42 black dots converge in perspective, each with the caption "foro" ("hole" – piercing through the page itself?); or 39 "numbered stones" cross two blank pages to be arranged "around the wall of the [illegible words]" (**figure II.6**). With a "fine disregard" of technical information and executive precision (he deliberately left many grammar errors that corresponded to his imprecise Italian), these

shaped by nature and a textual expression of the future tense ("I will sow grain in the shape of my body I'll sow grass in the other parts"). Moreover, the drawings and collages published in *Gennaio 70* catalogue have direct references of already famous works of the same area: *Sentire il rumore del mare* (two shells attached as headphones to a landscape-sized photograph of the sea, a work effectively realised in June 1970 at Galleria L'Attico) echoes Walter De Maria's *Ocean Music* from *Drums and Nature* (1968), that had just been commented by Achille Bonito Oliva in a reportage from the United States: "De Maria sweet of hair and voice mounts on the magnetophone a concerto of his own for two oceans and drums. The drums [...] in the concert intervene to counterpoint and complement the ocean noises. The music is not a separately invisible object to be heard, but a continuing trace of the artist's experience" ("De Maria dolce di capelli e di voce monta sul magnetofono un suo concerto per due oceani e batteria. La batteria [...] nel concerto interviene a contrappunto ed integrazione dei rumori dell'oceano. La musica non è un oggetto separatamente invisibile da ascoltare, bensì traccia continuativa dell'esperienza dell'artista", A. Bonito Oliva, "America anti-form," in *Domus*, 478, September 1969: 32); a photograph captioned "cameredaria [sic] in un torrente" could not help but make one think of Penone's *Alpi Marittime*, also exhibited in Bologna; the "tobacco leaves crossed by a wall-to-wall live wire" ("foglie di tabacco attraversate da un filo in tensione da parete a parete") and "a large pile of condensed tar but that it remains somewhat soft [;] a cylindrical steel rod is placed on it and slowly passes through it" ("un grande mucchio di catrame condensato ma che resti un po' molle [;] vi è appoggiata un'asta cilindrica di acciaio che lentamente l'attraversa") mixed elements from Pierpaolo Calzolari's, Gilberto Zorio's and Robert Smithson's most iconic and recent works; lastly, the sketch for an unrealised *Misurazione a passi srotolando* that is a "rotolo di carta da giornale diametro cm. 80 [;] la lunghezza va misurata in passi" ("Measuring in steps by unrolling: 80 cm. diameter roll of newsprint [;] the length should be measured in steps") might be a reference to Piero Manzoni's *Lines* that were famously executed with a printing roller. In general, Mattiacci's short captions are rather expressive than descriptive, as shown by the frequency of hyperbolic adjectives and neologisms: in the 1969 poster, see for instance "Una bandiera bianca / non è una bandiera / è un'enorme manicaacchiappavento" ("A white flag is not a flag is an enormous wind-catcher-sleeve").

²²² An exemplar from many drawings executed between 1971 and 1972 and related to the aluminum work *Tavole delle verifiche delle varie scritture*, presented at the 36th Venice biennial, *Verifica di tre scritture* ("Verification of three writings", 1972, coloured marker and ink on paper, 50 x 70 cm) was exhibited at the graphic show *Ricognizione 73*, organised by Italo Mussa in 1973, see SANTA MARIA CAPUA VETERE 1973. Mattiacci was included in the Christmas group show *Disegni* at Galleria La Salita, opening on December 18th, 1975, but no documentation exists about the works exhibited. At *Drawing/Transparence*, Mattiacci sent a 1975 drawing for the work *Essere* ("Being") that was realised only in 1978, see VADUZ 2019: 163-164. It is worth mentioning that a sketch for the performance *Sostituzione rituale – I pesci* ("Ritual Substitution – Fishes") was published as a limited-edition lithograph by Bolaffi Arte when Mattiacci won the Bolaffi prize in 1978. All these examples contain the typical traits of Mattiacci's draftsmanship of the seventies: he sketched his own works as objects (they are often *d'après*), with rapid signs and a gestural hatching (almost similar to Robert Rauschenberg's transfer drawing technique) and an original use of brilliant colours.

sketches recapitulate the ultimately painterly quality of Kounellis' installations, their colour arrangements, balance of masses and linear composition. It is no coincidence that he had recently experienced theatre collaborations as a scenographer, testified also in the form of drawn scripts that draw largely from a Surrealist repertoire.²²³

In a 1968 interview, Kounellis had stated that, "A lack of planning is an enormous availability. You go to a place and make a work. You get to be well-disposed toward to everything you find":²²⁴ coherently with such skepticism toward the a priori function of the project, the moment of invention registered and/or intentionally (re)staged in the sketches is the theatrical appearance of the works, in a way that maintains its obscure references and mysterious narration.

Being fragmentedly known through publications and largely dispersed, corpora of sketches like Mattiacci's or Kounellis' do not shed light on an actual private practice of daily and rapid planning on paper. To answer this question, one would have to consider less dispersed corpora on paper than Mattiacci's or Kounellis'. Curiously absent from *Gennaio 70*, the Emilian artist Claudio Parmiggiani could provide such an example. Between 1969 and 1971, he used sketch pads of small and medium size to plan installation and performances, in drawings that remained mostly private until recently.²²⁵ The artist typically set the basic scheme of the gallery space (the intuitive intersection of perspective lines that is a sort of standard spatial design, from Fontana to Kounellis, see **figures II.1, 6, 7**), then introduced colourful elements that caused estrangement, surprise or disbelief: among other objects, Parmiggiani imagined cubes of blood, holes in water, "an egg pierced by a spear", an animal skin filled with a fragment of sky, a human brain placed on a shelf, etc. The words inscribed in the drawings reveal a few references for his visionary imagery, namely Surrealism (see the names of "Savinio, Klee, De Chirico, Magritte" listed on a page), Pascali's *32 metri quadrati di mare circa* ("About 32 Squared Metres of Sea"), that was exhibited at *Lo spazio dell'immagine* and seems to inspire Parmiggiani's idea for a *Labirinto con vetri* ("Labyrinth with glasses"); or Kounellis' use of colour (for instance, in a project for some piles of stones and black rags).²²⁶

²²³ For a recapitulation of Kounellis' theatrical collaborations of the late sixties and a careful reading of some drawings for performances (namely, a four-part "progetto" drawn in ink and titled *Schema di spettacolo comunità*, published in *Sipario*, in 1969; and the set of ten graph-paper sketches for the inedited 1971 performance *Boogie-Woogie*) see LANZAFAME 2021.

²²⁴ KOUNELLIS 1968.

²²⁵ For instance, many sheets used around 1970 by Parmiggiani come from or are still attached to 21.7 x 28 cm or 34,5 x 50 cm sketch pads. See PARMIGGIANI 1995 as the largest collection of "projects" for two- and three-dimensional works. Parmiggiani's works on paper were first exhibited in 1985 and commented by Maurizio Calvesi, who considered his drawn work "a strand of his work completely independent of his hitherto best-known production", that "indeed bring into focus a whole course of Parmiggiani's thoughts, not lateral, but equally central; parallel" (MODENA 1985: 7).

²²⁶ Respectively, see PARMIGGIANI 1995: 32, 35, 46, figg. 23, 35, 45 (dated to August 1970).

A trend can be observed in the little studies made from 1970 to 1971 of a progressive reduction of his interventions to “imperceptible presences”.²²⁷ Around that time, Parmiggiani imagined an installation for the Galleria Christian Stein in Turin, titled *Microcosmo*. An arrangement of tiny “oggetti trovati” (“found objects”) delineates – as it is captioned on one of the sheets – “costellazioni di povere cose gettate” in a “cielo di rottami” (“constellations of poor things thrown away” in a “sky of debris”): the relative sketches represent tiny shapes or dots scattered across the walls and numbered (just as in Kounellis’s “stones”, **figure II.6**) to match a list of objects the artists had been using since 1966 (**figure II.7**).²²⁸ The illustrated spaces are often named “ambienti”, “luoghi” or “stanze” (“environments, places, rooms”), and the sketch pad’s little scale goes hand-in-hand with Parmiggiani’s invention: that is, a more and more direct relationship acts between the “discreet signs” on the paper and the imagined interventions. For instance, the use of feathers to create various objects (spheres, circles, and a snake) is perfectly rendered by tiny, gentle commas of variously colored crayons; in the project for *Luce, luce, luce*, some heaps of pure pigment are represented by finger-blended yellow spots; Parmiggiani even planned to simply occupy a room with the little signs of a match struck on the wall.²²⁹ This formal correspondence of drawn signs and imagined spatial elements also determines the fact that these kinds of sketches are usually never followed by further and more detailed planning stages.

Parmiggiani exceptionally exhibited three drawings of this kind (**figure II.8**) at Rassegna San Fedele in Milan, in late 1970. They were projects for an artificial rainbow to be produced in a room, probably elaborated between 1969 and 1970. They can be associated to the larger group of colourful sketches dedicated to light, fire, colours and feathers, and the realised work, *Arcobaleno piumato*, exhibited the Galleria Stein in Turin in June 1970, that was accompanied by a poetic homage by Parmiggiani’s friend and poet Corrado Costa in the catalogue.²³⁰ Like in the feathered objects, the rainbow projects sent to Milan reveal debts to Pascali’s playful recreation of natural imagery as well as overt Surrealist references: they “consisted in the transposition of a natural event transferred as it is, ‘handy’ in this sense; the childish gesture of touch the cloud, the moon, the rainbow, a scissor cut of a piece of sky with rainbow. Magritte with the cubed sky, the “painting in its pure state”, in the air, the rainbow at home”.²³¹ The mention of “childish gestures” appears appropriate to describe Parmiggiani’s attitude

²²⁷ A sketch dated to August 5th, 1971 is captioned “ambiente con presenze minime / rarefazione / e impercettibilità / una percettibilità attraverso presenze minime” (ibid: 63, fig. 67).

²²⁸ In this sense, the installation would have worked as a repertoire of past works. See ibid: 64-69, fig.68-73.

²²⁹ Respectively, see ibid: 49-53, fig. 49-54 (feathers); 31, fig.21 (finger-blended colour); 61, fig. 64-65 (the match). Another sketch from 1971 plans two variations of an installation that includes a pictorial surface (a canvas or a paper sheet) marked by little coloured commas that are repeated on the wall (p. 62, fig. 66).

²³⁰ See TURIN 1970C and Chiara Portesine’s commentary of the poem in COSTA 2021: 397, 399-340.

²³¹ “The present project: the artificial creation of a rainbow in an environment consisting solely of water, light, (artificial) clouds consists of the transposition of a natural event reported as such, 'at hand' in this sense; the ‘childlike’ gesture of

toward sketching, a form of planning that preserved simplicity and held drawing to its very minimal terms.

The section of the exhibition that included Parmiggiani's sketches was titled *Cose possibili* ("Possible things"), a collection of unrealised proposals that is a further example of the "fortune of the project" acclaimed by Barilli. The introduction to the section in the catalogue testifies the mixture of sociological, political and utopian issues carried by the theme. "Possible [things]: but not now, not here. In our society, the gap between what is thought and what is done is getting wider and wider. The done things cancel the thought things: and few men decide the things that must be done and the things that must not be done. [...] "We say: "The project of a rainbow is worth more than a real rainbow on the river Congo". Thought things, more than those done, this time will condition the relationships among men. Serve as an example for future upheavals".²³² Although the *Cose possibili* section still raised reactions of skepticism against the arbitrariness of "weird idea[s]",²³³ the more careful observers could point out that the already achieved status of *genre* of the project normalised and loosened its provocative or visionary tension, despite the variety of proposal in the section. It was an early sign of weariness for conceptualism in general, "which, in the end, is a koiné today, and it is not easy to be out of it".²³⁴

II "*Teleplastia ortogonale*": projects for spaces around 1970

At the same time *Cose possibili* opened in Milan, a different approach to the theme of project was experimented in the IV Rassegna d'arte contemporanea in Acireale. The 1970 edition of the Sicilian show was titled *18 m³ x 23 artisti* ("18 Cubic Metres for 23 Artists") and grouped artists from all around Italy, although the curators, Nello Ponente, Lara Vinca Masini and Aldo Passoni, privileged their own cities of provenance, that is Rome, Florence and Turin.²³⁵ White cells of 2 x 2 x 3 metres were arranged in a large salon at the Palazzo Municipale and the artists were invited to plan a work within that standard measure. They were asked "to articulate their own singular space [...] in function of their own kind of operation, providing altogether a graphic project with the instruction for the practical realisation",²³⁶ that was accomplished by a local architect. Masini explained the exhibition

touching the cloud, the moon, the rainbow, a cut with scissors of a piece of sky with a rainbow. Magritte with the cubed sky, 'pure painting', in the air, the rainbow at home" (MILAN 1970: 31).

²³² Ibid:11.

²³³ BUZZATI 1970.

²³⁴ VINCITORIO 1971: 31.

²³⁵ By the opening of the exhibition, the titled had changed into *18 m³ x 25 artisti*, as some local artists were added to the show (but not to the catalogue). Vittorio Fagone, close to curator Masini, reviewed the exhibition, pointing out its limitations due to the provincial context, see FAGONE 1970: 11.

²³⁶ Television broadcast *Cinemondo*, CN136 "Acireale: 4a Rassegna d'Arte Contemporanea Acireale Turistico Termale", 1/11/1970 (CN013603), Corona Cinematografica. The full broadcast is available at the link:

concept as “an interior design problem”: “our intention has been to promote a real design fact, which started, so to speak, from within each one's work type, causing a rebound and a snap toward the outside, so as to precisely qualify and characterise it”.²³⁷ The aim of the curators was to respond to those tendencies liable of escapist or imaginative planning, overtly depending on models from United States Land Art. The polemic toward Arte Povera was explicit in Passoni's words, that criticised “certain abnormal reactions that were originated from the possibility to act in full freedom, but in a dilated space that belongs to us only through induction, through a visibility mediated by the culture of information, rather than by an effective practice”.²³⁸

Against the risk of utopia, a more traditional technical planning was selected and emerged from the projects sent and published in the catalogue. The real space was conceived as entirely available to the project, “due to its anonymity and undifferentiation, [the 18 cubic metres cell] can be attacked and nullified more directly [...] in highlighting a mental process, which remains the dominant of the current artistic process”.²³⁹ Brought to a neutrality almost coincidental to the blank page of the project, the real space was subject to the a priori planning in a way antithetical to the “well disposition” sought by Kounellis with the “lack of the project”.

Masini resumed the typologies put in action on the page and in the space: from a sort of “aggression” by overturning “the perspectives and the real geometrical relationships”, to a focus on a single object distracting from the presence of the walls; to the manipulation of light and movement; to the nullification by leaving the space empty or marked by few signs. Unsurprisingly, the large majority of projects show use of a graphic language pertaining to technical drawing, from sections to plans or isometric projection of the parallelepiped of the cell, to more structured diagrams involving light sources and perspective. This predominant visual culture of technical projects was first of all a direct symptom of the critics' preference for the so called “neo-constructivists” area, represented, for example, by the Roman artists Giuseppe Uncini, Carlo Lorenzetti or Nicola Carrino. The starting element of the neutral space too went along with the approach of some artists, who in fact elaborated on the geometrical elements of the cell itself. Some of the published diagrams highlight such a geometric approach: this is the case of the side wall doubled to hide Piervirgilio Fogliati's *Generatore idraulico di suono bianco* (“Hydraulic Generator of White Sound”, **figure II.9**);²⁴⁰ or Maurizio

<https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000083502/2/acireale-4a-rassegna-d-arte-contemporanea-acireale-turistico-termale.html?startPage=600>.

²³⁷ Lara Vinca Masini, “Dall'environment come denotazione e identificazione di spazio-oltre all'interiori-design come caratterizzazione e personalizzazione di spazio-in”, in ACI REALE 1970: p. n.).

²³⁸ Aldo Passoni, *ibid.*

²³⁹ Lara Vinca Masini *ibid.*

²⁴⁰ An “idea-progetto per uno strumento a liquidi produttore di rumore bianco organizzato” was already mentioned in the catalogue of the artist's solo show in Florence, also curated by Passoni (who mentioned Moholy Nagy as precursor for Fogliati's research) and Masini, who argued that this artist-“inventor's” projects were “pushed to the edge of utopia, not

Nannucci's *Orientamento* ("Orientation", **figure II.10**), a suspended magnetic needle of which the drawing of graph paper presented the scheme of the cardinal points.

In the drawings of an artist uninvited to the show, Maurizio Mochetti, the problems at the core of *18 m³ x 23 artisti* appears to be verified as an "interior design problem" articulated in the language of technical drawing, a primacy of the project and a neutral spatial conception. In fact, one wonders why he wasn't invited in the Sicilian exhibition: fresh from a great success, he had already been included alongside Paolini and Carrino at the Venice biennial of few months earlier, that in many ways was a track for the theme proposed by Masini, Passoni and Ponente.

As a matter of fact, his work troubled from the very beginning the label of "constructivism", that was the most obvious to frame his technology-based production. In 1968, Marisa Volpi argued that his objects overcame a dependency on formal and visual qualities of geometry characterising Op and Programmed art, as well as Minimalism, and she coined in relation to Mochetti one of the first Italian formulas of "conceptualism", that is a "mental analysis of visual experience".²⁴¹

This expression might correctly frame the reading of one of the two works presented in Mochetti's first solo show at the Galleria La Salita in late 1968, that received an exceptional visibility and appreciation. *Due dischi di luce* ("Two light discs") lied respectively on the wall and on the floor of the gallery, and an elastic band was stretched between two points of the circumferences (**figure II.11**). The elegant display could recall a long tradition of geometrical abstraction from El Lissitzky to Fausto Melotti; however, the visual appearance did not reveal a piece of information that could only be grasped mentally, namely that the rubber band ran parallel to the line between the two discs' centres (and therefore one end was the exact projection of the other).

The tension introduced by such conceptualist meaning of the work also comes through the volume that was published for the show by La Salita. *Dieci progetti di Maurizio Mochetti*²⁴² is an unusual publication for the gallery materials usually edited at the time, and it can be rather compared to architecture or design portfolios. Volpi signed the introduction, which opens with a quote from Nikolay Punin about Malevich: "Malevich is a bullet shot by the human spirit into non-existence,

in the sense of absolute unrealisability, but of contingent unrealisability" (spinte al limite dell'utopia, non nel senso dell'irrealizzabilità assoluta, ma della irrealizzabilità contingente", FIRENZE 1970: p. n.).

²⁴¹ Commenting *Calotte (Oggetto polimerico)* ("Calottes. Polymeric object"), two white semi-spheres lying on the ground, Volpi pointed out an anti-material function of plastic, "to move attention from the full physicality of certain pop-art (Oldenburg) and from the lyrism connected to the physicality of post-informal paint, to a mental analysis of the visual experience" (ROME 1968A: [2]). Mochetti worked at a "level of intellectual, rather the physical perception, and their proposition's space is essentially that of thought" (ROME 1968am unnumbered pages). Volpi was very updated in respect to the American art scene and was apparently introducing some categories from the debate on early Conceptual Art. Such an early hypothesis of a Roman conceptualism would have been supplanted by the Turin and Milanese group commented by Celant and Trini, who in fact soon replaced Volpi in the critical support to Mochetti's work.

²⁴² ROME 1968B. The projects are all dated to 1968, except two from 1965 and 1967. The original drawings have different dimensions, supports and techniques but are all leveled on the printed page format (21.3 x 24.8 cm), see CELANT 2003: 17, 22, 31, 35, 37-38, nn. 7, 10, 23, 24, 30, 31, 32, 33.

into the pure emptiness of intuition, where the only realities are relations and connections”.²⁴³ On the track of the contraposition of Tatlin’s constructivism, based on an experimental analysis of materials, and Malevich’s immaterial “pure intuition”, she argued that Mochetti distanced himself from a formal application of geometry (“aiming at evading the theme of optical illusion, and the stillness of vision it implies [...] albeit working with apparently geometrical elements, he’s not a formal artist”)²⁴⁴ in order to involve thinking. Interestingly, Volpi might have known some early private drawings of the artist, where some graphic elements representing immaterial elements such as light and sound recall Malevich’s graphic and Futurism (Giacomo Balla) (**figures II.12-13**).²⁴⁵

The published projects show solid skills in technical drawing that he acquired in his former training at the Liceo Artistico, the Faculty of Architecture and Academy of Fine Arts,²⁴⁶ and nevertheless Volpi argued that Duchamp’s “asphyxiated formalism” had a major role in their conception. Quoting *Les Témoins Oculistes*, a detail from the *Large Glass* that was well-known as a graphic at the time, Volpi found a manumission of the geometrical constructions toward a dead end and a non-sense that were considered already conceptualist.²⁴⁷ Mochetti’s “investigation on processes and relations, materials-trajectories-spaces, brings to situations of hermeticism and the absurd (some projects are also physically unrealisable and hypothesise impossible conditions). [...] When we have understood the conditions and the process that obtain these compositions (ideas, materials, relationships), we get stuck in a thinking direction closed in itself”.

Guided by Volpi’s preliminary observations, the reader of the 1968 volume might have noticed the manipulations operated by Mochetti from within his graphic language of neatness and exactness. All the projects were titled by numbers and captioned by a short, dry text by the artist himself. *Project one* is related to *Generatrice* (“Generator”), the second work exhibited at La Salita and then multiple times between 1968 and 1970,²⁴⁸ an aluminum axis rotating from the wall and describing a semicircle on the ground. The title of the work refers to the geometric definition of the “generator” of a cone, which is embodied by the axis itself, and the drawing makes visible the construction of the cone, which required to be mentally imagined looking at the slowly moving metal object (**figure II.14**).

²⁴³ ROME 1968B: [3].

²⁴⁴ Marisa Volpi in ROME 1968B.

²⁴⁵ Malevich was on the agenda of Volpi herself, and an edition of Malevich’s writings with the title *Suprematismo: il mondo non oggettivo* was published in 1969 by De Donato.

²⁴⁶ After his diploma degree, Mochetti attended architecture at Università La Sapienza in Rome for two years, before leaving for the Academy.

²⁴⁷ Echoing this earlier reading in 1969, Tommaso Trini valued the artist’s position within the art system as “as close to Kinetic artists as to conceptual ones, who aim at a hermetic or strictly subjective expression. In his case too, rarefaction, suspect and paradox for suspended situations” (TRINI 1969A).

²⁴⁸ *Generatrice* was one of the two works exhibited at La Salita in 1968. It was then installed four times in 1969 (in his show at the Galleria dell’Ariete and at Polignano a Mare when Mochetti won the Pino Pascali Prize, as well as in Italian group shows in Hamburg and Paris); four times in 1970 (for instance, at *Gennaio 70*) and again in 1971 and 1973. See CELANT 2003: 242-244.

Moreover, it is interesting to notice that *Generatrice* reproduces the very movement of a compass on the paper:²⁴⁹ such correspondence of movement, lines and drawing is a fundamental element in Mochetti's projects and points out a conceptual relationship between the tracing gestures and the elements to be installed in space, or processes, that follow straight (and sometimes invisible) lines too: sun beams, laser, elastic bands and their shadows, and sound. *Project Four* has never been realised, being one of those "futuristic projects because the technology needed for them has not yet been perfected",²⁵⁰ mentioned by Tommaso Trini in 1969 (**figure II.15**). The drawing represents a room crossed diagonally by a double-colour cable that runs on the edges and walls and would modify the perception of the environment. The diagrammatic representation and reduction of the space could have perfectly matched the neutral cell of $18\text{ m}^3 \times 23\text{ artisti}$; in other words, Mochetti's planning presupposes the unconditional availability of the space and its adherence to the project. The rooms in which he operates are considered in their geometrical properties only, as are the elements installed (light, sound, surfaces and moving objects). In a review of the exhibition written by Claudio Cintoli in the militant magazine, *Cartabianca*, we grasp how much this conceptual primacy of the project could coalesce the very current conceptual and anti-objective instances. In Mochetti's projects, "the object in its most elementary and immediate form is also the negation of itself"; and further, "in the floating zone of thought the work acquires an a-gravitational status [...] There are in this lucid orthogonal teleplasty: allusion to appearance and hypnotic tactility, the object and its double, the image and its reflection, presence and absence".²⁵¹

"[The projects] published by M.[ochetti] aren't works; the realised works posed the problem of not failing the original project; at their origin, all the projects are works". Introducing the artist in the 1970 Venice biennial catalogue, Trini was keen to assert the non-autonomy of the published *Progetti* in favour of the environmental fruition of the works (possibly in order to chase away suspicion of a practice too close to industrial design, as Mochetti had already in fact designed jewels around 1965-1967). On the other hand, the critic acutely formulates a sort of pressure of the projects ("the problem of not failing the original project") and its consequence as the works' "closed system", an expression drawn from notions of cybernetics and topology. In fact, Mochetti's "objects" coincide with "an effect wholly identifying with its producing mechanism, to become pure sound, pure light, pure perception", as they tend to a "micromovement toward stasis", that is a conclusion in a "repetition stall" ("the generatrix comes and goes, the sphere rises and falls, the light line increases and decreases, the light

²⁴⁹ A 1967 work installed in Francavilla in 1969, *Filo con matita* ("Cord with pencil") materialised this metaphorical correspondence ("a cord, hanging from the ceiling of a given space, has a pencil tied to the lower end. With the pencil a circle has been drawn on the ceiling, exploiting the full length of the cord that therefore corresponds to the radius of the circle", *ibid*: 30, 241, 231).

²⁵⁰ TRINI 1969C.

²⁵¹ CINTOLI 1968.

point closes on its orbit”).²⁵² They are “topological events in no longer static structures”: curiously, Trini adopted the same mathematical field, topology, that had been recently used by American Post-Minimalist criticism to overcome the static, objective geometric space reading of Minimalism. Rather than anti-formal “constant process of spatial warp”²⁵³ involving both the work and the observer, though, Mochetti’s “topology” concerns a positional analysis of closed spaces and their internal relations. In this sense, clearly topological are the titles of the two works installed in Venice, $A \rightarrow A$ and $A \rightarrow B$, that also indicate how the two contiguous rooms were thought as in a sequence. The respective projects were illustrated in the catalogue as two spatial isometric diagrams (**figure II.16**).²⁵⁴ Visiting the Central Pavilion, one first met $A \rightarrow A$, a round space in which a projected laser point moved along the round walls describing a circumference; in the following room, $A \rightarrow B$, also known as *Balestra* (“Crossbow”), was a large room with two recorders on the opposite walls, that produced an arrow’s sound of departure and arrival, slightly delayed as if the distance between the walls were longer than perceived. On the one hand, the drawings focused on the invisible elements, like the trajectory of the (imagined) arrow; on the other, the anti-object realisation of the works obscured the technological apparatus.²⁵⁵

Going back to the 1968 publication, the *Project Ten* is titled on the sheet *Progetto per un cilindro che proietta due immagini uguali* (“Project for a cylinder that projects two identical images”, **figure II.17**) and represents an isometric projection based on a scale of three tones indicating, respectively, the black cylinder, the rays (the gray hatch tone) and the white circles projected by the light. This drawing in particular reveals a probable direct model in the graphics of Francesco Lo Savio, the Roman artist who took his life in 1963, and whose figure was being relaunched in the late sixties (as a precursor of Minimal Art, for instance) also thanks to the Galleria La Salita (**figure II.18**). Volpi had promptly indicated a link between the two artists, both ascribed to the lineage of Malevic and Reinhardt in her critical reading.²⁵⁶ Mochetti resumed Lo Savio on his operative side, where he overtly drew on industrial design: his projects from the early sixties, that resembled intentionally blueprints (with limited shades and the possibility of being printed in inverted tones) and circulated as heliographs too, were published in a volume analogous to Mochetti’s, also edited by La Salita in 1969.²⁵⁷

²⁵² TRINI 1970A.

²⁵³ DE BRUYN 2006: 33.

²⁵⁴ Later that year, the biennial projects illustrated Mochetti’s work also in ROME 1970D.

²⁵⁵ “Mochetti operates his artificial-satellite-like micromotors indoors, off stage, as non-theatrical instruments, as fundamental as support points”(TRINI 1970A).

²⁵⁶ Both the Roman artists manipulated light, surfaces and space as a “digging into the matrices of optical and plastic sensitivity, as matrices non only of the visual, but the global experience of the world [...]. [Mochetti] analyses the spatial incidences of light and shadow by playing on the correspondences: light - shadow, concave - convex, empty - full, opaque - transparent, etc. [...] Lo Savio with no different intensity focused his attention on the phenomenon of light: its appearance, its concentration, dispersion, incidence in volumes and space” (VOLPI 1968A).

²⁵⁷ See ROME 1969.

The grade of neatness and formal elaboration of the projects (often executed in large formats, on coloured papers and with the use of collage), as well as Lo Savio's model, are evident by looking at an earlier stage in Mochetti's practice of planning, documented by a group of sheets of smaller dimensions.²⁵⁸ These working sketches may effectively have served to propose ideas for environmental works to gallerists like Gian Tomaso Liverani. Despite the rough execution, some determining features are already set at this stage of ideation: for instance, the decomposition in room views and details of mechanisms accompanied by short captions; or, more interestingly, the use of the bicolour red-and-blue pencil, that conditions the topological binarism of the process comprised between the state and time of departure and those of arrival.²⁵⁹ A first idea for $A \rightarrow B$ (**figure II.19**) consists in a vertical section of the room, that highlights the emptiness of the space crossed by the sound (the thin, dashed line). It is interesting to notice that Mochetti would later return to this first version of the project (and not to the one in the biennial catalogue), in order to edit a lithograph with Edizioni Artestudio in Macerata (**figure II.20**).²⁶⁰ *Colpo di balestra* ("Crossbow shot") translates the theme of the invisibility of sound by leaving the paper surface blank, and it applies the topological concept of the work installed in Venice directly onto the sheet, whose opposite short edges are marked with red and blue ink. In one of the most "dematerialised" drawings to date in the Italian context, Mochetti seems to have provocatively taken to an extreme a concept formulated already in the sketches, inscribed and underlined in red in **figure II.19**: "l'oggetto non esiste, esistono soltanto i fenomeni" ("the object doesn't exist, only the phenomena exist").

Irreducible to a problem of critical labels, Mochetti's dialogue with more openly conceptual positions is proved by some later works, and drawings that thematised autonomously the theme of project itself.²⁶¹ The Duchampian tautology of his "closed systems" is first set through a topological approach to the sheet of paper itself. This is literally stated in the drawing sent to *Drawing/Transparence*, dated to 1974: it is an entirely blank sheet, meant to be "suspended from the ceiling in a way that both sides can be seen" (**figure II.21**).²⁶² Its title is written on both sides and reads: "Foglio di carta di dimensioni 70 x 50, reca su entrambi i lati la descrizione del progetto" ("Sheet of paper measuring 70 x 50, with

²⁵⁸ See CELANT 2003: 26, 28-29, 53. I thank Daniela Lancioni for sharing with me the images and much information about the five sketches.

²⁵⁹ For instance, in the project for an unrealised *Asta che taglia lo spazio* ("Rod that cuts space", see CELANT 2003: 29, n. 18) a blue vertical line corresponds to the starting position of the object, while a red area occupies the plane crossed to reach the position of arrival. The red pencil also reminds of the use of laser, for instance in *Lama di luce* ("Blade of light", *ibid*: 29, n. 17).

²⁶⁰ *Colpo di balestra*, lithograph on paper, is signed 1970; though, the date can refer to the "work" reminded by the lithograph. The corresponding drawing, executed in 1971, is slightly larger (51 x 72.8 cm) and made on cardboard.

²⁶¹ For instance, see the two ideas *Progetto a lunga scadenza* ("Long-term project", 1973: "The project is based on an idea that is not declared. Over time "useless" objects are presente separately. They are fragments of an idea in the process of being made", *ibid*: 234, n. 85) and *Lavoro non completo* ("Unfinished work", 1974: "A work is presented incomplete on the walls of a given space; the rest is in the catalogue", *ibid*: 234, n. 102).

²⁶² CELANT 2003: 234, n. 92.

a description of the project on both sides”).²⁶³ It is not difficult to spot a reference to Giulio Paolini, who from the late sixties exhibited canvases and drawings inscribed with their titles only.²⁶⁴ For that matter, it was not difficult to recognise the conceptualist instances that presided over initiatives such as, which recognised the project as taking priority over the perception of space. In this sense, precisely the participation of Paolini, or that of another conceptualist such as Luca Patella, seemed to overcome the constructivist hypothesis by understanding the function of the project in a radical sense. The latter sent a typewritten form stating itself that “my project is the ideas explained in the five tables [...] that I’m presenting in the show”²⁶⁵ (that is, excerpts from books by psychologists Harry Stack Sullivan and Erich Fromm). Paolini, on his part, provocatively refrained from any drawn, technical or geometric representation of space, and sent a handwritten letter containing very basic instructions for the installation of 1967 work *Qui*, a definition of space that made linguistic expression and spatial experience coincide, bypassing the function of the project altogether.²⁶⁶

III *Ideologies of the project*

As already mentioned, both Mochetti and Paolini were invited to the Italian pavilion at the 1970 Venice biennial, which went down in history for its thematisation of *Ricerca e progettazione* (“Research and planning”) in the special show *Proposta per un’esposizione sperimentale* (“Proposal for an experimental exhibition”).²⁶⁷ Curators Umbro Apollonio and Dietrich Mahlow collected in the central pavilion artworks and machines from the twenties to the sixties, in order to account the technological impulse of the avantgarde up to the present, with a didactic attention to the relationship between art and society. Starting from Tatlin’s *Monument to the Third International* and ideally concluding at artists like Rafael Soto, the selection privileged optical art, Programmed art and sorts

²⁶³ The work is also listed in the catalogue of Mochetti’s solo show at Galleria dell’Ariete opened on November 11th, 1976, with this description: “Sheet of paper (70 x 50 cm) bears a description of the project on both sides. There is a proportional relationship between the two surfaces” (MILAN 1976B: 10, n. 3).

²⁶⁴ See, for instance, *Primo appunto sul tempo*, 1968 (see DISCH 2008, vol. 1: 168-169, n. 148, or GPO-0148) or *Mille Val d’Ognes*, 1970 (GPO-0182), that was exhibited in an important Paolini’s show in Rome at the beginning of 1970, very likely visited by Mochetti.

²⁶⁵ “Il mio progetto sono le idee esposte sulle cinque tabelle [...] che presento alla mostra” (Luca Patella, work included in ACIREALE 1970).

²⁶⁶ “I do not envision any particular closure or delimitation of the space reserved for me: simply, in the centre of the floor corresponding to that space, I would place a work of mine, from 1967, entitled “Qui” [“Here”]. It consists of three plexiglass disks to be superimposed on each other, each of which bears the engraving of a letter. The three letters would then read, in transparence and from above: qui” (“Non prevedo alcuna chiusura o delimitazione particolare dello spazio a me riservato: semplicemente, al centro del pavimento corrispondente a tale spazio, collocherei un mio lavoro, del 1967, intitolato “Qui”. Consiste di tre dischi di plexiglass da sovrapporre l’uno all’altro, ognuno dei quali reca l’incisione di una lettera. Le tre lettere si leggeranno quindi, in trasparenza e dall’alto: qui”, Giulio Paolini in *ibid*).

²⁶⁷ In addition to the biennial catalogue, a volume with this title which collected essays by the curators divided into historical and thematic sections, was published with some delay after the opening (see APOLLONIO, CAMEL, MAHLOW 1970).

of neo-constructivism according to the critical orientation of the expert committee, dominated by Giulio Carlo Argan. Interestingly, projects themselves (plans on paper, models, blueprints) had a secondary role in the exhibition display, that favoured rather a spectacularisation of the machine: among the few works on paper exhibited, there were drawings and oscillographs automatically executed by Zoran Radović's ornamentographer, or the graphic computer images by the Computer Technic Group, CTG. It goes without saying that planning was meant in a strictly technological sense (as evident from section titles such as *Produzione manuale, meccanica, elettronica, concettuale*) at the expense of other areas. In fact, the analysis of the archival documents relating to the organisation actually had shown how a few attempts to include a larger spectrum of contemporary researches, from Land Art to Arte Povera, were frustrated.²⁶⁸ The artists invited of the Italian pavilion reflected an analogous orientation, that evidently opposed the recently fortunate Arte Povera and Celant's critical discourse:²⁶⁹ more than half were painters and sculptors of an earlier generation (Carlo Battaglia, Claudio Verna, Agostino Bonalumi and Nicola Carrino), and the representation of conceptualism marginalised the Turinese group (of which Paolini constituted an exception in many respects), by the invitations to the Roman Sergio Lombardo and Mochetti.²⁷⁰

III.1 *The Arganian "destiny" of the project*

The influence of Giulio Carlo Argan in the Italian critical debate about planning was deeper than his direct and recurring involvement in important exhibitions like the Venice biennial may demonstrate. More than a decade earlier, the Communist art historian had already formulated an original and precise theory that assigned an absolute centrality to the term "progetto". His 1964 essay, *Progetto e destino* ("Project and destiny"), he pointed out a radical dichotomy in respect to planning between the two main current trends of the early sixties, Pop art and "Gestaltic art".²⁷¹ If the former abolished the practice of planning in the passive (and consumeristic) acceptance of given images and objects,

²⁶⁸ The project of a section on Land Art failed and only a diapositive of Michael Heizer's *Displaced/Replaced Mass No. 1 Silver Spring* (1969) from the Dwan Gallery was projected in large scale. Moreover, Leo Castelli refused to mediate the loan of a Bruce Nauman's "laser work" from the collection of Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, see PORTINARI 2017: 137, 156.

²⁶⁹ See the account of the critical reaction, especially in relation to Germano Celant's and Tommaso Trini's reviews, in PORTINARI 2017: 152-153.

²⁷⁰ The journal *Flash Art* edited seven lithographs, one for each of the artists invited for the Italian pavilion (Carlo Battaglia, Nicola Carrino, Sergio Lombardo, Agostino Bonalumi, Claudio Verna, Mochetti and Paolini). The edition testifies a range of possibilities with which artists translated their work into graphics: Battaglia, Carrino and Verna simply reduced to drawing and etching the typical patterns of their paintings or sculptures; proper projects were edited and printed as graphics by Lombardo, Bonalumi and Mochetti; Paolini published a new version of an autonomous, text-based work.

²⁷¹ With this term, Argan grouped op art, Arte Programmata ("Programmed art") and Kinetic art as they relied on the principles of Gestalt psychology.

the latter “starts from the project but it purposely does not realise it, it merely reifies it as a project”.²⁷² This opposition (“on one side, the project that does not create things, on the other side things made without project”)²⁷³ is the result of a crisis in planning caused by the industrial technology, which has “disintegrated (alienated)”²⁷⁴ the link existing from the project to the object. The only possible answer to the new technological culture – Argan stated around 1970 – is to move aesthetic activity from art or architecture to the scale of urbanism, that articulates itself as a “programma di progettazione”²⁷⁵ (“plan of planning”) and involves the broadest aspects of culture, politics and history (while subsuming, or rather substituting, traditional art).

Two art historical genealogies were provided and crossed together in order to explain this new condition of practice based on planning. On the one hand, the Vasarian primacy of drawing:

In historical terms which, obviously, are no longer the classic ones of mimesis and invention, the situation that emerged in the Renaissance is re-proposed, when a universal technique was established above particular techniques: drawing, as mental or ideation technique, ideal or theoretical principle at the origin of the multiple species of praxis. And drawing was already, institutionally, planning. It is not a historical recourse: it is precisely that situation which, as it evolves, has now reached its point of crisis, in the emergence of a radical transformation of the principles, methods and aims of the project.²⁷⁶

On the other hand, the “crisis of the work of art” was traced back to Michelangelo’s “non-finito”,²⁷⁷ and to Paul Klee’s “conception of the work of art as work of life, unfinished continuous suspended and precarious as the time of life itself”.²⁷⁸ On this path, Argan’s conclusion appears prophetic for future concepts such as the “dematerialisation” of art (Argan spoke of “the horror of the thing”) and the art as “behaviour”:

“Unfinished art is in-project art and, at the same time, a project of existence according to an order that is not that of formal logic, but an order internal to existence as such, to its actualisation: a principle of structure that is outlined and built in succession itself of the not passively endured events [...]. In art planning there is a sense, an interest, a passion of life, which we do not find in the flawless logic of technological design [...]. If the work of

²⁷² ARGAN 1964: 40.

²⁷³ Ibid: 51.

²⁷⁴ Ibid: 58. According to Argan, a crucial difference exists between the industrial design and art planning: “The project of an industrial product is the result of a number of data, grouped and combined in such a way as to resolve their contradictions. More than a project, it is a preliminary calculation; the result more than a proposal is an inference. In the process there are comparisons, reductions, final choices, but in view of the success of the product or the progress of the technique that produces it. There is no properly critical evaluation” (ibid: 68).

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid: 65.

²⁷⁷ Through an overt Heideggerian reading: “Already in Michelangelo and even more in the romantic poetics of the ‘sublime’ the idea of art-as-existence is associated with death or, since death does not provide experience, the thought of death as immanent to the otherwise meaningless thoughts and acts of life” (ibid: 69).

²⁷⁸ Ibidem.

art is no longer valid because it is completed or perfect but because it is not finished, we must ask ourselves what it prepares and carries within itself, what problem it poses for the future. Does it pose a problem that still demands an artistic solution or a problem that excludes it?”²⁷⁹

The latter option was apparently to best suit the Italian debate of the late sixties, heated by the student protests and contestation of institutionalised art. It is no coincidence that Argan’s perspective of a “reduction of the artistic techniques to intentional methodology of planning” could survive in the critical discussion of the early seventies: his programme was both ideologically engaged and impermeable to capitalistic consumerism,²⁸⁰ and could dialogue with the newest structuralist ideas of “work in progress” and “opera aperta” (“the type of absolutely open artwork is the project”).²⁸¹ By 1970, the Arganian debate about planning as a practicable political intervention was reflected in many contributions published in Italy and was epitomised by Tomas Maldonado’s *La speranza progettuale*, published by Giulio Einaudi that year.²⁸² Even Germano Celant’s positions about planning reflects this influence, as in backlight. Already in his 1967 *Arte Povera. Appunti per una guerriglia*, he pitted the artistic production of objects²⁸³ against the Marcusian “libero progettarsi dell’uomo” (“free self-planning of man”), an anti-systemic existential condition based on “a return to limited and ancillary planning, in which man is the fulcrum and focus of research, no longer the means and the tool”.²⁸⁴ Interestingly, among the pictures illustrating these words, a very neat drawing of a sculpture by Gianni Piacentino echoed evidently the Minimalist appropriation of industrial design (**figure II.22**): a reference admitted by the artist himself and proved by his private sketchbooks.²⁸⁵ Even when he sided opposite positions to Argan’s, Celant accepted the terms of Argan’s ideology when he sided opposite positions: for instance, in 1968 he defended utopistic and radical architecture precisely because of its escapist impulse lamented by Argan.

²⁷⁹ Ibid: 70.

²⁸⁰ Ibid: 64. “the planning exerts its influence without being subject to consumption: which opens the way to the possibility that the enjoyment of the artistic work may take place through channels other than those of the market economy, into which capitalist society has channelled and forced it, and to the possibility of a redemption from the condition of alienation in which the industrial economy has placed us” (ibid: 61).

²⁸¹ Ibid: 57. In virtue of the political actuality of his discourse, other contradictions or short-sighted prediction receded: like the overt diagnosis of a possible merging of Pop and Gestaltic art around 1966;²⁸¹ or the exorcising prediction of Minimalism (“shouldn’t we, for the sake of consistency, end up taking the industry as the model of artistic behaviour?”, ibid: 66).

²⁸² MALDONADO 1970.

²⁸³ “[The previous artist] while rejecting the world of consumption he finds himself being a producer. [...] One never designs, but integrates” (CELANT 1967B).

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ “[Tommaso Trini:] Is there a relationship between your work and design? [Piacentino:] Certainly, there is an analogy in the cycle of realisation: planning with sketches and scale drawings and handcrafted practical realisation. And perhaps it is also inherent in the perceptual dimension of my works, which are oriented toward an idea of ambiguous balance between real object and abstract structure” (TRINI, PIACENTINO 1968: 79). The artist’s sketchbooks have been recently published (by Celant himself), see PIACENTINO 2015.

“The architect sought his true individual dimension with architecture on paper [...]. He immersed himself in a fantastic, free, unconstrained architecture and escaped the established social order that continues to drown his self-planning in necessity. In this way he demonstrated the need to question everything again, his political, creative and operational existence, he opened himself to all interference of a subjective and irrational nature, he understood that “practical” design is constraining and asphyxiated, and reactionary since it hardly proceeds with the becoming of life”.²⁸⁶

Coherently, these words are illustrated not by a project but a portrait of the architect who draws on his table, namely, Paolo Soleri, at work, shirtless and in his luminous studio in Cosanti around 1960 (**figure II.23**). Progressively radicalising his critic of planning based on an ideological sociopolitical discourse, Celant inevitably rejected the idea of project as a material practice (“whatever action of word or project falls into consumerism, the word has a market as project has one”),²⁸⁷ and drawing will rarely appear in his criticism.

III.2 A “*crisis of planning*”

A consequence of the theoretical tracks shaped by Argan was a typical split between the theme of planning and conceptualism in the Italian debate. With the effective exclusion of Arte Povera from the 1970 biennial, the difference between the terms appeared to be as radical as their respective ideologies. Yet, it would not have been difficult to bridge the gap, by admitting the primacy of the project as a common genre of artistic research, as Gillo Dorfles pointed out in an outline of the general art situation:

“The Venetian exhibition is also the clearest confirmation of a fact: the current cerebralisation of every artistic phenomenon. If [Max] Bill’s modular constructions, [Joseph] Albers’ chromatic experiments, Radovic’s electronic works or [Hans] Richter’s programmatic ones, are highly rationalised; if the new researches based on new materials and new techniques are distinctly intellectualised; so are the attempts, only apparently instinctual, of land art, earth art, arte povera: all aimed at individuate that conceptual element, extremely subtle and extremely fragile, which can make of their situational lucubrations something winged, sublimated, which transforms the handful of earth or straw, the fragment of leather or wire, into an imaginative fetish. Here, perhaps, for both sides of the current creative forces, lies the real sore point: on the one hand, the transience of modern materials; [...]

²⁸⁶ CELANT 1968: 55. For a broad discussion of the panorama of artistic political engagement between the sixties and the seventies, see BELLONI 2015B.

²⁸⁷ “If Marcuse ‘s new belief in a “new sensibility” is to be trusted as an attitude toward a new way of conceiving politics, design, with its myth of superfunctional performance, is a reactionary and repressive attitude [...] L’unica azione di design non consiste nel fare estetico-funzionale del progettista, ma nel percepire in chiave demistificata ogni particolare della realtà, dall’oggetto allo spazio, dal tempo alla natura. Il design ha invece mitizzato ulteriormente l’oggetto e lo spazio [...], li ha condotti ad essere altro dalla vita, con un’ulteriore enfaticizzazione della separatezza tra ambiente e vita, lavoro e vita, azione e vita” (CELANT 1970: 28).

on the other hand, the transience of conceptual situations, already shrunken and dull after the sudden and rapid flash that a sudden fantasy had ignited. What then remains but the hope of transferring the concept to a more lasting, or at least broader, medium? Transfer to the territory and the urban landscape those cautious modulations, those perceptual values, which - limited to the 'work of art', to the aesthetic object - have shown their lack of effectiveness?"²⁸⁸

As such urbanistic perspectives proved to be impractical in the following few years, the retraction between a Gestaltic or neo-constructivist faction and conceptualism got alimented. The theme of planning started to serve a rhetorical distinction, to contrast the seriousness and formal awareness of the former with the arbitrariness of the latter. Stages in this trend were some exhibitions devoted to "project", such as *Progetto intervento verifica* ("Project intervention verification"), held in Milan in early 1972 and *Basta il progetto* ("The plan is enough"), that took place in Trieste at the end of the same year and was followed by a public debate on "the crisis of planning". The shows were basically meant to relaunch the medium of sculpture, and the artists involved had belonged for some years to "neo-constructivism". In the catalogue of the Milanese exhibition, the critic Roberto Sanesi lamented the apparent appropriation of any discourse on rational thinking in art by conceptualism, which appeared instead as a generic and contradictory category. In the concrete and material work of some sculptors was to be found "a strongly rational (dialectic) element, and if the term "conceptual" would not have lost its original sense (applied to expressive forms of another kind, and in my opinion deviant if not doubtful) of the ordering of the multiple under a single act of thought and certain references to phenomenology, I would gladly define as conceptual the type of operation realized by the four artists included in this show".²⁸⁹

Exhibited in showcases alongside the realised sculptures or models, the drawn projects intentionally indicated a traditional function of planning, the intellectual stage within a process of creation that included "intervention" and "verification". The intelligibility of the process itself guaranteed the value and the function of this kind of research, a "conscience of operating", directly opposed to the hermeticism typical of conceptualism.

This stalemate also connotes the discussion held in Trieste in 1972, that brought together critics and architects, among which included Dorfles and Apollonio.²⁹⁰ The attempt of discussing together the three areas of architecture, of object-oriented (also defined as constructivist or structuralist) and

²⁸⁸ Gillo Dorfles, "Dal modulo al territorio. Dal museologico all'ecologico", in APOLLONIO, CAMEL, MAHLOW 1970: 13.

²⁸⁹ MILAN 1972: [3].

²⁹⁰ The panel discussion followed the exhibition *Basta il Progetto*, held in the Galleria La Cappella in Trieste, that involved Aricò, Barisani, Bonalumi, Celli, De Alexandris, Gandini, Legnaghi, Lorenzetti, Morandini, Pardi, Spagnolo, Uncini. A related edition of 12 heliographs was published and introduced by Gianni Contessi's *Note sulla progettazione* ("Notes on Planning"). The round table discussion also included Contessi, Bruno Munari, Enzo Fratelli and Pierluigi Nicolini.

conceptualist artistic research, failed in the face of the apparent loss of material and functional identity of planning. Paradoxically, at the very moment of its greatest fortune and diffusion in exhibitions and the art market, the project turned out to be a weak, insubstantial category of analysis, suspended in “a kind of noble and in a certain sense inconsistent bond that hangs now on one side, now on the other”, that is, on the object or on the concept. Dorfles was aware of the current existence of a “genre”, which complicated a sharp distinction between planning for execution and that end in itself: as in Agostino Bonalumi’s case, for example, who realised projects *a posteriori* “to catch up with the times”. He also tried to take a stand for conceptualism, providing two examples of valuable conceptualists, namely Dan Graham and Giulio Paolini, as a “counter-altar” of planning. Despite these stratifications, there remained a “very strong” distinction between a planning that addresses the formal problems of the work, and a conceptual art that no longer “trespasses” into “so-called artistic phenomenology”.²⁹¹ In this sense, Apollonio called “ideological” the pure imaginative projection he found in Lawrence Weiner’s work “through purely verbal forms, explicative, which [...] leave the viewer, the user, to imagine what would happen, or [...] allusions, premonitions in some cases through photographic or graphic documents [...] which hint at you, give you an idea of what that person, that author intended to achieve”.²⁹²

Within the field of architecture, the crisis of planning was formulated dramatically in 1973, when the designer Ugo La Pietra was invited to the Triennale in Milan and decided to realize the film *La grande occasione* (“The Great Occasion”). The title referred to the “the charge of tension and expectation on which all cultural forces rely”, represented by the images of the empty exhibiting spaces waiting for the installation of the show. “My effort, my hope, my anguish (which is then that of a culture that fails to affect reality) fail to transform space in the slightest, which remains the absolute formalisation of an unchanged and unchangeable state of affairs”, as the film’s opening credits report. La Pietra is then filmed in the act of drawing sketches, plans, or mere lines, directly on the white walls with a marker (**figure II.24**); gesticulating in the air giving indication to no one; handling paperwork, projects, wandering around spaces in an anxious and agitated manner; only to leave the space as it was at the beginning of the film. The dead end of planning was then a real impotence, to be faced as such, and opposed any utopistic forms of the escapist projects.²⁹³

Still until 1974 and the exhibition *Dal progetto all'opera*, the theme of the project would be vindicated by a precise faction in the debate of Italian art; while it would be dismissed in the most conspicuous

²⁹¹ Gillo Dorfles in *CRISI DELLA PROGETTAZIONE 1972*: [7].

²⁹² Umbro Apollonio in *ibid*: 26.

²⁹³ In 1975, La Pietra published *Autoarchiterapia*, an interesting collection of drawn studies from 1960 to 1974, that was introduced by an alert: “these drawings are not utopistic projects / these drawings are not moments of evasion / these drawings are not models of comprehension / they represent a way not to intervene pretextually to the modification of territory” (LA PIETRA 1975).

and accredited shows about the national and international art scene of the early 1970s, from *Land Art Arte Povera Conceptual Art* (Turin, June 1970) to *Vitalità del negativo* (November 1970) and *Contemporanea* (December 1973).

Having become a matter of factions, a cross-sectional review on the subject and a focus on the problems of design, so interesting to the field of drawing, will be lacking in those years. It could have started from linguistic observation internal to the architecture field, such as some notes by architect Alessandro Cappabianca published in *Casabella* in 1969. With a lucid and attentive look at the operational details of designers, he articulated the all-bankrupt problem of utopia in terms of the comprehensibility of drawing, a theme that could relate to a large segment of the drawing practices of the time, including those in the conceptualist sphere. First, Cappabianca attested to the circulation in architectural theory of the time of the concepts of “disegno interno” and “esterno” formulated by Federico Zuccari. On this basis, he read the tension between a private ideation and its transcription into communicable code, that was vivid in the recent phenomenon of an “increasingly numerous series of avowedly utopian hypotheses resting on unusual and ambiguous graphic representations”.²⁹⁴ Nonetheless, “not even in the intentionally utopian drawing, however, does the design-construction relationship become tout-court drawing. The moment construction is not annulled, the relationship never fails, if it is a true architectural design. Construction remains; as an ideal term, as a pretext of the will, as a distant aspiration, perhaps as a fictitious alibi”.

This observation could perhaps have opened up the possibility of analysing the issue of conceptual planning in terms of graphic language too, setting a parallelism between the projected architectural construction, and the projected idea or mental working of a conceptualist work. “The drawing in the architectural [but also, conceptualist?] project has an active role, which consists in being a «means» with all the characteristics proper to «ends»: that is, it has all the characteristics of a structured whole, therefore «finished», autonomous, sign system that can be considered in itself, without any connection to «meanings»; but this structure is, at the same time, open toward something other than itself, it inserts to and prefigures a different structure (the construction), which sets itself (at least institutionally) as its ultimate end”.²⁹⁵ Albeit generic, such perspective sheds important light on the practice of numerous artists who appropriated the codes of architectural or technical drawing and indicates the projective tension as a possible identity or necessity of the fortunate, critical *genre* of the early seventies.

In the next paragraphs, two artists will provide a double perspective on the cluster of these problems by a segment of their careers, which in different ways, progressively brought drawing at the core of

²⁹⁴ CAPPABIANCA 1969: 10.

²⁹⁵ Ibid: 15.

their practice. Mario Merz and Beppe Devalle had been rarely discussed together in the literature, mostly because of the latter's rapid oblivion in correspondence of the former's international acknowledgment. Before this divarication, they were both included in crucial exhibitions like *Gennaio 70* and the 1972 Venice biennial, and a comparison between their 1970-1974 paths is less a historical forcing than a refreshing recovery of a then perspective.

At the starting point of this chronology, the two Turinese artists' contribution to the catalogue of *Gennaio 70* already expressed a dichotomy in the planning attitude of the time. Among the categories in the exhibition subtitle, Devalle programmatically invested in *Progetti* while Merz was more likely ascribed to *Comportamenti*, as the pages assigned to him were simply crossed by an arch of the Fibonacci numbers, cryptically announcing his next pervasive adoption of the sequence (**figure II.25**). By 1975, however, both artists used to exhibit projects and drawing and achieved a sophisticated, materially rich practice of planning. While Devalle inspired the latest and more aware discussion on the theme of project, the material quality, richness of execution and even the "aesthetic pleasure"²⁹⁶ of Merz's drawings ended up outweighing the mathematical foundations that structured them.

IV "Dal progetto all'opera", and viceversa

Beppe Devalle contributed to *Gennaio 70* catalogue with a statement titled, *Progetto di un mondo* ("Project of a world"):

"I privilege the most regular aspect of reality, and I use a typically historical tool that is perspective in order to acknowledge this rule in reality itself. Instead, I refute all coarse approximations that do not consider the precise and stable logic structures needed for a discourse meant as articulated and self-conscious. Structures are not mathematical-metaphysical entities, but they are the real cognitive tools of man (measure, distance, relation, colour, etc.) that he needs to arrange for himself an illusory but convincing image of what he obscurely perceives with the senses. The space of my architecture utopia is coloured in depth (the light's color); volumes cannot be covered with flat brushwork, but require a specific one, that conveys density, thickness and depth of colour itself. The colour/light, emulsified by the spray, in the very moment it lays on the surface shifts from three-dimensions entity to a two-dimensions one but it keeps its own illusory depth. (The light phenomenon's depth.) The final

²⁹⁶ "I am pleased by the order of the neat, blue-glowing neon numbers, which can be grasped optically without any mathematical talent. I am pleased by the hatching orders, the line drawings, the formal intelligence with which Merz invents and brings together forms on huge cloth drawings [...] that shape, structure and summarise an entire hall. An aesthetic pleasure, then – it remains, even if one does not even know who Fibonacci is. Mario Merz demonstrates in drawings that are made sparingly with loops, curves, hatches, number marks, layering, the simplest objects (such as the conical vessel, a plant pot), that he belongs to the brilliant draftsmen who draw lines out of body movement, structure them rhythmically at points and, in any case, proceed primarily from a sense of form and experience of form and not from abstract thinking" (Louis Scutter, *Mario Merz in der Basler Kunsthalle*, Radio der Deutschen Schweiz UKW, 2. Programm *Kunst und Künstler*, January 31st, 1975, 20.50 h).

aim could be defined as the exemplar model of a ruled spatial reality, which I miss in my surrounding environment”.²⁹⁷

Devalle’s discourse is framed within two instances familiar to the Italian debate outlined insofar: the refusal of the irrational or tautological-paradoxical positions of arte povera and conceptual art (and the Fibonacci’s series as used by Merz could be easily read as a “mathematical-metaphysical entity”), on one side;²⁹⁸ and the impulse to an architectural utopia based on perspective, on the other.²⁹⁹ What is more eloquent, though, is the main content of the statement, that is a detailed description of the formal making process shaping his practice at the time: the accountability of his operations, albeit often more rhetorical than trustful, ascribed Devalle to the faction that opposed arte povera or conceptual art; at the same time, from his marginal position in the Italian debate about conceptualism and from a virtual comparison with Merz’s path, it is possible to articulate some important material aspects of the genre of project as a fundamental drawing practice.

IV.1 *From studies to series*

After studying in the Liceo Artistico in Turin, Giuseppe Riccardo Devalle had graduated in stage design at the Accademia Albertina and debuted as a painter: starting from an early Gorky-informed expressionism, by the late sixties he had come to a geometric, precise abstraction, that was critically (but approximately) positioned between Pop and op art.³⁰⁰ Between 1967 and 1969 Devalle started to focus on large-scale, three dimensional works that required an exceptionally long time in gestation, and a correspondingly rich production of collateral works on paper as “studies”. Alongside the statement dated December 19th, 1969, in fact, two blueprint-like projects were illustrated in the catalogue, and captioned as “related to *African Tree*, a painting that I am finishing in these days, and that I promise to present at the Bologna biennale” (**figure II.26**). As the natural testimony of the

²⁹⁷ BOLOGNA 1970: p.n.

²⁹⁸ Devalle’s words prove that he had introjected the reading of his own work made by Enrico Crispolti in the previous year: “With respect to ‘primary structures’ and ‘Arte Povera,’ in particular, and to their ‘innocent’ intuitionistic fideism, Devalle accepts (while those reject) the ‘loss of innocence,’ he accepts ‘the doubts of self-consciousness,’ and in short rejects ‘the security of innocence.’ The individuality achieved by Devalle is objective individuation, and not only supposed unilateral and merely designative individuality (typical of the designative act – drawn by Duchamp – of ‘Arte Povera’). Individuality as objective individuation versus the anonymity of the individual gesture could be a new perspective, insinuating unsuspected openings in the individual-mass relationship, the central motif of our current existential and social condition” (Enrico Crispolti in MILAN 1969).

²⁹⁹ The final expression of disappointment for the surrounding environment (“nell’ambiente che mi circonda”) can be understood both as a spatial concern or a contextual dissatisfaction with the current art system.

³⁰⁰ Such was his profile coming out from his participation at the 1966 Venice biennial. About the early career of Devalle, see ROVERETO 2015: 106-133; 271-284.

ongoing studio work, such studies functioned as rhetorical evidence of rigor and seriousness of the artist's research. Devalle has already established this relationship – of a coherent preparatory study – between works on paper and his large paintings in 1969, like in the case of the work *Prospettiva* (“Perspective”), shown multiple times alongside a set of drawings titled *Progetti*.³⁰¹ This homogeneity to the process making was not compromised by the frequent appreciation for the works on paper's autonomous qualities, like their “fertile inventiveness of an impeccable draftsman” or “colouristic freshness on the level of current English graphics”.³⁰²

The adoption of perspective claimed by the artist himself substantiated the homogenic relationship between the projects on paper and Devalle's paintings. Commenting on *African Tree* in 1971, the art historian Giovanni Romano pointed out both the source for this recent interest in perspective, that is Erwin Panofsky's *Perspective as symbolic form* (first translated in Italian in 1961),³⁰³ and the artist's original overturning of the device. “The perspective castle is constructed starting from the centre [the image of a baobab drawn from a magazine, reduced to "a pale trace" through the painting process] according to a process that is exactly at the antipodes of classical perspective: in fact, Alberti began by conducting around the natural spectacle to be portrayed an obligatory frame on which to report all the relationships of the internal measures. On this reversal of the humanistic perspective, so that the observed environment prevails and not the observer, who is, on the contrary, subjugated by it, the annotations in a Panofskian key could be many, and not insignificant”.³⁰⁴ As the perspectival lines project toward different vanishing points and not to a single standing observer, the sequence of drawn studies testified the adjustments of the different planes on which space is indicated, graphically rendered with a set of shades of various opacities. The technique he most frequently used, alcohol-based inks and architecture drawing markers, allows Devalle to modulate slight shades of a limited range of cold hues (violet, gray, purple, red), alternatively rendered through geometric, more or less dense kinds of hatching, as a reduction of his colour concerns in painting expressed in the 1969 statement. Some lines correspond to the elastic bands in the spatial work, that consists of movable elements too that had been arranged in different positions (**figure II.27**). As variants of a subtle composition work (some lines change positions for few millimetres only), the studies accounted for

³⁰¹ It is not clear whether the “stupendous drawings” with “fantastic compositions of architectural framework” (TRINI 1969D), exhibited alongside *Prospettiva* and other two paintings (*Complesso* and *Ebony*) at the Galleria Blu (see MILAN 1969) were directly related to those works. The title *Progetti* was mentioned only in the reviews of the show at the Galleria Stein in Turin in December.

³⁰² Respectively, DRAGONE 1969 and TRINI 1969D: 113.

³⁰³ See Giovanni Romano, *Tre parole per Beppe Devalle*, in ROVERETO 2015: 25.

³⁰⁴ Giovanni Romano, *Per Beppe Devalle*, in TURIN 1971: p.n.

a “non-easily reducible” complexity of Devalle’s operations, that overcome a technical stage design planning and is based on the linear, two-dimensional articulation of space.³⁰⁵

“Devalle is in danger of never putting an end to his work whose realisation is no longer measured in months, but in years”:³⁰⁶ the endless work of making and unmaking (romantically imputed by Romano to the artist's dissatisfaction), as well as the verification of endless possible variants, ended up pushing him to a form of “opera aperta”, that found in the projects and in drawing a more suitable dimension. It might be the reason why Devalle abandoned the realisation of large paintings just after *African Tree* and chose to limit himself to works on paper, or, in other terms, to the genre of project: that is, he moved to a practice that allows variations and adjustments in the form of numerous series, giving relevance to the process of a figurative idea rather than to its final accomplishment, to a point where there is no more difference between variants and adjustments.

This concrete shift was noticed by the local critic Angelo Dragone as well: “[...] in thinking about a new [large, painted] work, time slipped away from him while he left behind, however, not purely mental projections but a harvest of paintings executed with essential means, which this time camped on bare sheets of paper”. In fact, Devalle started to realise drawn series on 70 x 100 cm large sheets of an exhibition-quality paper, intentionally made to be displayed or sold as finished works (and certainly available to a far larger market than the large three-dimensional works, all of which remained unsold). His “essential means” actually showed great mastership of various techniques, from alcohol-based ink, gouache, pastels, and despite their often remarked precision their surface reveals an intense and crafty work of cuts, traces, schemes and inscriptions.³⁰⁷ Possibly exhibited in 1969, and documented in a few later exhibitions, the series *Palladium* corresponds nowadays to about ten exemplars registered in the artist archives,³⁰⁸ but clearly has merged into further works carrying different titles (namely *Zowie*, *Pampurio*,³⁰⁹ *Paradise Now*, and *Cuori*). The central motif is a core

³⁰⁵ Among the discarded variants, Romano mentioned “two lazy concentric swirls around the trunk, which, at one point in the work, was completely undone” (ibid).

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Dragone noticed that Devalle “making abstraction of the technique itself, [...] indifferently used acrylics and the pastels, the ballpoint pen pencils, in these new paintings, the inks that as a diluent use alcohol” (Angelo Dragone in IMOLA 1970: 36).

³⁰⁸ I am very grateful Maria Teresa Devalle and Jolanda Devalle for giving me the possibility to use the archival data about Beppe Devalle’s works on paper. The archive has originated from the photographic register of the artworks, started quite early by the artist himself. On the back of some photographs, the artist wrote short notes, describing some features of the works and some precious making-process insights: although considered as dated to 1970 (see ROVERETO 2015: 271), it is doubtful when these notes were written down, and later corrections or comments (often in different inks) appear to be added up to 1979.

³⁰⁹ Titles are sometimes difficult to link directly to the drawings in terms of formal elements or themes: “Zowie” is an onomatopoeia frequent in English or American comic strips, as well as the title of a collection of “spicy cartoons and gags” published in the fifties. Sor Pampurio is the name of a comic character designed by Carlo Bisi that was published since the 1930s on the Italian youth journal *Giornale dei piccoli*. Designed by a strongly geometrical, deco stylisation, Sor Pampurio wore a big papillon that may resemble the symmetrical acute shape of some *Palladium*’s elements. Another title, *Pinchy Blach* (which is inscribed on the back frame of C69#42-69) is an (intentional?) misspelling of *Pinky Black* (pink and black being the only colours used in this work).

linear structure made of a rhombus/square and its diagonals, that got a fundamental starting point for many drawings (he used to operatively call it “struttura Palladio”). This figure’s symmetry is the point of departure for further expansions made by compass and French curve ruler, following the idea that “the image can enrich itself and self-generate to the infinite, notwithstanding its parents”.³¹⁰

“This building-like illusory image could be a sort of ‘opera ballet’; it can be broken down into central image (heart), left- and right-side image, upper and lower image; the various balances are always resolved in axis according to perfection and complication that always refer to a single point of view within the image”.³¹¹

Elsewhere, Devalle described his work on the structure as a “true battlefield”:

“this structure came into being to solve various problems (it is isolated, as a whole, but in relation to the sheet it lives of a definite direction, it makes [sic] therefore feel the differences of right and left and above and below, and it weighs at the bottom as a base and from this subdivided [structure] consequences arise at the periphery and in the centre. These in the centre are particular because they are curved and tend to create a structure within structure and to influence by stylistic analogies other surfaces both on the horizontals and verticals”.³¹²

Although the series’ title refers to the famous London theatre, the architectural outcomes of the drawings (the rhombus is placed as a “gate” and the rectangular of the base is foreshortened as a “staircase”) are independent from any image source; on the contrary, a more playful reference to this name might be the presence of spheres (“palle”, see **figure II.28**) at the linear junctures and extremities of the structure present in many exemplars of the series (insisting curved lines being the major element of novelty in respect to *African Tree* and the previous drawing). Moreover, it was later noticed that “Palladium” was also a carbon paper brand,³¹³ and a self-referentiality of the drawing to its means would match both Devalle’s programmatical stress on formal making (sometimes ironically expressed, like in the title *Zowie-Squadrette e curvilinee*) and the new quality of this work on paper: albeit still based on construction lines, perspectival projections and even the linear application of “shadow theory”, they are arranged with free autonomy and manipulated for composition reasons. The addiction of curved lines to the core rhombus may have determined the subsequent and gradual superimposition of the *Palladium* series onto the “hearths” one, that went on through early 1970.³¹⁴ The new motif was a hearth shape housed within a cubic-like geometric structure and standing on a

³¹⁰ “I used, the structure ‘palladium’ on the ‘double’, centring on the left and right centre square. With a partially ascending play. This was in order to further verify this structure, and believing that the image can enrich and self-generate infinitely, still the parents” (Beppe Devalle, 1970 c., notes on photograph C69#07-69, Archivio Devalle, Milan).

³¹¹ Beppe Devalle, 1970 c., notes on C69#06-69, Archivio Devalle, Milan.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Marco Rosci, *Tema: Devalle (1977)*, in TURIN 1979: 8.

³¹⁴ About seven drawings are archived as *Cuori*.

shadow-like lines on the base. It is interesting to point out that the popular image of the hearth belonged stably to the most advanced artistic visual repertoire, through a genealogy that from Duchamp's *Coeurs volants* (the famous cover of a 1936 *Cahiers d'art* issue) followed to Jim Dine's frequent subject in graphic and painting. In respect to these precedents, Devalle diverted from the iconicity of the symbol and avoids its symmetry, by rotating the valves on multiple axis, so to state an exclusively formal process (the hearth of the structure) rather a narrative or psychological content. Nevertheless, it was within this series that the artist first addressed the problem of inserting collaged images in his drawings. In some exemplars dated to 1969, photographs published in magazines are cut in the hearth shape and glued at the centre of various linear structures. Although carefully cut and rotated to fit the spatial axis and curves, the images are certainly not abstract or neutral: for instance, *Marijuana azzurra* shows a close-up of a joint smoker taken from the cover of a recent *Life* issue (October 1969), dedicated to the legalisation of marijuana.³¹⁵ On the back of the archived photograph of *Music is the Message* (**figure II.29**), a large drawing completed in January 1970, Devalle accounted for the new tension caused by the insertion of the collaged image within the linear abstract structure, "now perfect enough to accommodate (prepared) images". Drawing the image from a repertoire of collected cut fragments, he liked the "volgarizzazione pubblicitaria" of Marshall McLuhan's landmark phrase ("The medium is the message") and the unscrupulous promotion of discs through a seductive female face. In the moment of the *mise en page*, the collage generates a new set of "consequences that are obviously quite bastard, as until that moment everything was built independently from the image, whereas now with the inserted image all the consequences are found from both", referring, for instance, to the vertical spines that "crown" the fragmented face. Moreover, "colours are consequent to the insertion of the image,"³¹⁶ and red and purple ink is spread over the collaged magazine too.

³¹⁵ See C69#35-69. The deadly theme of "smoke/pollution" seems to connect a number of drawings of this early phase, most of them were never exhibited: see *Cigarettes Posion* [sic] (C69#41-69) where Devalle cut the dramatical image of a tobacco testing with the forced injection of smoke in a chicken mouth; as well as *Cuore inquinato* (C70#05-70), *Cuore atomico* (C70#17-70) or *Topolino dead / Aiuto!!* (C70#54-70), *Billions of Bacteria / la Macchia (con pennacchio)* (C70#20-70; the collage is taken from an advertisement of the Monsanto Company selling a stain removal: the image of a man who cut himself shaving his beard and stained his shirt collar is captioned, "Billions of bacteria create enzymes to remove tough stains like this"; possibly, both the cutting and the stain are playful reference to the drawing means used by the artist) and an untitled collage (C70#59-70: on the cut magazine fragment, the image of a man wearing an insect-like mask reads: "Human fly? No. It's part of the effort to control air pollution. Doctors check effects of smog pumped into eyes and nose"), all made in 1970.

³¹⁶ "Questa [sic] struttura è quella dello scorso anno, "Palladium, tanto per intenderci, che dopo innumerevoli rivelanesciamenti [?] (è stato un vero campo di battaglia) e successive invenzioni era ormai abbastanza perfetta per accogliere immagini (preparate). Come forse ho già detto questa struttura è nata per risolvere vari problemi (è isolata, nel suo complesso, ma in rapporto con il foglio vive in una direzione precisa, fa quindi sentire le differenze di destro e sinistro e sopra e sotto, pesa in basso come base e da questa suddivisa nascono conseguenze alla periferia e al centro, queste ultime al centro sono particolari perché curve e tendono a creare una struttura nella strutta ed ad influenzare per analogie stilistiche altre superfici sia sulle orizzontali che sulle verticali – vedi il doppio centro sul rettangolone di base. Ritornando alla seconda immagine è stata la creatrice del secondo rettangolo in prospettiva al quale si ricollegano i vertici del rettangolone di base. Su questo secondo rettangolo e soprattutto sui suoi vertici partono ulteriori conseguenze che sono

Alongside the *Cuori* series, in which “a non-human hearth realised mechanical situations on a «habitual» level”,³¹⁷ the series *Il Giuoco* (“The Game”, **figure II.30**) was inaugurated in the spring of 1970. It is based on the motif of the hand playing with balls or small barbells, for which Devalle used templates of the silhouette of his one-year-old son Diego’s hand.³¹⁸ The critic Giorgio Brizio defined the motif as “a *divertissement* at a high conceptual graphic level, achieving Swiss perfection in the execution of the inlays of the various sections; a lucid rationality in the thoughtful use of colour-signal; and a schematic, highly enjoyable essentiality in the rendering of the figurative visible”.³¹⁹

In a national exhibition in Imola in June 1970, Devalle presented for the first time his new autonomous works on paper, although Dragone still called them “paintings” in the catalogue. As the trait d’union of *Giuoco n. 2*,³²⁰ *My Marilyn, Save Life* (**figures II.31-32**) and a fourth unidentified drawing titled *Cuore elettrico*, the critic points out the “situation” Devalle staged in them, that carried not only formal but also psychological contents.³²¹ These can be acknowledged in the light of the strategies in cutting his sources: the narrativity of the beautiful photographs found from magazines entangles with the rigorously abstract spatial diagrams he arranges on the sheet. In this sense, the blue pool from which a playful Marilyn Monroe emerges (in a two-page illustration from a 1962 *Life* issue) is cut out in the shape of a bunch of balloons lifting from the hearth shape hosting the actress; or an advertisement of the US company “Allied Chemicals” (found browsing a 1967 *Scientific American*) is cut so to include the quote “repair damaged hearts with ‘spare parts’ made of plastic” and a sort of self-portrait as a the bespectacled surgeon focused at work (**figures II.33-34**).

In *Save Life, Music is The Message* and other early collages³²² is also evident how the hearth shape accommodates the face (or the eyes) and its symmetry, which will become the main theme of a further series of collage in the second half of 1970.

naturalmente un po’ bastarde [?] perché sino a questo momento tutto era costruito indipendentemente dall’immagine mentre ora, infilata l’immagine, tutte le conseguenze sono trovate da entrambi. I colori sono conseguenti all’inserimento dell’immagine. Tra immagini di ritaglio ho trovato questa che è la volgarizzazione pubblicitaria del celebre “messaggio” mi è piaciuta perché vendevano dischi attraverso le battute del cervello e una bella donna – alla fine mi sembra un lavoro [unreadable words]” (Beppe Devalle, 1970 c., notes on C69#27-69, Archivio Devalle, Milan).

³¹⁷ BRIZIO 1970.

³¹⁸ See *Mano Diego / Il Giuoco* (C70#09-70).

³¹⁹ BRIZIO 1970.

³²⁰ This title is not registered in the archive; two exemplars of *Il Giuoco* result “destroyed”. The work was nevertheless timely illustrated *ibidem* (albeit the wrong way up).

³²¹ “The heart is like the visual support of an emotional tension, immediately harnessed in the logical lucidity typical of intellectuality typical of the entire Devalle operation through which it determines that spatial sequence that in *Cuore elettrico* seems to project in its pseudo-perspective structures the patterns of possible internal circuits, and then acquires chromatic relief in the sensitive tonal development of the work, giving body to the richest and most complex images where, once again, the artist solves with a spatial invention of purely aesthetic value, an otherwise impossible application of the theory of shadows” (Angelo Dragone in IMOLA 1970: 36). Dragone also mentions *Duchamp* and *Miss America*.

³²² See for instance, *Miss America* (C70#12-70), *Miss Natura* (C70#21-70), *Muto / Occhi grigi / Occhi tuoi* (C70#27-70), *Smile / Occhi bimba* (C70#23-70: the source comes from an advertisement of the AT&T Inc. - American Telephone and Telegraph Incorporated, frequently published on *Life* between 1968 and 1969; Devalle included the caption “Ever hear a smile? Listen carefully next time you call someone you love. Long Distance is [the next] best thing to being the[re]”),

IV.2 Devalle's collages as projects of images

“Drawing, as indeed artistic production in its entirety, now plays a negligible part in defining the visual and cultural patterns through which we acknowledge the world around us; however, it remains an efficient communicative and persuasive tool at the level of advertising (animated or otherwise) design, and political design”.³²³

Romano concluded with these words the historical entry for the term *Disegno* in an encyclopedic publication about art published in 1971. A few months earlier he had met Devalle in Turin, just when the artist anachronistically turned to drawing, ending up “isolated in an adverse situation”, his reliance on the medium being the guarantor against the “onda dell’irrazionale, dell’istintuale e di altri surrogati, tendenti a far coincidere l’arte con la vita”.³²⁴ The two sectors in which Romano attributed a persistent relevance of drawing could be linked (albeit indirectly) to the latest developments in Devalle’s draftsmanship.

The friendship and collaboration with an art historian itself, expressed Devalle’s field choice when Romano wrote the text for the solo show at the Galleria Stein in late 1971. The display of *African Tree* alongside a suite of 24 collages on paper only apparently confirmed the reassuring relationship between a large work and its preparatory “studies”, as the drawings were evidently recognisable as “esercizi di controllo a posteriori”: introducing the new theme of the manipulation of the image, now taken predominantly from fashion magazines, they were all “portraits” and seemed to interrupt progression by series, since each image developed its own singular graphic elaboration. Dating from 1970 to 1971, the portraits were anchored in the previous series of *Cuori*, or “ritratti cuore”. This dependence is still evident in works like the four *Beatles*, born out of a fashion shoot by Richard Avedon published in December 1968 on the American issue of *Vogue* (**figures II.35-36**): the faces are “urbanised in a space of rational opticity at the bottom”, hosted in the former hearth structure; only in the last exemplar, *Ringo Starr*, some long plumes (“pennacchi”) depart from the figure, “irrational as image but rational as for “making” because I’ll need them to reach the edges of the sheet”.³²⁵

John Cage Clock Blu (C70#24-70: from the original photograph Devalle cut off Merce Cunningham, that was depicted alongside Cage), and the proper portrait *Duchamp arancio TV* (“Duchamp orange TV”, C70#52-70).

³²³ ROMANO 1971: 160.

³²⁴ TURIN 1971: p.n.

³²⁵ Beppe Devalle, 1970 c., notes on C69#15-69, Archivio Devalle, Milan. The series was first executed in 1970 and then apparently remade in 1971, as in the Galleria Stein catalogue the four sheets are dated 1971. Nevertheless, in the archive only *Paul McCartney* and *George Harrison* are registered in two versions. Interestingly, the photograph of Ringo Starr is substituted with a self-portrait by David Bailey, perhaps because in the Avedon’s shoot, Starr is the only one photographed while laughing at the camera.

In the latest works exhibited in 1971, the geometric-spatial constructions developed “around” the figures to “host” them get progressively substituted by a conception of drawing made “onto” the collage itself. “Every image suffers in some way from insufficiency: its obvious, photo-typographical appearance hides, from those who are not educated to see, wonderful regular patterns that it is the artist's job to reveal, as an expert in the language of forms”:³²⁶ Romano echoed the artist's own words, on the formal, guiding impulse on the portrait drawings: “I have, especially since I have been working on these faces, the impression of finishing a job left behind”³²⁷ and elsewhere: “The important thing is not what I put in, but seeing what was missing”.³²⁸ A composite attitude toward the sources emerges, that both accepts and modifies the starting image, or “base”, which “with its illusiveness, or half-truth, allows for a visible, but mysterious mediation, because the two, base + painting, albeit remaining, do not merge”.³²⁹ Devalle's practice was then moving toward an analysis of the image through geometry and his drawn interventions corresponded to a verification of lines and points of connection and proportion. The project attitude remained but in a sort of reversed process, in which the outcome (the beautiful and sophisticate images by renowned fashion photographers) is first deconstructed in its harmonical premises, and then integrated with addictive graphic interventions. A complex study on the image was operated through various materials and intermediary stages, including photocopies of the magazine pages and retracing paper. In order to compose *Greta Garbo Star*, Devalle worked on a portrait by Cecil Beaton, overlaying a vellum paper silhouette taped on a mylar sheet (**figures II.37-39**). For *mise en page*, he rotated the image in a way that highlights the curve of the profile turned three-quarters. On the vellum, then, he articulated a geometric scheme connecting points (the eyes, the forehead plane, the mandibular notch), and traced the external outline of the face that would eventually be cut. Devalle called the portable vellum silhouette *teoria* (“theory”), and probably used it in order to transfer the diagram on other sheets for further studies, as it shows modifications and pentimenti corresponding to the 1970-71 five variants of the work. Devalle scored outlines, wrote down captions like “no” or “tratt.[eggiato]”, and indicated with arrow-like signs the direction in which the lines should be prolonged outside Garbo's face to articulate the star-like crown all around the image.

At the 1971 Turinese show, Romano pointed out as the “most Devallian result” the two versions of the same subject, *Sorriso* (“Smile”, **figure II.40**) and *Sezione sorriso*: a smiling portrait framed by “a

³²⁶ TURIN 1971: p.n.

³²⁷ The artist was commenting here *Verushka* (see TURIN 1971: n. 11), where a full page of *Vogue Italia* (March 1969: 48) was glued on the sheet, watercoloured and “completed” with the profile of the hair (in order to correct “the cutting of the page, and other superficialities, and impairments”, Beppe Devalle, 1970 c., notes on C70#25-70, Archivio Devalle, Milan). An (insofar unreadable) graphite inscription is present on the sheet just above the collage.

³²⁸ Beppe Devalle, 1971 c., notes on C71#06-71, Archivio Devalle, Milan.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

stellar explosion of infinite points of referral and connecting segments that, checking them one by one, would all reveal their correct geometric reason for existing”, demonstrating in even the smallest changes between the two drawings “that stubborn exploration of what is seen and how it is seen”.³³⁰ Devalle started from a full-page close-up from the American *Vogue* (**figure II.41**), and executed a first study of the same format, now archived as a third unfinished variant: it only shows an earlier development of the lines, projections and circumferences, around the empty oval in the centre that corresponds to the removed cutout (**figure II.42**).

Although the “correct geometric reason” was accounted by the artist himself as the only formal orientation of his work on the images, it was easy for Romano to individuate some possible visual sources from the high art historical tradition. For instance, he suggested that Devalle was re-reading the geometrical articulation of Cubism, namely of Juan Gris, but also Saul Steinberg’s drawings; he also mentioned Oscar Schlemmer’s costumes and design projects. The didactic materials by Paul Klee, for instance, published in the recent catalogue of the Paris *Bauhaus 1919-1969* exhibition,³³¹ would provide an example to Devalle’s drawing process: the comparison (**figures II.43-44**) with a study of asymmetrical forces, weights and counterweights by Klee, indicates how in *Harper’s Bazaar* the angular, linear diagram should be read not as a two-dimensional zig zag, but as a projection in foreshortened space.

A fascination of Buckminster Fuller’s very fortunate structures was the most available reference to the coeval commentators, and the architect’s idea on planning as a modular articulation certainly permeated Devalle’s theoretical horizon. Matila Ghyka’s texts about proportion belonged to the same literature about geometry and its application that was rediscovered at the time, and can be easily associated with the artist’s theme of “harmony”. In particular, among the many texts published in English or French, *A Practical Handbook of Geometrical Composition and Design*, printed in London several times between 1952 and 1964,³³² provided some operational strategies and formal choices: graphic grids, traced with thin and thick lines and small circles at intersections, and diagrams of “harmonic analyses” of geometric objects, architecture, works of art and figures. *Cover Girl* (**figure II.45**), made on a full-page close-up (advertising “the ’71 foundation” make-up), resembles closely the geometric proportions traced on the photograph of tennis player Helen Wills Moody, famously elaborated by Ghyka (**figures II.46-47**). In the same way, the harmonic analysis of Leonardo’s portrait of Isabella d’Este (**figure II.48**) echoes in the profiles displayed in the exhibition, from *Verushka* to *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Facial Plane* (**figure II.49**).

³³⁰ TURIN 1971: p.n.

³³¹ See PARIS 1969: 69.

³³² See GHYKA 1964. Devalle mentioned Ghyka’s studies among his references (“Anthropometrie alla Mitily Gimka [sic] (vagamente)”) in a 2012 diary entry, see ROVERETO 2015: 291.

Considering the original source of the latter's cutout (**figure II.50**), a theme inherent in Devalle's photomontages emerges, which would bring his work closer to an ideological sphere more typically absent from his statements. Devalle must have been amused to find in November 1970, right at the beginning of his work on portraits, a *Vogue* article about the "architecture of the face", i.e., plastic surgery: it illustrated the profile of the model Betsy Theodoracopoulos, on which was superimposed an X-ray of her skull and a pattern of lines, those "which a surgeon would draw as a precise guide in his quest for perfection".³³³ After cutting out the outline, the artist manipulated the printed lines to construct his own diagram, extending them to the right and projecting them into the triangular structure at the bottom and the curves above. This case is not the only instance in which Devalle appeared to follow the captivating suggestions of fashion advertising design, as the pages of *Vogue*, *Look* or *Harper's Bazaar* often offered variously sectioned or broken close-ups, cropped profiles, photographic manipulations on the models' faces or playful comparisons with the elevated artistic objects.³³⁴ The stereotyped aesthetics and the upper-class, bourgeois pertinence of the fashion repertoire occasionally originated a social and political reading. It happened in May 1972, when Devalle presented a project (now forgotten in the literature about the artist) for the exhibition *Prospettive 5* curated in Rome by Enrico Crispolti. The artist was invited by the critic Duilio Morosini and sent to him four drawings accompanied by some photographs, "works in progress" or "fragmentary documentation" to be exhibited on the wall too (**figure II.51**). The documented, unfinished work was entitled *Et in Arcadia Ego* and dated 1972 in the catalogue, but archival traces date it back to 1969 and attest a title variant, *Rio*,³³⁵ that reveals its reference to the city and hillside of Rio de Janeiro. "Two vertical structures, [...] characterised, respectively, by a linearity of orthogonal impacts, in the first case ('The City'); and by curvilinear perimeter shaping but supported and subdivided by rectangular geometric modules of fixed size, in the second case ('The Hill') constitute the framework [...], destined (Devalle writes me in a letter accompanied by numerous photos) to serve as the perfect equipment for creating and carrying the very thin skin of painting". The second structure was studied at the very origin of this project. Its visual source is a diagram about the consumption of some resource (it is impossible to identify it from the cutout fragment), probably taken from the usual scientific journals. Devalle copied the curve on a graphic study, in which he collaged a picture of the savanna and Mount Kilimanjaro (**figures II.52-53**). The choice of this tiny, quite anonymous illustration is all the more surprising: it seems to testify to a Duchampian import of

³³³ MORINI 1970, first published in the New York edition of *Vogue* (August 15th) and a few months later in the Italian and British editions (November 1970).

³³⁴ For instance, the Beatles series and the profile of Catherine Deneuve used in *Chaterine* were included in an article titled, *The Ecstasy of the Eye*, that collected faces from Piero della Francesca to Japanese Kabuki or Gothic goldsmith objects.

³³⁵ *Cane Rosso* ("Red Dog") is a further variant title, whose meaning hasn't been identified yet.

scientific and ready-made visual elements, rather than a thematic reflection (on the “consumption”). Once the steel structures were built and installed in the Turinese studio, the artist photographed them according to two possible points of view in which one panel at a time is foreshortened up to its disappearing. Morosini imagined that these structural skeletons should have been integrated with “paintings” similar to the photomontages on display: “a three- (or four-) dimensional narrative would thus be created, centred on the theme of the fictitious myths and fetishes of beauty and well-being for all, put into circulation through visual techniques, by today's devious private and public business operators”.³³⁶ Aside from the title, which might classically allude to the ephemeral nature of beauty staged in fashion magazines, no element clearly supports a thesis of costume criticism, linked if anything to Morosini’s background as a Communist intellectual. An interpretive lineage attempted as early as 1969 to place Devalle’s design in a vision of political activism, whether because of hoped-for social implications of the viewer's perspective involvement in the large pictorial works,³³⁷ or precisely because of the “Pop” repertoire of the collages. Moreover, the section of *Prospettive 5* in which Devalle was included, *Progettazione spaziale o concettuale* (“Spatial or Conceptual Design”), was framed in a discourse on “breaking the circle of pure subjectivism”. For curator Mario De Micheli, at the height of 1972, “the problems were shifting from diatribes about language to the meanings of language,” and artists “using methods, manners, procedures born perhaps from poetics of solitude and escapism, were forcing or even overturning its assumptions”. The answer was the landing to an “objective figuration”, since “The objective image is thus one of the ways that the artist has of recognising himself in an open history, the history of others in the context of society”.³³⁸

Devalle’s invitation to the Italian section of the fifteenth Milan Triennale in the fall of 1973, the first edition since the student protests and occupation at the 1968 edition, also brought his work close to a social problem through a close dialogue with industrial design. Curated by the architect and designer Eduardo Vittoria, a prominent member of the Communist Party, the exhibition *Lo spazio vuoto dell'habitat* (“The empty space of the habitat”) collected design furniture that had “to do with the transformation of viewpoints and concepts” of living: among others, Giovanni Guazzo’s tent-like *Teorema, una possibilità di spazio minimo* (“A possibility of minimum space”), Bruno Munari’s screens or Alessandro Mendini's *Sedia Scivolavo* and other chair design, set up on a conveyor belt, all arranged under Vittoria’s curved “tensostrutture”, piled one on top of the other on the ceiling. The ensemble was curiously undisciplined and lush, especially compared to the parallel exhibition on Mackintosh, as Gillo Dorfles noted in an acute review entitled, *Nostalgie dell'ornato* (“Nostalgias of

³³⁶ Duilio Morosini, *Beppe Devalle*, in ROME 1972: 190.

³³⁷ See MICACCHI 1969, who detected in *Prospettiva* a possible “pictorial link with the historical-revolutionary instance of a different class repopulation of human space”.

³³⁸ Mario De Micheli, *Rompere il cerchio del puro soggettivismo*, in ROME 1972: 15.

the Ornate”). Vittoria chose five collages from Devalle’s series titled, *Regine* (“Queens”), in which a dress-like diagram develops from the collaged cutout of a central head:³³⁹ from a few pictures of the display, *Mistinguett*, *Eva*, *Vispa Teresa*, *Mata Hari* and *Queen* can be identified, hanging on the wall behind the conveyor belt (**figures II.54-55**). From a comparison with Claudio Cintoli’s textile installation, *Il filo di Arianna*, which was installed alongside and appears to load Sol LeWitt’s model with mythological references and overt decorativism (see **figure II.71**), Dorfles blamed the “incongruity of too many current stylistic features, which often border on Kitsch”, and the “repressed desire [...] to restore the ornate without the motivations present at the time of Art Nouveau”.³⁴⁰ Paradoxically, if one thinks of the controlled rigor with which they were conducted, Devalle’s latest achievements endorsed Dorfles’ reading: the meticulous executive process was now being overtaken by the overtly Pop and ironic refinement of references, and instead of a geometric harmony prevailed the idea of an excessive and whimsical distortion of female figures.

IV.3 “*Prove di trascrizione*” as conceptualist drawing

“The magic of the drawing effect, the resultant, what appears from this specific operation called drawing determines my life. Drawing has been my mirror, in it I have recognised myself. My aptitude for drawing, the pleasure I derived from it, especially during manipulation, were and still are for me the pole of my identity. On the age of fourteen, when it came to making my first major choice, to drawing I decided that I would dedicate my life. Immediately I wonder if I have ever betrayed this ‘vocational’, ‘ideal’ choice. I cannot and will not cheat. I don’t think so, not even recently (the last few years) when I took on passages of photography on a sheet of paper to fight the supposed inevitability of truth”.³⁴¹

By identifying with the very medium of drawing, Devalle in this text showed his literary sensibility rather than an interest in the psychoanalytic introspection that was depopulating in Italy on the wave of Lacanian theories. The indefatigable obsession, perhaps modeled after Vladimir Nabokov’s

³³⁹ Devalle had “dressed” his portraits since 1970, probably in a dialogue with his wife Cristina De Braud’s fashion figurines. At the Stein show in late 1971, the title *Greta Garbo Gala* alludes to the “crinoline” of curved lines falling from the actress’s small face; *Il poeta A. G.* (“The Poet A. G.”, 1971), Allen Ginsberg inaugurated a male series of characters, partially collected in the hypothetical series *Un popolo di assassini e poeti* (“A People of Murderers and Poets”: this title appears on the back on some works in the archive - perhaps it would have responded to Warhol’s famous *Thirteen Most Wanted Men*). Other male figures possibly related to the series are *Japanese* (C71#20-71, exhibited at the X Quadriennale in Rome in 1972 and published on the cover of *Graphicus* in 1972), *Juan Corona. 23 murders / the wrong man!* (C71#21-71: the cutout comes from an article about the investigation on a mass murder of 24 people in Yuba City, California, and the picture of the killer is captioned “Juan Corona has been charged with ten of the murders. His lawyer, a volunteer county defender, says Corona is “the wrong man”, *Life*, June 11th, 1971: 39), *Dr. Stranamore / Peter as Devil* (C71#34-71, on a silhouette drawing of Peter Sellers from the 1964 movie) and *Fort Carson* (C71#19-71: the cutout comes from a cover of *Life* (February 5th, 1971) illustrating a soldier, John Geurts, in the US army post of Fort Carson, Colorado).

³⁴⁰ DORFLES 1973.

³⁴¹ Beppe Devalle, *Il disegno*, 1974, published in in ROVERETO 2015: 296.

passion for Lepidoptera,³⁴² was part of a precise construction of the character initiated at least since 1971, when he had been described as literally angular (“allergic to rounds”)³⁴³ like his works, and continued thereafter by such images as the “ice skater, who only if he is a god in obligatory exercises can afford everything in improvisations”.³⁴⁴ The collaboration with art historians like Romano or Francesco Arcangeli also expressed a clear choice of field, that occasionally appeared able to embrace larger and unexpected areas of research. For instance, in 1972, Romano had included Devalle in a very select group exhibition on the most recent Turinese generation 1960-1970, along with disparate artists such as Anselmo, Paolini, Fogliati and Gallina. Under the title of *Con il conforto della ragione* (“With the comfort of reason”), they were chosen as they “know how to shrewdly distinguish between the feeling they have about life and the way they translate it” and “prefer to program their existence with reason”.³⁴⁵ Devalle was clearly a point of reference for such critical orientation, and it was precisely the medium of drawing that could link his “geometric embroideries” to other exhibited works, such as Fogliati’s *Fissazioni* (“initial ideas to be realised”, traced *in situ* in charcoal on large white plywood boards); or in Gallina’s elegant and sharply outlined silhouettes. If Paolini’s work was immediately readable as an homage to academic classicism,³⁴⁶ it was the inclusion of Giovanni Anselmo to be most surprising, as Romano gave a psychological reading of his works of the late 1960s (“a nightmarish scenario, unstable and threatening, where even the few non-hostile presences appeared bewildered and surreal”), untangling the artist from the Celant, mainstream reading against the “trivialising tautologies of many who jumped on the Arte Povera train by accident or opportunism”.³⁴⁷

Positioning himself in the Italian “hostile context” went hand in hand with self-representation, which in the early 1970s took the form of a retrospective reinterpretation of his own work from the previous decade. Already at a 1971 exhibition in Torre Pellice he chose to send works dating back as far as 1964, including exemplars from *Palladium* and *Il Giuoco*;³⁴⁸ then, a 1973 solo show in Turin titled,

³⁴² On this theme, Devalle created many works since 1972, using a small pastel portrait of the writer by Russian-Indian painter Magda Nachman, found in *Life Magazine* (January 14th, 1972: 17): from the dressed portraits *Farfalla (Nabokov)* (C72#01-72), *Green Nabokov* (C72#03-72), or *Nabokov con papillon rosso* (C73#78-73) to relief-collages that incorporated tissue paper, like *Blumine* (C73#05-73, C73#11-73, C73#34-73) up to a series of photomontages that insert Nabokov’s head onto a butterfly body, also titled *Nabokov farfalla* (C73#71-73 to C73#77-73). For Nabokov’s fame in those years, see Serena Vitale, “Nabokov, l’entomologo impazzito,” in *Il Dramma*, 46, 1 (January 1970): 139-141, where the writer was defined “an entomologist gone mad, tired of recognize in the wings of a butterfly the imprint of Superior Drawing, of Simmetry”; see also Simona Morini, “Vladimir Nabokov talks about his travels,” in *Vogue New York*, 159, 8 (April 15th, 1972): 74-79.

³⁴³ GANDOLFI 1971.

³⁴⁴ BRIZIO 1972: 36.

³⁴⁵ Giovanni Romano, *Con il conforto della ragione*, in TORRE PELLICE 1972: [12].

³⁴⁶ Paolini sent *Ateneo*, five diplomas with sentences by children visiting the Pinacoteca di Brera Museum, drawn from a 1959 publication, and signed by the artist himself.

³⁴⁷ Romano in TORRE PELLICE 1972: [13].

³⁴⁸ See TORRE PELLICE 1971: p.n. The listed works are *Alt* (1964), *Mobile* (1967), *Disegno* (1967), *123456* (1969, from *Palladium*), *Mano n. 3* (1970, from *Il Giuoco*), *Harper’s Bazaar* (1971, **figure II.43**).

Ieri e oggi (“Yesterday and today”) compared the recent collages with wax crayon drawings of the series *Alice* from 1962.³⁴⁹

Later in the same year, Devalle started to go back to earlier drawings and to transcribe the process of their execution. “Proive di trascrizione” (“Transcription tests”), as the critic Paolo Fossati named them,³⁵⁰ that originated a clarification of Devalle’s idea of drawing. These new drawings were exhibited for the first time in January 1974, in the exhibition *Dal progetto all’opera*, organised by Fossati and Licisco Magagnato at the Museo di Castelvecchio in Verona. Including also Nicola Carrino, Pietro Coletta, Marco Gastini, Gino Gorza, Giorgio Griffa, Sandro De Alexandris, Francesco Arduini, Teodosio Magnoni, as well as local artists, such as Maurizio Casari and Cosimo Lerosé, it represented the most important Italian exhibition dedicated to the theme of the project. On panels designed by Arrigo Rudi, in quite a narrow corridor, Devalle exhibited three series of drawings (**figure II.56**): each series consisted of the original collage, about ten framed drawings each corresponding to the steps of execution and a typewritten text called “traccia delle operazioni” (“track of the operations”). *Lady Astor* (1971, **figure II.57**) was the oldest work submitted to such a retrospective analysis: two years after its execution, Devalle could still recall the reason of his first choice of the image “this stupendous profile suggests to me to attempt relationships between the ‘inward’ of the supra-nose and supra-chin and the ‘outward’ of the nose”. Here, the artist began to articulate his drawing from the long lines of the profile, while in most cases, the starting point is the pupils and the vertical and horizontal axes between them, generating further points, circumferences and lines found with the compass. The eventual four triangles are slightly drawn onto the photograph and function as “un «contrario-uguale» a quel bellissimo profilo” (“a «reverse-equal» to that beautiful profile”).³⁵¹ *Black Make-Up* was made in 1972, and its transcription had been illustrated together with an important interview with the artist published in October 1973 (**figure II.59**). The verbal description might have surprised readers for the strictly technical language (an almost unreadable list of compass-pointing and points-finding operations), but it expressed a few passages of subjective choices: some points are “important”, a distance “can be exploited”, the artist “attempts” to connect two points, or has “intuition” as well as intention “to isolate the nostrils, or rather recreate them”. If *Black Make-Up* meant to “push to the maximum” the face expression, paradoxically through the slightest geometrical

³⁴⁹ See TURIN 1973. The idea was repeated a year later in the show *Come eravamo*, curated at Centro Guido Rota in Turin by Renzo Guasco, who invited Turinese artists to send two works, one from the sixties and one from the recent production.

³⁵⁰ See FOSSATI 1974.

³⁵¹ Beppe Devalle, 1973, in VERONA 1974: 30.

choices,³⁵² *Mata Hary* consisted in the construction of an entire body, starting from a cutout face of few centimetres, and reached the amount of more than 60 points.

On one side, such an effort to account the process of making should once more be considered as partial. It was reduced to mere “instructions” that recall textbooks of technical drawing, but the information is only apparently plain as it obliterates any further meaning of the works. For instance, nothing is said about the titles, which nevertheless interact expressively or ironically with the appearance of the work: for example, we can’t explain why *Lady Astor* is actually the portrait of Laura Legh, a scion of London aristocracy, **figure II.58**; and how far goes the analogy between Devalle’s own re-making of the nostrils and the process of make-up itself, correcting and transforming the face? On the other side, the “didactic” display in Verona results in a new form of drawing, dilating the process through an apparatus of works on paper, which changed, or ultimately enlightened, the conception of project established by Devalle thus far. A specific feature of geometric drawing is the possibility to isolate and section the steps of execution, as well as to verify them through actual measures and find mistakes. Interestingly, when the artist titled, dated and signed the back of the works collected in the archive, he defined them as “collage reversibile” (“reversible collage”), attesting since 1971 to an idea of operation that can be traced back retrospectively.

In his essay in the catalogue of *Dal progetto all’opera*, Fossati summarised the “polemics” at the origin of the exhibition concept: “actuality [...] wants today, in the name of utopia, disengagement or behaviour conducted only by the freest and least formally restrained imagination and fantasy, that *there is no project* in social or personal countenances”.³⁵³ The critic goes on trying to explain the incompatibility of the project with *arte povera* or “*arte del comportamento*”, which need “anonymity”:

“anonymous [language], that is, not conditioned by already solidified formal notions and evidences (and as such the opposite of anonymity); anonymous and that is, in the midst of a subjective reality, not only expressive of one’s own individuality but common and homogeneous with a broader dimension of phenomena; anonymous, also, as not yet or not fully expressed, and seeking its own expression and reason. The project, the work of art, the geometry seems to be at the opposite of such a need: they appear as a pattern, as a systematic frame that encompasses and unifies into a single, constricting dimension just that anonymous phenomenology [...], annuls the process in favour of the systematic figure, mutates into the ideal a need for actuality. [...] Finally, the project appears in the hands of practitioners who identify themselves as repositories of creative forces, denying, in fact, a more total and homogeneous presence of these forces, [that are hoped to be] distributed according to realities very different from that exclusivity”.³⁵⁴

³⁵² To make an example, Devalle could choose between two slightly different radiuses for the “raggio maggiorato” (“increased radius”) that doubled the circumferences traced around the eyes and lips of the model, see the point 6, 3 and 10 in the second element in **figure II.56**.

³⁵³ Paolo Fossati, *Tre spunti per una mostra*, in VERONA 1974: 11. My italics.

³⁵⁴ Ibid: 13. The concept of anonymity is drawn from Husserl’s “kingdom of subjective phenomena that remained anonymous”.

Fossati's thesis points to two arguments: on one side, following the already mentioned analysis of utopia by Argan, the refusal of the project should be considered as a withdrawal from an actual contact and intervention within reality ("utopia, futurability [...] put the future in a parking area where to be out of the risk of present (dramatical, of course) as well as the risk of future (non-bright, of course)");³⁵⁵ on the other side, by clarifying the historical primacy of the project in the Bauhaus,³⁵⁶ Fossati suggests an operational, less aprioristic conception of "project" as the dialectic effort to set a relation with space. "The space to which the title of the exhibition refers is not an undifferentiated void where everything, future utopia and risk, is possible, nor a reality established once and forever and conditioned consequently to defined senses as a road planning for automobile flow. Geometry, eventually, is not merely a language for measuring each event and reducing it to a model, but sensible approximation between composition method and continuous variation of tension and motivation".³⁵⁷ From the artists' interviews and statements, abundantly quoted in Fossati's essay, the role of the project appeared integrated in the practice, as a step merging together with verification and intervention, "The object is not the aim of the project, but project itself";³⁵⁸ "to indicate possibilities, to indicate non possibilities is to plan. Possibility is an operation, the project is an operation. The operation is a process, the process is method";³⁵⁹ "the project is, at the same time, a segment of experience and seamless remind [...] its separation from the realisation into object brings to the idea of "product", that is the unappropriated and superfluous object".³⁶⁰ Such comments echoed visually in the illustrations, that continuously associated drawings, diagrams and sketches alongside photographs of the installed works, geometry functioning as an element of continuity from two- to three-dimensions practices (**figure II.60**).

Actually, the pages assigned to Giorgio Griffa were occupied by seven drawings, each consisting of ten horizontal lines variously arranged (**figure II.61**). "It may be that this arbitrariness of departure allows, where one looks at the drawings, to approach the meaning of my work".³⁶¹ Even Fossati was

³⁵⁵ Ibid: 12.

³⁵⁶ "whether the historical starting point of Bauhaus and gestalt has been hastily attributed to a reduction of contemporary art to planning and design, that is, to rigid planning and instrumentation that can be multiplied indefinitely. The reductive possibility of design to operation, to behaviour, to evaluation of symbolic and psychological elements, etc., has been a very precise node of escaping the conditioning of design and planning. [...] Well the major effort was (and remains to the evidence of recent facts basic concern) to hold the dialectical relations between anonymity [...] and individuality or subjectivity (as verification of facts and in the experience of an experience). And it is also the effort to redefine certain systems of relations, such as those between formal and content aspects: and let it be permissible to quote an excellent formula in this regard, such as that which fixes the problem thus: form stands to content as the unconscious stands to consciousness" (ibid: 15).

³⁵⁷ Ibidem.

³⁵⁸ Nicola Carrino, *Costruttivi/testo 5*, 1973, ibid: 35.

³⁵⁹ Sandro De Alexandris, untitled text (dated October 1973), ibid: 62.

³⁶⁰ Gino Gorza, untitled text, ibid: 90.

³⁶¹ Giorgio Griffa, in ibid: 98.

forced to admit the flagrant “absence of design” in Griffa's practice, which was currently ascribed to analytical painting. Cases like Griffa's and Marco Gastini's, as exponents of the so-called *pittura analitica*,³⁶² performed a “reduction to the pure making” that denied planning as a concept and the material realisation of projects. For the critic, “absence and presence [of the project] are two sides of the same coin”, as project is defined as “a category of contemporary art” also by its own refusal.

Although Devalle clearly stood as a point of reference for Fossati's thesis, as demonstrated by the numerous quotes from his interviews, his ultimate outcomes also problematised the theme of the project, and partly contradicted the critic's assumptions. As eloquently stated in the sequence of the geometric construction of *Black Make-Up*, illustrated in the catalogue, the final drawing on the image corresponded to the construction itself and did not produce a further outcome. In other words, as a counterpart of Griffa's “absence of the project”, the “projected” work is missing, or rather, was the starting point (the photograph). As a reviewer of the show observed, “for Devalle, the work is not really realised, because he explicitly “rejects” it and only engages in deriving geometric structures from previous figurative achievements”.³⁶³

Although Devalle repeatedly stated that he looked for the “effettiva sorpresa” (“effective surprise”)³⁶⁴ unpredictably elicited in the source images by his drawn interventions, his 1974 text titled, *Il disegno*, quoted at the beginning of this paragraph, suggests this identification with the drawing process as an analytical practice. As such, the serial works exhibited in Verona and repeated in later exhibitions can be acknowledged as a conceptualist apparatus, staged to comment itself in its own making.

Indeed, the hypothetical inclusion of Devalle within conceptualism had been critically debated in the following years, when the artist was losing visibility in the Italian art scene. “It is not necessarily the case that the conceptual research should circumscribe itself to a formal sphere, but if an artist applies his conceptualism, that is, his speculations, in this direction, it would be sectarian and foolish to exclude him from a côté that, by its very definition, wants to be the most articulate and available”.³⁶⁵ Nevertheless, such an inclusion becomes problematic as the definition of conceptualism tightens around the group of “the purest and most a-objectual investigations”: in respect to Devalle's

³⁶² Devalle took position against this group of artists: “for example, I totally disagree with what the 'new painting' does, which is just moving about the space, abstract, flat, writing a green line, a yellow line, maybe very calibrated in details. It is a typical situation of overspecialised people who reduce by only seemingly rational ways the clash with the real. They represent the elementary linguistic baggage, but this baggage the painter must use and compare with reality: [otherwise] they are only obligatory exercises, they are not free exercises. And don't tell me that reality is a dot, or a line” (FOSSATI, DEVALLE 1973: 19). Fossati, although supporting Griffa and Gastini, also hinted to a current conceptualist practice based on a superficial “revival of a notion of painting, as a [...] reflection out of practical nexuses”, the critic diagnosed “a discomfort, an inactuality of the project: the more it loses in rigidity the more it seems to make it difficult to differentiate one's work as a painter or sculptor or operator from other, no less complex and arbitrary activities” (Fossati in VERONA 1974: 19).

³⁶³ FARINATI 1974: 4.

³⁶⁴ “The result, the final answer I find, after successive steps that rationalize a series of intuitions, eventually leads me if I have followed certain precise rules of the game, to read the chosen image differently” (FOSSATI, DEVALLE 1973: 19).

³⁶⁵ CAROLI 1975.

increasing attachment to drawing as the fundamental formal language, the conceptual turn in the art system “entails the repudiation not so much of the work, which, while introducing painful deprivation, would be the lesser evil, but the irretrievable loss of a particular quality of thought, of an individuated form of knowledge and communication, such as is realised only in the presence of the support of ‘vision’”.³⁶⁶ Around the mid-seventies, such positions were now as marginal as Devalle was isolated, overtaken by more agile arguments and disparate forms of knowledge drawing on post-structuralism and psychoanalysis, which in a few years would put drawing back at the centre of the debate, on completely different tracks.

V *The projects of Mario Merz*

Celant’s reticence about drawing was dented for a change in his first article about Mario Merz published in *Domus* in June 1971. It starts with an anecdote told by the artist himself that dated back to 1945, when he was imprisoned for antifascist leafleting in Turin. In jail, he executed a portrait of a red-bearded prisoner without raising the pencil from the paper, resulting in a sort of “hieroglyph”. Soon after,

“When I got out of prison, I immediately went to the meadows to do grass drawings, as I had done that portrait, according to this time, I would go outside in the morning and go to the meadow, the time of the drawing, in the meadow, was the time of the mark that continued from morning to evening, always with the same technique of not taking the pencil off the paper. Around sunset I would stop, and the fact that I would spend all day drawing this stroke in circumvolutions, as if it were a kind of gut, without smudging, allowed me to think. All the time I spent thinking, I was following my thoughts and everything going on around me, for example, birds chirping, leaves falling, the distant sound of a truck. All these things entered into the drawing, without entering into it of course, but they entered as time, as a recording, as if the pencil was the tip of certain instruments recording on a sheet of paper, the tip always turning and recording humidity, temperature, noises, sounds. You can't actually see anything but it's all inside this tip, even if you can't see it, there's all that passage of time. That was the meaning for me, so much so that I was able to continue for months on end doing these things. [...] I did it maybe for a year or two in a row, but mostly in the summer months; in the winter months, that is, in the bad season, I could not do it because there was no meaning, not naturalistic, but the physical and mental possibility of being inside a place, which was this grass”.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁶ CASTAGNOLI 1976.

³⁶⁷ Mario Merz in CELANT 1971: 47.

In the rest of the article, largely made of quotes from the interview with the artist,³⁶⁸ there is no further comment on these early drawing experiments (elsewhere referred to as “disegni progressivi” too)³⁶⁹ and their meaning for Merz’s career up to the seventies. The introductory prominence of the anecdote strengthens Celant’s reading of Merz’s art as entangled with his “vita concettual/vegetale/biologica”, about the furrow of the arte povera critical writings from the late sixties. The quote fits effectively the recent concerns of the critic: in the absence of actual works on paper documenting the artist’s memory, this “dematerialised” practice of drawing testifies an act of thinking, a process of recording feelings and a process of connecting to energies of nature (“humidity, temperature, noises, sounds”). Merz pointed out the pertinence of the “hieroglyph” drawing made in jail for his current production: “At that time, drawing had this meaning, I speak about it now because it is a very precise work, because I never took the pencil off the paper, a work that I now take up with certain drawings that I am doing, but it is not even a resumption, it is something that is there”.³⁷⁰ It remains impossible to identify which 1970-1971 drawings the artist refers to. It is possible though to position this acknowledgement of the importance of drawing in Mario Merz’s practice of the early seventies, and more precisely in correspondence to the entrance of the Fibonacci series in his works: in this paragraph, the analysis of this passage will bring together major themes related to Merz’s draftsmanship, such as the appropriation of architecture drawing and theory, the spatial dilation of drawing and the specific role of his exhibited projects from 1970 up to 1975, when drawings were included in his European retrospectives.

V.1 “*Il progetto è quindi curvo o diritto?*”: *The Haus Lange projects*

Mario Merz’s case has a further point of interest as it shows how around 1970 the new issues related to conceptualism could affect an established artist who, in the late sixties, was already known as a painter and a sculptor. Some monographic exhibitions about Merz’s works on paper have pointed out the coherency, both quantitative and qualitative, of his drawing practice throughout from the fifties to his later years.³⁷¹ Among the features assuring this consistency are the speed of execution, the structural impulse and a gestural expression, and the private status assigned to such works. However corroborated and refined, this reading of continuity does not conceal a substantial turning point, at

³⁶⁸ The interview was made in Genoa on March 10th, 1971 and has been first fully published in CELANT 1983: 46-62. Instead of signing the article on *Domus*, Celant only appeared as an editor, according to his own recent abdication of the role of critic and interpreter, and supposed self-limitation to the role of collector of information and interviews (also sanctioned by the establishment of the IDA, Information Documentation Archive). The quote about drawing in the grass appeared around the half of the later transcription, CELANT 1983: 50-51.

³⁶⁹ In an undated text titled *Biografia come sostentamento* (“Biography as survival”), CELANT 1983: 72.

³⁷⁰ Mario Merz in CELANT 1971: 47.

³⁷¹ This is the implicit thesis in the largest catalogue of Merz’s drawings, see TURIN 2007.

the height of 1970, largely as a consequence of the extensive and radical introduction of the Fibonacci series in Merz's work. Shortly before, in a group of 1968-69 sheets dedicated to some igloo-works, the artist had drawn with his typical richness in materials that included sanguine, charcoal pencil, watercolour and even applied clay crumbs.³⁷² One of the exemplars, dated realistically to 1969, carries a drafted text which is both typical of Merz's writing and symptomatic of his involvement in the new art launched in Europe that year (**figure II.62**). The artist wrote down some associative thoughts on the theme of the igloo as a greenhouse ("the igloo is an overturned cup that grows back up from the ground toward which it swells with perfume as if covered with a mantle of broken glass. Even the earth is reborn like a greenhouse"), and alongside the title *Object cache-toi* (which means "Object hide yourself"), he put the statement: "the anti-object controversy is visual" ("la polemica anti-oggetto è visiva"). Meditating on an expression already widely present in the debate about international conceptualism, Merz meant "dematerialisation" as a refusal to create objects and at the same time a permanence of the visual dimension. At the time, he was starting to put into practice this theoretical attitude, like in his intervention at the show *Al di là della pittura* in San Benedetto del Tronto. After going to the seaside and seeing the seagulls' traces on the sand, he remade them by scraping the walls of the museum with a gouge. It was the first case in which the artist manipulated a space with an ephemeral intervention, rather than installing an object in it.³⁷³

According to Celant, the first experiments with the Fibonacci's series were presented in 1970 at *Gennaio 70*. On a long wall in the Bolognese Museo Civico, a new version of *Appoggiati*, thirteen glass plates placed against the wall and secured with green putty,³⁷⁴ was integrated with neon bars on the back and inscribed with the first thirteen numbers of the Fibonacci sequence in white paint (**figure II.63**). Some direct testimonies by the artist anticipate his first interest in Fibonacci to 1969.³⁷⁵ "I

³⁷² This group of drawings, that was not considered as a series like in other cases, includes ten sheets (nn. 22-31 in TURIN 2007) that have belonged to the collection of Elena Buchmann (Basel and Lugano), and one that has been in Tucci Russo's collection in Turin (n. 21). The eleven sheets can be divided in two groups, according to a larger format (47 x 65 cm) and a smaller one (22.5 x 29 cm), and one exemplar is executed on vellum. Apart from the Tucci's sheet, all have been signed and dated by the artist in pencil to 1968, 1969 or 1970. As the pencil intervention appears extraneous to the execution, it is possible to hypothesise that they were signed later; more likely the drawings can be dated to 1968-1969.

³⁷³ "In San Benedetto del Tronto I had gone to the beach and saw seagull footprints that had like three fingers. I remade that mark and those footprints on the wall, carving with a hammer and a gouge, starting from the bottom upward and making the footprints come out of the window. The intervention had a meaning of transcending the environment itself, to the work I had also attached a piece of paper with a writing" (CELANT 1983: 58-59). The sentences on the sheet of paper pointed to the process of "individuation" of the materiality of the walls determining the space ("Traces. Intervention on plaster performed with gouge. Marks in the form of bird tracks. The white is empty plaster and concrete beneath. The concrete is identified").

³⁷⁴ *Appoggiati* was exhibited in early 1969 in Rome, Turin and Bern, at *When Attitudes become Form*.

³⁷⁵ The most important testimony is a letter to Konrad Fischer sent on February 4th, 1970, in which the artist told the gallerist that "My work on Fibonacci was done a year ago in a different way" (see *infra* p. 30). In the catalogue of *Processi di pensiero visualizzati*, published in May 1970, a picture of the work installed at *Gennaio 70* is captioned "Mario Merz 1969 'Fibonacci' 1202 (vetro, neon, mastice)". In the chronology edited in 1983 (probably based on memories of the artist and on Celant's documentation), some felt tip drawings on glass according to the Fibonacci proliferation" are registered as exhibited already at the show *Disegni progetti* at the Galleria Sperone in late May 1969; no documents currently support this information though, see CELANT 1983: 214.

came across it quite simply in a book, and as I looked at it I became aware that this progression had a meaning that was applicable beyond the progression itself, that it was not merely a mathematical process, but had a meaning in terms of the idea of proliferation".³⁷⁶ Merz's later words are important to understand the process of his free appropriation of the scientific analysis of the numerical sequence, but they are helpless to identify which kind of publications he was looking at. His curiosity could have been supported by an endless literature, spanning from bulky treatises to be consulted in public libraries³⁷⁷ to occasional articles he might have run into browsing popular science journals, from mathematics to architecture.³⁷⁸ His earliest comments about the Fibonacci series show a rather encyclopedic and non-mathematical knowledge of it, not far from the kind of information present in a standard manual, such as Petrucci's *Disegno e progettazione*.³⁷⁹ A text dated "1969/70" resumes it as follows:

"In the year 1202, the monk Fibonacci, who lived in Pisa during the construction of the Leaning Tower, published a treatise on the mathematical series that made a structural contribution to the architectural definition of the tower. My work is based on this same Fibonacci series in which the numbers develop in a progressive series going to infinity, beginning with the number one. And a progression in which each preceding number is included in the number that follows. This adding each number into the one that follows is the fundamental rhythmic law of numbers in which Fibonacci develops the mathematics of organic growth in nature. Bee males, for example, reproduce with a proliferation that can be enumerated by means of the Fibonacci series. I counted the pine cone fruits in the series 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21. I found that the pineapple follows the same mathematical order. The silkworms of the spiral plants revealed to me the shape of the spiral itself. In drawings and works derived from the same rhythm of proliferation, the spiral configuration is the expansion of space as it develops in accordance with the Fibonacci series. Merz 1969/70".³⁸⁰

³⁷⁶ TISDALL 1976. In a 1972 interview, the artist remembered instead to have found the series in a journal, see Bandini 1973: 9.

³⁷⁷ For instance, see the wonderfully illustrated Theodor Cook, *The curves of life, being an account of spiral formations and their application to growth in nature, to science and to art, with special reference to the manuscripts of Leonardo da Vinci* (London: Constable & Company, 1914); as well as Matila Ghyka, *The geometry of art and life*, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1946: 87-110. In 1969, the Turinese editions Bollati Boringhieri translated in Italian D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, *Crescita e forma*, Bollati Boringhieri: Torino, 1969.

³⁷⁸ See, for instance, *Scientific American* (GARDNER 1969). Curiously, on November 2nd, 1969 the Radio Nazionale broadcasted a ten-minute long content about Fibonacci's *The Book of the Abacus*, see *La Stampa*, 101, 252 (November 2nd, 1969): 9.

³⁷⁹ In a Merz's 1970 composite drawing in the Agrati collection (TURIN 2007: n. 32), a text on Fibonacci reaches detailed and technical terms such as "flosculi", that could be found in PETRIGNANI 1967: 51-52.

³⁸⁰ "Nell'anno 1202, il monaco Fibonacci, vissuto a Pisa durante la costruzione della Torre pendente, pubblicò un trattato sulla serie matematica che diede un apporto strutturale alla definizione architettonica della torre. Il mio lavoro si basa su questa stessa serie di Fibonacci in cui i numeri si sviluppano in una serie progressiva che va all'infinito, a cominciare dal numero uno. E una progressione in cui ciascun numero precedente è compreso nel numero che segue. Questo aggiungere ciascun numero in quello che segue è la legge ritmica fondamentale dei numeri in cui Fibonacci sviluppa la matematica della crescita organica in natura. I maschi delle api, ad esempio, si riproducono con una proliferazione che può essere enumerata mediante la serie di Fibonacci. Ho contato i frutti della pigna nella serie 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21. Ho trovato che l'ananasso segue il medesimo ordine matematico. I bachi da seta delle piante a spirale mi hanno rivelato la forma della spirale stessa. Nei disegni e nelle opere che derivano dallo stesso ritmo di proliferazione, la configurazione a spirale è la dilatazione dello spazio così come si sviluppa in accordo con la serie di Fibonacci. Merz 1969/70" (TRINI 1970B: 41).

Two texts available to Merz in the second half of 1969 that can't be proved as direct sources for Merz, appear nonetheless particularly close to his approach to Fibonacci and can be usefully considered as contextual indicators. The second issue of *Design Quarterly*, published by the Walker Art Center and curated by Christopher Finch, was titled *Process and imagination* and collected beautifully illustrated Futuristic projects by Antonio Sant'Elia, photographs of Buckminster Fuller's geodetic structures and Frei Otto's pneumatic domes and Paolo Soleri's drawings for Mesa City. A second section included a few contemporary artists that were crucial to the current redefinition of monumental planning, such as Claes Oldenburg, Barry Le Va and Sia Armajani. The latter illustrated a graphic version of the work, *A fairly large number*, in which a computation of the digits in the Fibonacci Numbers was translated into three pages entirely covered by printout sheet with series of zeroes (prolonged to the issue's cover as well). Despite its numerical visual result, Armajani's Fibonacci work went beyond a "merely a mathematical process" and thematised the conceptual dilation of numbers; above all, the entire issue would have articulated the sequence within a discourse on utopian architecture, its mathematical principles and contemporary art practice based on environmental process (like Barry Le Va's), all put in dialogue beyond disciplinary distinctions.

Also published by October 1969, the 19th issue of *Zodiac*, the architecture journal funded by Adriano Olivetti and printed in Milan, was dedicated to geometric research in architecture, mostly under the sign of Buckminster Fuller. Anne Griswold Tyng's *Geometric Extension of Consciousness* was also translated into Italian, and her fascinating theoretical arguments entered easily into the Italian debate. Her analysis embraced a very wide range of sources and materials, from studies on the physiology of the brain to Herbert Read's and Henry Focillon's history of art and architecture. At the centre of her discovery there was a sequence of growing spatial organisations (bilateral, rotational, helicoidal and spiral) that could be described by geometry and found from the chemical structures to the stages of civilization ("hierarchical organisation of collective life"), passing through the positional articulation of in Jung's psychology and knowledge itself ("The mind is a design ["disegno" in the Italian translation] that is in a ceaseless flux, [...] and its activity, in this sense, is an artistic activity",³⁸¹ as Tyng quoted from Focillon). The usual information about Fibonacci was integrated with its spatial configuration of the spiral and carried multiple consequences: the spiral corresponds to the most complex stage of consciousness, a non-static and expanding dimension, that, for instance, described the dynamic interaction of consciousness and subconscious, as well as the collective rites and myths of advanced societies. Above all, in architecture, "the fascinating possibilities of its use [that is of the Fibonacci sequence as a special case of Divine Proportion] in man-made forms, allowing for

³⁸¹ TYNG 1969: 138.

continuous internal enrichment and additive growth, is in stark contrast to the rigid use of repetitive multiples of a single modular dimension”.³⁸² The illustrations, carefully arranged within the text on large fold-out boards, were an integral part of Tyng’s discourse: as a theorist of morphology, geometric construction and diagrams had a prominent role in her argument and the spiral was drawn in schemes of phyllotaxis, as well as in geometrical progressions (**figure II.64**).

Tyng’s text should be kept in mind in the attempt to reconstruct the major project undertaken by Merz in 1970 –a personal exhibition at the Museum Haus Lange in Krefeld, that would have involved a massive reflection on architecture, although which left almost no traces as it failed. The institution was cutting edge in the contemporary scene in 1969: Merz’s show, which would have taken place from February 15th to March 30th, followed the Krefeld stage of *When Attitudes become Form* and a sequence of site-specific installations by Fred Sandback, Sol LeWitt and Jan Dibbets. As it is possible to reconstruct from a fragmentary correspondence, in early December the secretary of the museum, Gisela Fiedler asked Merz to send an exhibition concept or a checklist of the objects included, and photographs for the planned catalogue. “If your conception is not yet finished, perhaps you can send us drawings or sketches of the works that will be exhibited”.³⁸³ However, Merz didn’t go to Krefeld until mid-January, together with Marisa Merz and their daughter Beatrice, bringing materials for the catalogue.³⁸⁴ From the following letters with the director Paul Wember, it is possible to understand that the show would have included a first exemplar of the *Igloo Fibonacci* and a spiral traced on the floor of the Haus Lange, but it apparently failed because Merz’s “ideas could not be realised in a concrete way to lead to a clear conception for our exhibition”.³⁸⁵

In the same early days of February, when it became clear that the show had to be postponed, Merz contacted the gallerist Konrad Fischer in Düsseldorf, proposing a site-specific project that “can be done in pencil on the walls and ceiling_ naturally chancing [sic] the relationship of the scale. Fibonacci’s series have an intimate [sic] correspondence with the structural growth of the vegetable world_ by growth I mean the numerical relationship [sic] between different elements”.³⁸⁶ On the

³⁸² Ibid: 145-6.

³⁸³ “Se la sua concezione non sia ancora finite, forse lei possa mandarci dei disegni o dei schizzi delle opere che saranno esposti [sic]”³⁸³ (Gisela Fiedler, December 2nd, 1969, letter to Mario Merz, Archiv der Kunstmuseen Krefeld). I am thankful to Waleria Dorogova for the sending of the archival materials and the information about Merz’s works present in the Krefeld Museums collections.

³⁸⁴ See Mario Merz, December 22nd, 1969, letter to Gisela Fiedler, Archiv der Kunstmuseen Krefeld). The artist, who wrote from Turin, also asked, “I will be there certainly on January 15th, 16th or 18th. Will there be time to do everything?”.

³⁸⁵ “[Es tut mir leid, dass] Ihre Ideen nicht so konkret realisiert werden konnten, um zu einer klaren Konzeption für unsere Ausstellung zu führen” (Paul Wember, February 19th, 1970, letter to Mario Merz, Archiv der Kunstmuseen Krefeld). The director “considered the show not as canceled, but only temporary postponed” (“ich betrachte die Ausstellung nicht als aufgehoben, sondern nur zeitlich verschoben”). In the 1971 interview with Celant, Merz recalled instead that he was “sent away”, see CELANT 1983: 68.

³⁸⁶ Mario Merz, February 4th, 1970, letter to Konrad Fischer, in Archiv Dorothee und Konrad Fischer, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Schenkung (ZADIK Zentralarchiv für deutsche und international Kunstmarktforschung, Cologne), Künstler-Korrespondenz A-Z, 1970-1972, A096_V_002, 0159, recto).

back of this letter he typed a more cryptic proposal, possibly the title of the project: “Aus n° 2584 bis 45278 ich mache ein igloo von Fibonacci. Der profil ist in die Numerierung”. Less than a month after this letter, on March 7th, the exhibition at Fischer’s inaugurated, where the first *Igloo Fibonacci* stood within a proliferation of numbers on the wall. The invitation card contains a drawing by Merz that relates to the quoted title, as the two numbers are selected from the Fibonacci vertical scheme (**figure II.65**).

Around mid-March, Merz completed a series of 12 heliographies from drawings related to the Haus Lange project, and sent them to Fischer (on March 14th)³⁸⁷ and to Wember (on March 16th), as “[...] some documents of work, which I intend to gradually develop”.³⁸⁸ In his last letter to the Haus Lange director, the artist admitted that “the study of this overall working project on the theory-Fibonacci is continuously progressing”, and at the end of March he announced “new drawings to send and an almost-ready text”.³⁸⁹

In later interviews, the artist remembered that the project for Krefeld only remained in “drawings and projects, that fleshed out the book with Sperone”,³⁹⁰ that is *Fibonacci 1202 Mario Merz 1970*, an artist book published in the same year by the editions of the Gian Enzo Sperone, edited by Germano Celant and Pierluigi Pero. However, the heliographies do not correspond exactly to the about 20 drawings that were illustrated in the book, seven of which are still known as a series of 70 x 50 cm white paper sheets and include slightly later themes of work, such as the diagram of the pine cone. Probably before the book came out, the 12 heliographies were exhibited within Merz’s solo show at the Sonnabend Gallery in New York, opened on April 25th. Hanging on two walls of the room, they framed the central *Igloo Fibonacci* (**figure II.66**) and faced two large untitled mural works, as well as *Counting on the Pine Cone*, two leaning glass plates. Following the failed Krefeld show and the photographically undocumented Düsseldorf one, the Sonnabend exhibition provides a fundamental material to the analysis of the first Fibonacci projects, their rhetorical position in the room and the relationship with the installed works, all stimulating a new exploration of the medium of drawing in the spatial dimension.

The heliographs were probably displayed to account for the development of the Haus Lange project. As later reported by Celant, Merz determined a centre in the plan of Mies van der Rohe’s 1930

³⁸⁷ “Cher Konrad, je t’envoy 12 dessins eliographés et numerotées [...]” (Mario Merz, March 14th, 1970, letter to Konrad Fischer, in Archiv Dorothee und Konrad Fischer, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Schenkung (ZADIK Zentralarchiv für deutsche und international Kunstmarktforschung, Cologne), Künstler-Korrespondenz A-Z, 1970-1972, A096_V_002c, 0158, recto).

³⁸⁸ “Egregio signor Paul Wember, le mando una copia numerata di alcuni documenti di lavoro, lavoro che intendo via via sviluppare” (Mario Merz, March 16th, 1970, letter to Paul Wember, 12 attachments, Archiv der Kunstmuseen Krefeld).

³⁸⁹ “Lo studio di questo progetto di lavoro complessivo sulla teoria-Fibonacci procede continuamente. Ho nuovi disegni da mandarle e un testo quasi pronto. La prego di tener presente che la proposta di lavoro in un museo è sempre molto interessante per me” (Mario Merz, March 30th, 1970, letter to Paul Wember, Archiv der Kunstmuseen Krefeld).

³⁹⁰ CELANT 1983: 67.

building and traced an axis orthogonal to the plan. On the axis, some points are marked calculating their distance through the Fibonacci's progression and unit of measure of 1 metre. A spiral should have been then traced on the floor with chalk,³⁹¹ encountering the axis in the marked points. Two heliographies got to the Berlin Kupferstichkabinett through the estate of Konrad Fischer. **Figure II.67**, captioned *Misurazione della pianta della casa secondo Fibonacci (modulo 1 m)* ("Measurement of the house according to Fibonacci (1-meter module)"), seems to correspond to the second sheet hanging on the long wall, and it is indeed one of the first stages of the project: Merz retraced a simplified plan of the Haus Lange ground floor and individuated the centre, connecting the most external corners of the vertical body. Then he added the horizontal axis encountering the centre, and marked it with six points toward left, according to the sequence of Fibonacci.³⁹² The only reviewer of the show argued that in his "drawings", "Merz dépasse l'art technologique par l'ampleur de son propos. Il n'y a chez lui aucun artifice visual, mais seulement le pur développement graphique d'un concept mathématique".³⁹³ He therefore excluded the afferece of this Merz's project to either a technological or a neo-constructivist area of artistic research (such as that expressed at the Venice biennial that was opening in the same months). In particular, no formal fascination with the diagrams or the plans guided the execution of the heliographed drawings, made rapidly with no accuracy or material quality, by pencil or felt tip marker. It is then all the more interesting that the sheet mentioned attests for the first time a stylistic trait that will be recurrent in Merz's drawings from 1970 onward, namely, the fine parallel hatching. The artist probably retraced it from a plan provided by the museum itself, where the hatching backgrounds instrumentally indicate areas outside the gallery plan, such as the two *terrassen*. This appropriation of a technical detail of architectural drawing will be charged in other refined works with possible higher references to Leonardo da Vinci's hatching³⁹⁴ or antique prints.

In the sixth drawing of the series, also in Berlin, the plan is removed and only the spiral is traced; Merz specified how it encounters the axis directed to Nord-East with the Fibonacci intervals (**figure II.68**). Thirteen triangles are positioned along the swirling spiral, and the caption names them as "pesi di tenuta" (literally "holding weights"). Although it is not clear how they might have been realised in the installation, the fact that these weights are also spaced according to the Fibonacci progression

³⁹¹ The material is mentioned in a text known as "The Haus Lange", that was exhibited at the Sonnabend show alongside the heliographs, see *ibid*: 63.

³⁹² According to the scale, the 6 points would have occupied the following positions: at 1 metre from the centre; at 2 (1+1), at 4 (2+1+1), at 7 (3+2+1+1), at 12 (5+3+2+1+1) and at 20 metres (8+5+3+2+1+1). Two of the points matched with walls in the plan, while the last one would have ended up outside the gallery, in a room not included in Merz work.

³⁹³ NEW YORK LETTER 1970: 131.

³⁹⁴ Merz himself remembered a 1947 trip to Rome and the study in a public library of "books among which the drawn studies of Leonard da Vinci and Karl Marx's texts" (CELANT 1983: 72).

links them to the main theme of this drawing, written on its lower edge, that is “la resistenza diminuisce con la dilatazione della spirale” (“resistance decreases with the dilation of the spiral”). The resistance could probably be that of the pre-existent structure, that is van der Rohe’s plans (and possibly its “holding weights”), against the expanding spiral traced by Merz. An inedited typewritten text that survived in the Krefeld archives together with Merz’s letters suggests this reading. It starts with a description of the building as an organism in its energetic and socio-environmental context:³⁹⁵

“The house museum Haus Lange built by M. v. D.R. in brick reinforced concrete with piping from outside, water coming from the great German water sources, with piping carrying electricity from outside in quantity and quality always normal to its specific voltage: electricity. Foundations that are measured in the 1928 drawings and that remain deafeningly tied to the house among the earth that in these places (Wi...allee)³⁹⁶ is scented with rotting leaves and not leaking gas. The Haus Lange museum house also gets gas pipes and piping for the telephone, for television no piping, its quality is to have a receiving apparatus that is in this house and is connected with a transmitting apparatus placed far away”.³⁹⁷

Then, suddenly, a subjective point of view accounts for Merz’s approach to the modernist, “rectangular” architecture, and a series of cryptic questions arises:

“The energy and the pleasure I felt following the spiral by which I meditatively went out and came back from the house into the house. Dr. Huebler³⁹⁸ what is a house to you? Is it a shadow on the earth or an unclear fractionation of space? Is it a place to gather supplies or a place to gather weapons or a place to receive the elementary advice not to move from home? Does rectangular space threaten bent space? Does bent space threaten rectangular space? We like to think that the line of this house is curved, as every line is curved. Would you rather see the curve or imagine it? Is the project then bent or straight?”³⁹⁹

³⁹⁵ It is a first version of the text known as “La Haus Lange” and published from the archives of Germano Celant in *ibid.*: 62-64. One of the versions of the text might have been hanging in the Sonnabend Gallery as well, as it is possible to see a little, typed paper sheet alongside the drawings.

³⁹⁶ Wilhelmshofallee.

³⁹⁷ “La casa museo Haus Lange costruita da M. v. D.R. in mattoni cemento armato con tubature provenienti dall’esterno, l’acqua proviene dalle grandi sorgenti tedesche di acqua, con tubature portanti elettricità dall’esterno in quantità e in qualità sempre normali alla sua specifica tensione: energia elettrica. Fondamenta che sono misurate nei disegni del 1928 e che rimangono sordamente legate alla casa tra la terra che in questi posti (Wi...allee) è profumata di foglie marcite e non di perdita di gas. Alla casa museo Haus Lange arrivano anche tubature di gas e tubature per il telefono, per la televisione nessuna tubatura, la sua qualità è di avere un apparecchio ricevente che sta in questa casa e che è collegato con un apparecchio trasmittente collocato molto lontano” (Mario Merz, typewritten text, January-February 1970, Archiv der Kunstmuseen Krefeld).

³⁹⁸ This name does not correspond to any known person, but it probably misspells “Wember”, the last name of the director, Merz’s interlocutor for the show. The hypothesis of a reference to the artist Douglas Huebler, albeit more interesting, is not sustained by other evidences yet.

³⁹⁹ “L’energia e il piacere che io provai a seguire la spirale con la quale meditatamente uscii e rientrai dalla casa nella casa. Dott. Huebler cos’è una casa per lei? È un’ombra sulla terra o un poco chiaro frazionamento dello spazio? È un posto dove raccogliere le provviste o un posto dove raccogliere le armi o un posto dove ricevere il consiglio elementare di non muoversi di casa? Lo spazio rettangolare minaccia lo spazio curvo? Lo spazio curvo minaccia lo spazio rettangolare? Noi amiamo pensare che la linea di questa casa sia curva, come ogni linea è curva. Lei preferisce vedere la curva o immaginarla? Il progetto è quindi curvo o diritto?” (*ibid.*).

Meant to be published in the catalogue of the Krefeld exhibition, this text is less cryptic if put in the context of the exhibitions that have been just reconstructed. Inevitably, the Haus Lange conditioned any artistic interventions made on it. It had happened, with the harmonious dialogue possible between Modernism and Minimalism, with the exhibition of *Skulpturen und Wandzeichnungen* by Sol LeWitt held in October-November 1969: in the catalogue, Wember declared that “never before were Architecture and Sculpture in such correlation. There seems to be a mental identity between the sculptures of Sol LeWitt and the architectural volume of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe”.⁴⁰⁰ On the contrary, Merz’s intervention is presented in the text as antagonistic to the grid-based plan, and the spiral a disruptive element. The anthropological scope of the questions that close the text for Krefeld echoes some current notions of architecture planning, present for instance in the already mentioned article by Cappabianca: “In the sphere of classical drawing tools, the plan, by highlighting the ‘distributive’ aspects of spatial composition, is linked, to the extent of the other elaborations [of architectural drawing], to function understood as the complex of human usages referred to the horizontal plane; and the horizontal plane, in fact, is the functional plane par excellence, it is the plane originally, viscerally linked to the activities of primal man, to the ‘natural’ relationship of the body with the earth”.⁴⁰¹ In this sense, Merz connected the building with the landscape and energetic system, in order to support a critic of the “house” in political terms too. This point was put into focus in a second text about the Haus Lange that was exhibited alongside the heliographs at the Sonnabend show, a sort of continuation of the Krefeld writing that in New York served as a recapitulation of the unfinished project. “Then we decided / let’s abandon the practical space for a theoretical one / Let us abandon, clear all the space that has become money and abuse / let us free the «Haus Lange» house-museum from the tangle of abuses [...]”, where the practical space is understandable as the functionalism at the base of van der Rohe building. In Merz’s formulation, it was also an issue of drawing, as “graphic” questioning the straight or curve identity of the “line” of the house (the artist states that “every line is curved”). He even asked the director Wember: “il progetto è quindi diritto o curvo?”. Such geometrical terms can’t but recall Tyng’s spatial configurations and her comments about the spiraled against the modular shapes in architecture and more broadly in their biological and cultural implications: “[...] the spiral thus lived a biological constancy as the upward momentum of a garden branch lived a biological constancy the term to be reached were the trees and the spaces outside the chalk spiral on the polished floor was the thing to be offered to the house itself beauty

⁴⁰⁰ KREFELD 1969.

⁴⁰¹ CAPPABIANCA 1969: 13.

would be restored to the biological space and a viewer might believe by walking on the polished floor to find the idea of a spiral in proliferation toward infinity”.⁴⁰²

V.2 *On walls, through glass: expanded drawing in Merz’s practice of the early 1970s*

The “abandonment of a practical space for a theoretical space” planned for the Haus Lange remained a major theme of Merz’s 1970 exhibitions, where he repeatedly dedicated himself to directly mark the room rather than installing objects. In 1972, he declared to feel annoyed by the spatial limitation of the objects (“I did not understand why a work of art had to be a certain length when it could be infinite”) and to be “not interested in the aesthetic quality of the materials” of his installations but in the room’s “own psychology and personality”.⁴⁰³

Paradigmatic as a conceptualist impulse toward dematerialisation in the Italian context, this move entails drawing as an important tool to reach such spatial dilation. The material process sustaining Merz’s abundant, obscure writings and declarations can be acknowledged better looking at the precious photographic documentation of the Sonnabend show installation, realised by the gallery photographer Nick Sheidy (**figure II.69**): in the empty room, we see Mario and Marisa making the untitled work described as “the diagram made with a thread freely arranged that connects the numbers according to the layout of the walls”.⁴⁰⁴ They look at one of the heliographies, possibly to find clues of the proportions and order needed as Mario fixates the thread around some nails onto the walls. In another picture, Marisa is writing on a notebook next to a thread spool, some scissors and rulers, and two large dark sheets marked by lighter squares, which might have served as preparatory cartoons to report in large scale the progression. Both the heliography and these lost working materials may then correspond to those “drawings that are continuously transportable, with the same series, from one thing to another”,⁴⁰⁵ with which Merz started to apply the Fibonacci series. The diagrams, albeit freely arranged, respect proportionally the progressive distances between the numbers. Commenting the graphite numbers made on walls at Konrad Fischer’s as well as the neon sequence realised at the Galleria Françoise Lambert in Milan in October, the artist pointed out that “on the wall you start with any form and then you see where you end up [...] it was absolutely arbitrary as a position of spaces, but absolutely precise as a position of distances and ratios. It was basically using the wall for what it

⁴⁰² CELANT 1983: 64.

⁴⁰³ MINNEAPOLIS 1972: p.n.

⁴⁰⁴ CELANT 1971: 50.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

can go to”.⁴⁰⁶ At Sonnabend, the primacy of the diagram over obstacles and measures of the walls results in the overshoot of the thread on the ceiling. The arbitrariness of these early wall arrangements would be overcome at the Guggenheim biennial in early 1971, where the numbers sequence integrated both spatially and theoretically the spiral stairs of Lloyd Wright’s building.

With his 1970 elastic thread works,⁴⁰⁷ Merz could not help but position himself among the various spatial or wall drawing practices at work in the international context, resumed quite comprehensively by the three artists hosted at the Haus Lange in 1969. By 1970, LeWitt’s wall drawings were familiar in Italy and Merz might have met him by the summer of 1970, so that his autonomy from the American’s influence appears intentional and eloquent.⁴⁰⁸ In a perfectly coeval work like *Lines connecting architectural points*, that was installed at Celant’s show *Conceptual Art Arte Povera Land Art* at the Museo Civico in Turin in June 1970, the drawn intervention confirms the pre-existent architecture as the ground for a self-referential demonstration of planned principles. As the spiral in respect to the Krefeld plan, Merz’s progressive wall diagrams defy the framing function of the wall. The divergence wouldn’t lie in the use of threads instead of graphite on wall: the regular, even decorative, principles of LeWitt’s model could be recognised in later wall compositions, such as Luciano Fabro’s 1972, *Penelope*, installed at the 1972 Venice biennial with a zigzag, strongly vertical pattern that rendered the thread almost invisible (**figure II.70**);⁴⁰⁹ or Claudio Cintoli’s already mentioned *Il filo di Arianna* at the XV Triennale in Milan, evidently inspired by the *horror vacui* of some linear patterns from the repertoire of the American artist (**figure II.71**).⁴¹⁰

Jan Dibbets had taped the walls of the Haus Lange, registering the positions of the shadows projected through the windows for four days. On the one hand, then, he captured the “psychology” of the rooms conditioned by the natural light and the disposition of the building, that in part interested Merz too. On the other hand, the shadow drawings were traces of a past time and could be enjoyed only statically and passively by the viewer. For Merz, as he put it in a later text, it was necessary to “contrariare le tautologie” (“to oppose tautologies”).⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁶ CELANT 1983: 64.

⁴⁰⁷ Works similar to the one exhibited at Sonnabend’s were installed at the Tokyo biennial in May, at the exhibition *Amore mio* in June; a retouched photograph of an analogous work is published in the catalogue of *Vitalità del negativo* published in late 1970.

⁴⁰⁸ Merz was definitely aware of LeWitt’s wall drawings executed in L’Attico garage in May 1969, with the help of big squares and rulers, few months after his own solo show. After possibly meeting in Bern or London for the stages of *When Attitudes become Form*, LeWitt came to Turin in June 1970 for his solo show at Sperone and Celant’s *Conceptual Arte Povera Land Art* exhibition at the Museo Civico.

⁴⁰⁹ See HECKER 2011. Curiously, the author doesn’t name LeWitt’s important precedent, that would match the delicate and barely visible appearance of Fabro’s wall work.

⁴¹⁰ Cintoli’s *Il Filo di Arianna* was first ideated in 1968 in his notebooks. In June 1972, *Arts Magazine* published a complete series of details from “All Wall Drawings”, see LeWitt 1972. With the intricate superimposition of lines, *Filo di Arianna* could be compared to n. 68 executed at the Guggenheim International exhibition (ivi: 42), n. 76 executed at *At the moment* in Zagreb (ibidem) or n. 113, realized at John Weber’s in 1971 (ivi: 44).

⁴¹¹ The text, dated August 27th, 1971, is titled *Teoria per una mostra* (“Theory for an exhibition”), see CELANT 1983: 72.

Finally, Fred Sandback's installations may have interested Merz for practical reasons, as they were made with coloured, elastic or fabric threads and attached to the walls, to appear as pure abstract lines in real space (as they appear in his drawings). In a similar way, Merz considers the nylon thread used on the wall as the materialisation of an abstract line; nevertheless, he never lifts it beyond the surface where it is "leaning": and that is because, unlike Sandback, the Italian artist would avoid any illusion of virtual planes in the room, in order to mark the real space with the equally real biological meanings of the Fibonacci's series. This fundamental aspect of Merz's practice could also explain why after the Düsseldorf show, where the numbers were written in graphite on the wall, the artist resorted to "non-illusionistic" marks, that is nailed threads, neons or actual objects. In other later words by the artist himself, "If you paint a number on the wall, it means that this number becomes part of it. I like neon lights in stores because they can be taken down. They don't become an integral part of the space. [...] I attach the stuffed iguana, not a drawing of one, to the wall because it is a reality".⁴¹²

In the early Fibonacci's works, another strategy to defy objecthood is drawing on glass, a material that distinguished Merz in the Italian context. Merz had been using glass since his show at L'Attico in February 1969. Commenting the already mentioned *Appoggiati*, Merz referred to Celant the meaning of the introduction of this support: "each glass [...] being a transparent and serially repeated structure does not exist [...]. The physicality of previous works is annulled in a proliferating mental system".⁴¹³ One of the first drawings on glass was performed for the videotape, *Lumaca*, included in Gerry Schum's *Identifications*. In order to obtain the effect of drawing in the pure space, Merz positioned a glass in front of the camera, so that the living snail could move on one side while he traced the Fibonacci spiral on the other side, as if the drawing came out of the animal. The full transparency of the glass plate, whose edges are not visible in the videotape, makes possible to include in a single vision the drawing process, the artist himself, the snail and even the natural outdoor setting intentionally chosen by Merz (**figure II.72**). A similar fascination for the possibilities of a transparent support is caught in a photograph from the opening of the show at Galleria Lambert in Milan, in which the artist lifts one of the felt tip pen drawings on glass displayed in the mezzanine of the gallery and looks at the photographer through it (**figure II.73**).⁴¹⁴

Exhibited at Sonnabend's, the now lost, two-glass-plates piece *Pine cone* (**figure II.74**) was realised "enlarging a work",⁴¹⁵ that is the drawn scheme of the pine seeds' disposition (that follows spirals

⁴¹² Mario Merz in MINNEAPOLIS 1972: p. n.

⁴¹³ "ogni vetro [...] essendo una struttura trasparente e ripetuta in serie non esiste [...]. La fisicità dei lavori precedenti si annulla in un sistema mentale proliferante" (CELANT 1971: 50).

⁴¹⁴ In **figure II.73**, it is possible to see that at least two drawn glass plates were exhibited alongside each other, as a series.

⁴¹⁵ Ibidem.

according to the Fibonacci series, see **figure II.64**) that was published the Sperone book.⁴¹⁶ Merz did not draw on the glass, but glued some little lead seals (typically used for packages) on it, and made a rope going through them to trace the scheme; then he numbered the seals.⁴¹⁷ The Fibonacci diagram, traced by felt tip pen or through a thread, articulates in space or rather – in the artist’s own words – leans on the spatial elements, with its own slight shadow projected onto the walls.

In other cases, Merz seems to indulge in a more complex play of transparency, opacity and shadow. In a lost work, probably titled *La matematica è un’ipotesi* (“Mathematics is a hypothesis”)⁴¹⁸ and installed on the ground in a solo show at Sperone in early 1971 (**figure II.75**), two glass plates are densely inscribed with hatched diagonals and curves, while the numerical series is written on seven stripes of white tape, interrupting the transparency of the support. In this work, the plates are organised as written pages, as the lines wrap into the next ones as text (later Merz would publish actual pages with this outlook as contributions to catalogues, with the idea that the Fibonacci sequence shapes the form of writing itself, too).⁴¹⁹ The serial display is decisive and it was probably studied in two 1971 drawings on vellum paper,⁴²⁰ where eight contiguous rectangles contain a progressive motif numbered according to Fibonacci: a growing spiral that knots up to the centre, marked by a horizontal red line, and multiplying concentric rectangles (**figure II.76-77**). The first one accompanied a Renato Barilli’s text which appeared in the first issue of *DATA*, focused on Merz’s “war on image, on every sensible-concrete (aesthetic) element, in favour of prioritising the concept”.⁴²¹ Barilli pointed out the artist’s necessity to develop a variety of analogic visualisations of the Fibonacci series: “Sometimes the analogon is given by dizzyingly increasing horizontal distances along the walls of a room (and it is then necessary to transfer them gradually to different orbits). Other times, it is like the resultant between horizontal thrusts and vertical thrusts, compounded into a snapping upward parabolic curve. [...] he wants to avoid limiting it to some fixed configuration”.⁴²²

⁴¹⁶ Merz also published the pine cone drawing as his contribution to the “conceptualist” *Art International* issue curated by Seth Siegelaub and Germano Celant.

⁴¹⁷ Although it is difficult to acknowledge this technique from the pictures of the New York piece, similar works were executed in 1972, see those illustrated in MÜLLER 1972: 146; and *Untitled*, 1972, at the MACBA Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Barcelona. I am thankful to Núria Montclús Carazo for sharing images and information about the work, purchased by the MACBA foundation in 1988.

⁴¹⁸ In CELANT 1983: 201 the work is registered as *Untitled*, but *ivi*: 207, in a list of work exhibited at Merz’s solo show at Sperone, the title *La matematica è un’ipotesi* is described as “drawing on glass according to the Fibonacci proliferation.

⁴¹⁹ See, for instance, BERLIN 1974: [8-10].

⁴²⁰ Both the drawings are 29.6 x 41.6 cm.

⁴²¹ BARILLI 1971B: 24.

⁴²² “Qualche volta l’analogon è dato da distanze orizzontali vertiginosamente crescenti lungo le pareti di una stanza (e occorre allora trasferirle via via su orbite diverse). Qualche altra, esso è come la risultante tra spinte orizzontali e spinte verticali, composte in una curva parabolica scattante verso l’alto. [...] egli vuole evitare di limitarlo a una qualche configurazione fissa” (*ivi*: 25).

Quoting from Merz's own words, Barilli argued that "our spiritual energy, and 'calculation' that is its most effective weapon, 'takes place without images in the depths of the brain'".⁴²³ Coherently with this interpretation, the artist has often expressed the equivalence of drawing and counting in his own accounts of works like *Pine Cone*. In the drawings made for the catalogue of the Guggenheim International Exhibition, even his typical hatching is used as a form of counting, as the quantity of the red tiny traits proportionally corresponds to the Fibonacci sequence, and visualises the progressive segments along concentric or serial circles, or in a vertical section of a spiral possibly echoing the museum stairs (**figure II.78**). The aerial elegance of these drawings marks a further step from the Krefeld drawings, less aesthetically charged, and they parallel the mysterious quality of the cold neon lights in the carefully illuminated rooms of the installations. Comparing such a Merz's neon environment installed at Galleria Lambert and an exhibition by Bernar Venet opening at the same time in Milan, Pierre Restany believed to face "the two extreme poles" of current conceptualism. Venet's photo-reproductions of scientific texts stood as the "practical and eventually entirely depersonalised illustration of a general method": his objective detachment opposed the "gestural aspect of an artist like Merz, which derives directly from the individualised and subjective action", and a "dangerous return to aestheticism, which we have been saturated with since the Renaissance".⁴²⁴ The function of drawing introduced by the Haus Lange projects and articulated at the Sonnabend show brings together the planning practice on paper, the private dimension that Merz continued throughout his life, and the spatial dimension of his works. By virtue of the diagrams generated by the Fibonacci sequence, a sort of "geometric extension of consciousness" for Merz, drawing is defined as a project of space first, and then rapidly involved further dimensions of reality. In fact, the 1971 interview with Celant shows that Merz was rethinking the medium of drawing as capable of absorbing all the elements of natural reality: his hand on the page worked like a seismograph that moves on the page without interruptions, involving himself in the environmental dimension rather than merely representing it. This conception frames his copious works on paper that started to include actual objects of nature, glued or taped onto the sheet: snails, seeds or leaves (**figure II.79**)⁴²⁵ are appropriated through the (drawing) act of counting and numbering.

In the Guggenheim catalogue, Merz also projected some sort of autobiographical notes on the hatched segments of two lines, starting with his place and year of birth, and then listing some "freedoms"

⁴²³ "[...] la nostra energia spirituale, e il «calcolo» che ne è l'arma più efficace, «si svolge senza immagini nel fondo del cervello»" (Ibidem).

⁴²⁴ RESTANY 1970B: 47.

⁴²⁵ The 1972, 47.5 x 67.5 cm, taped collage of a leaf, with five numbered extremities, was titled *Drawing* in the catalogue of BELFAST 1973: p.n.

about social and existential issues⁴²⁶ – a self-fashioning that confirmed the current critical acknowledgments of his art in the field of “comportamento” (“behavioural art”). In the list, the “freedom to draw” could be a salute to a practice and a paradigm of drawing that is based on a precise numerical order, not to confirm a set order, but to merge into reality and life.

V.3 “The decisive station between idea and objects”: exhibiting drawings 1973-1975

Between 1971 and 1972, Mario Merz obtained an international fame due to his prominent participation in important exhibitions, namely the Guggenheim International Exhibition, the Venice biennial or the *documenta V*. In those years, he avoided exhibiting actual works on paper in his shows in favour of articulated spatial installations, igloos and even a few photographic experimentations that stably associated him with unconventional, Post-Minimalist and behavioral researches.⁴²⁷ A conspicuous increase of the visibility of the medium of drawing started from 1973, when Merz was an artist in residence in Berlin, and since then his draftsmanship has been appreciated and interpreted as the core of his work.

In August 1972, a few weeks after he received the invitation from the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) to take part in the 1973 Künstlerprogramm, Merz proposed “to give a series of lectures about his Fibonacci-project (house building) realised in Italy”.⁴²⁸ Although there is no further news about such lectures, the broad project of the “Fibonacci House” has evidently dominated his work in Berlin, and could have ridden a specific local interest in the topic of art and science.⁴²⁹ It first took the form of a copious practice of drawing that started quite soon after moving into his studio apartment in Moabit,⁴³⁰ where he resided throughout the year, with periodical interruptions to return

⁴²⁶ The transcripts of the two pages are: “Born in Milan, Italy / freedom to carry the burden of patience / freedom to believe oneself accused without being accused / freedom not to be moralized into adverse conditions / freedom not to believe oneself prisoner of economy / living space and freedom in natural progression” and “freedom to read / freedom to draw / freedom to leave / freedom to present a thing to anyone / freedom to enter arbitrary into a conversation / freedom to bear a declaration of hostility / freedom to hold three conflicting ideas” (NEW YORK 1971: p.n.).

⁴²⁷ In particular, the Italian pavilion at the 36th biennial was titled *Opera o comportamento* (“Artwork or behaviour”) and Merz was clearly ascribed to the second term: for the comprehensive work *Alla deriva con i numeri di Fibonacci* (“Drifting with the Fibonacci numbers”), he occupied a room with two disparate applications of the Fibonacci sequence (a crocodile and a roar) and worked on a docked boat for the *Vascello fantasma* (“Ghost vessel”), where he installed an igloo and inscribed the numbers with chalk.

⁴²⁸ Anonymous, Vermerk für Herrn Ruhrberg (Note for Mr. Ruhrberg) “Mario Merz möchte gern eine Reihe von Vorträgen über sein in Italien realisiertes Fibonacci-Projekt (Hausbau) in Berlin halten – es könnte bildende Künstler und Architekten interessieren. Käme die Akademie dafür in Frage ([the president of the Akademie der Künste, professor Werner] Düttmann, [architect Peter] Pfankuch?)” (DAAD Archives, Berlin, folder: Merz, Mario Bildende Kunst, 1973). I am thankful to Kathleen Clancy for her help in the research through the DAAD Archives.

⁴²⁹ In January 1973, Klaus Honnef, director of the Westfälischer Kunstverein in Münster, was asked to think of an exhibition about “art and science” for the annual Berliner Festwochen, together with Bazon Brock and Karl Ruhrberg, who was already in contact with Merz as guest in the DAAD programme, see HONNEF 1973: 197-200. The eventual show was instead the first edition of *Aktionen der Avantgarde* at the Akademie der Künste in which Merz effectively arranged *Tavoli*.

⁴³⁰ His address was Bundesratufer 5.

to Italy.⁴³¹ In fact, by March 1973, he had planned to send monthly materials to *FlashArt* about “the fermenting houses and the igloos of meditation”.⁴³² This “house” developed from the Haus Lange idea of three years before, as demonstrated by the only contribution effectively published in the journal – a finished ink drawing that echoed the 1970 series of the spiral traced onto the Modernist planimetry (**figure II.80**). Other traces of his re-handling of the Krefeld materials might have appeared in the first work he exhibited in Berlin, in the stand of the Galerie Folker Skulima at the Fünfte Internationale Kunstmesse, held for six days (from March 13th to 18th) at the Akademie der Künste (**figure II.81**). In an area of the art fair delimited by a line on the ground, Merz constructed an igloo of glass and putty, and installed a neon sign with the question “Is Space Bent or Straight?” on the wall, quoting from the Haus Lange texts as well. The work was actually a proper performance concerning inhabiting (and “meditating”), as the artist himself, his partner Marisa and friend Emilio Prini were photographed within the igloo in various activities (reading, knitting, writing on a type machine).⁴³³ The result may have reminded the German public of the famous photographs of “enflatable office” designed by Hans Hollein in 1969, in which a worker could be seen through the transparent PVC of the transportable office.⁴³⁴ In respect to Prini’s collaboration, it would be very interesting to link the Berlin performance to the series of typed, black and red ink drawings, developed by the artist mostly from 1974 (**figure II.82**). Such drawings, which only recently have been considered as a coherent body of work,⁴³⁵ were also dedicated to architectural plans according to numerical proportions, with obvious debts to Merz. In a typed text that today is part of the igloo-work (and exhibited inside the type-machine), Merz took the following notes: “he has the idea of making a drawing / it could be as for Goethe writing a poem / antithetical to producing / not productive / antithetical to productivity / voluntary auto hexameter present unsure autonomous”.⁴³⁶ On the catalogue of the Kunstmesse, Merz was the only artist illustrated under the section of Galerie

⁴³¹ Expected to be in Berlin in January, Merz was interviewed by Mimmo Paladino and Enzo Esposito at some point in the spring. Letters to John Weber testifies he was in Berlin in April and back to Turin in May, when he worked in Milan too.

⁴³² “Beginning with the next issue, Mario Merz will present the fermenting houses and the igloos of meditation,” in *Flash Art*, n. 40: [20].

⁴³³ The work and collaboration were recently discussed with the presentation of new photographs and documents in a talk organised by Dia Art Foundation, see *A conversation on Mario and Marisa Merz with Teresa Kittler and Matilde Guidelli-Guidi*, March 25th, 2021, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0aLXFAYL6Ns&t=2662s>. The pictures were taken at the Kunstmesse by Angelika Platen, and first published in “Internationale Verzeichnis kommender Ausstellungen, neu erschiener Grafiken, Multipels, Kataloge, Bücher etc.” in *Kunstforum International*, 1 (1973): [187].

⁴³⁴ Hollein was certainly known to Merz since he was assigned the 1972 Austrian pavilion at the Venice biennale (when Merz exhibited in the Italian one).

⁴³⁵ See the exhibition *Emilio Prini. Il caso standard*, at Spazio Ordet in Milan, May 4 – June 24, 2023.

⁴³⁶ “gli viene l’idea di fare un disegno / potrebbe essere come per Goethe scrivere una poesia / antitetico a produrre / non produttivo / a[n]tetico alla produttiv[i]tà volontario auto esametro presenziale insicuro autonomo”.

Skulima, where an analogous cryptic text was accompanied by drawings related to the theme of collectively inhabiting the “bent space”.⁴³⁷

A concrete link between the projects from 1970 and the new comprehensive conception of the Fibonacci House might also have been the hypothesis of an exhibition at Neue Nationalgalerie: in fact, the building symbol of Mies van der Rohe’s architecture was still in early 1974 an option for the final exhibition of Merz’s stay in Berlin (eventually hosted at the Haus am Lützowplatz).⁴³⁸

Interviewed by Michael Haerdter about the theoretical background of the Fibonacci House, the artist explained why he started from the *Fibonacci Tables* and why “furniture is important and not the walls”.

“For this reason, I got interested in building a house of which I can determine the space. To me, the first and most important thing for the determination of space is the table. If you have a tiny table, you can make a certain kind of work, if you have a large one, another. Eating or working on a tiny table is something different from eating or working on a large table. To construct the table before the house is built, means to put into question its space and enclosing walls too”.⁴³⁹

Merz’s *Tavoli* were presented in September at the Akademie der Künste,⁴⁴⁰ and then remade in New York for his show at the John Weber Gallery in November. The related catalogue represented the point of maximum political expansion of the project of the Fibonacci House, with texts that openly addressed economics, and a series of drawings on vellum on the theme of the outset of the sun,

⁴³⁷ The text is divided into short aphorisms: “Wenn ich im *Iglu* bin als Schauspieler, bin ich einer, der sich selbst nicht hat. / Wenn ich nicht im *Iglu* bin, bin ich einer, der kein Publikum hat. / Ich lasse den *Iglu* nicht allein und gehe, sondern ich betrete den *Iglu* nicht wie ein Schauspieler, aber wie ein Künstler, der den *Iglu* spielt. / Ich bringe meine Unabhängigkeit in den *Iglu*. / Ich bringe meine musikalische Unbewußtheit in den *Iglu*. / Ich bringe elementare Formen des Lebens in den *Iglu*. / Ich bringe andere Menschen in den *Iglu*. / Und ich bringe mich selbst in den *Iglu*, also bin ich im *Iglu* private und öffentliche Person. / Mario Merz, Berlin 1973” (BERLIN 1973A: p.n.). The drawings might have been made parallelly to the writing as they represent three humans (possibly hinting to Merz’s family, or the three artists involved in the actual performance at the Kunstmesse) and a violinist (handling the instrument in the wrong way) under the curves of the bent space, as well as a leaf whose extremities are numbered according to the Fibonacci sequence.

⁴³⁸ In a letter to John Weber dated to January 11th, 1974, Merz reported that: “I am in Berlin for prepare a show at the neu National galerie do from Mies van der Rohe architect. I like very much this building. I am working hard” (Dresden, Marzona Paper). In some notes by Karl Ruhrberg from a conversation with the artist seven days later, the Nationalgalerie is one of three options, comprehending the Foyer of the Akademie der Künste and the Haus am Lützowplatz, see. By February 5th, “for reasons about the space and the quality we have decide, I and the curator Wirland Smith [sic] of the “Neu national galerie” [sic] to prepare my exposition in one old Berlin’s haus, the name is “Haus am Lützow platz” (Mario Merz, February 5th, 1974, letter to John Weber, Archiv der Avantgarden, Dresden).

⁴³⁹ BERLIN 1974: [13].

⁴⁴⁰ While in Berlin, Merz took part in four group shows: the mentioned Fünfte Internationale Kunstmesse Berlin 1973 (Akademie der Künste, on Hanseatenweg, March 13th-18th); the 3. *Freie Berliner Kunstausstellung* (Funkturn, April 8th-May 1st, 1973); the *ADA: Aktionen der Avantgarde* (Akademie der Künste and city area, September 9th-October 3rd, 1973, see BERLIN 1973C and BERLIN 1973D); and *30 internationale Künstler in Berlin: Gäste der Deutschen Akademischen Austauschdienstes, Berliner Künstlerprogramm* (Beethoven-Halle, Bonn, December 14th to 27th, 1973). It is impossible to verify the information (CELANT 1983: 211) that *Tavoli* were already executed at the Funkturn, which is rather doubtful since thirteen other artists exhibited in the same section of the 7th Berliner Künstlerprogramm, apparently with not enough space; and in the catalogue his name is listed without the title of the work (possibly sent too late to be printed) and the illustration contains only the handwritten text *Ein Werk von Mario Merz 1973*, see BERLIN 1973B.

ascribable to the traditional Italian socialist symbol (“il sol dell’avvenire”, **figure II.83**).⁴⁴¹ The work arranged in Berlin consisted of six large wooden tables sprayed and stenciled with numbers and lines, which lay on pedestals that had been requested from a supplier,⁴⁴² with chairs and milk glasses possibly provided by the academy itself (**figure II.84**).

The New York version resulted in “neat”:⁴⁴³ five tables made of wood, and composition boards were displayed without chairs and marked by neon numbers, and their arrangement in the room followed a spiral (**figure II.85**). This new synthesis might be indebted to the seamless graphic research that the artist was carrying out in the same months, testified by numerous works on paper dedicated to the tables.⁴⁴⁴ This process might have been accounted by a series of nine drawings in a separate room of the Weber Gallery, shared with paper works by the American artist Mon Levinson (**figure II.86**). Merz himself pointed out the self-reflective quality of his own practice of drawing “on” the tables:

“On the table I draw the projects for the house, the sketch is bonded to the shape and size of the table. The function of the table is also a question mark. I imagine a table that is the idea of a new table, and at the same an actual table. If you construct a table according to a new idea directed toward what you want to do differently, to change, then you understand that the usual tables are built to be used only in the sense of a usual idea. Eating on a common idea, for example, means not wanting to eat”.⁴⁴⁵

Obviously, Merz’s approach is less understandable within the coeval industrial design conception of planning, than on the impulse of avantgarde historical models, from Giacomo Balla’s decoration for Löwenstein house in Düsseldorf to El Lissitzky graphics (see **figure II.95**). Such models,

⁴⁴¹ Here is the translation of Merz’s text or poem introducing the drawings: “money is a proliferating series! / Capital is a proliferating series! / All working days are a proliferating series! / All non-working days are a series of empty vortexes! / The earth! / The sun! / The inhabited planets! The planets of stone! / Life is a series of vortexes! / The motionless shell that the chemical animal creates in spirals on the backs of the rocks under the trembling plants is an empty vortex! / The psyche is an empty vortex! / Every day is a spiral! / Time is a biological spiral and a year is the spiral shell of the planetary revolution! / But what I do more carefully, less absent-mindedly, is that there is nothing in everything but a spiral, and I spiral as a shell lives by making THE SPIRAL attached to any point on any rock of the immense reef! / Numbers I do not know except in their form, which expresses above all and only finally a spiral! What I dare to learn on a daily basis is that there is nothing serious in this, for the spiral is slow and full of humours like a fruit, and what we see dramatically in the spiral, is only the idea that the shape of the spiral is a malign concept, or at any rate that the spiral is a shape that expresses anxiety, the spiral probably expresses only and uniquely the rising of matter upon itself, then the spiral shell is devoid of force when organic matter slows down and stops its pouring, the poem is full of questioning exclamation marks, the poem is an introduction, the love of form is in the rising, numbers always rise from a unity, a day rises upon itself, the shell expresses primordial form, and primordial slowness, the comma is the breath, the comma says one must breathe to write, even to draw one must breathe” (BERLIN 1973C: n.n.p.).

⁴⁴² See Karl Ruhrberg, October 11th, 1973, letter to Mario Merz (DAAD Archives, Berlin, folder: Merz, Mario Bildende Kunst, 1973): the curator informed him that after the show, the tables were disassembled, the dashboards remained at the Akademie and the legs were being returned to the supplier.

⁴⁴³ MELLOW 1973.

⁴⁴⁴ See nn. 115-121 in TURIN 2007. Two photographs published in an interview with Pio Monti and possibly dated to 1974, show himself (the editor of *Artstudio Macerata*), with Mario and Marisa Merz, in front of a wall where some drawings of the *Tavoli* (in particular, n. 113 from TURIN 2007) hang together with a Marisa Merz’s copper work, see Pio Monti, *Pio Monti. Un gallerista da 40 anni a Roma*, *Art Tribune*, 25 dicembre 2015: <https://www.tribune.com/attualita/2015/12/pio-monti-40-anni-galleria-roma/>.

⁴⁴⁵ Michael Haerdter in conversation with Mario Merz, in BERLIN 1974: 12.

recognisable at first in the graphic iconicity of the red squares, also carried social and political instances, that characterised Merz's early formulation of the *Tables* too, as proved by a proposal sent to Weber.⁴⁴⁶ One of the earliest drawings "for tables" that was executed in Berlin and exhibited in New York, subsequently entering John Weber's collection,⁴⁴⁷ presents a zenithal view that provides the key for the meaning of the installation, as well as their elegant appearance as an abstract composition of squares (**figure II.87**). At the centre, four tables of the same dimensions correspond to the first four digits of the Fibonacci series, as they host, respectively, one, one, two and three seaters, indicated both as circles and lines on the edges of the squares, in red ink. The tables then "grow" to host five, eight, 13 and eventually 21-seaters, which are asymmetrically disposed. Merz had rapidly traced a spiral in pencil that guides the black ink signs within the tables. Fragments of a big spiral were effectively painted on the tables exhibited in Berlin, so that this drawing can be likely referred to as the first version of the work realised in September.

As for its subject and technique, this drawing is very close to the one that opens the illustrations in the catalogue of the exhibition at the Haus am Lützowplatz, a sequence carefully arranged in order to guide the reader from the drawings to the photographs of the installed sculptures (**figure II.88**). In the publication, though, most works on paper are highly finished and are executed on a very sophisticated support, that is 50 x 70 cm sheets of Roma paper (a hand-made and hand-watermarked, yellowed, whole cotton paper made in Fabriano and known for its high stability), and they would possibly have constituted the body of work to be exhibited according to the first plans of a show of drawings at the graphic cabinet of the Neue Nationalgalerie.⁴⁴⁸

Nail holes at the corner of the sheets may indicate that the drawings used to hang on the walls of Merz's studio, where they had been seen by the critic Wieland Schmied during a visit in preparation

⁴⁴⁶ "Tables are in increasing size in space with a spiral force starting from a unit level that can be represented as a spiral. The tables are at the level of 75 cm from the ground the tables are the natural necessity of man to have the ground level within reach of his hands whether standing or sitting the tables are the revolution through the ages from herding without tables to today working on tables. Set in spiral, they are also the first element of a house that truly is for humans a living space in openness" (transcription from the unpublished document: "Le tavole sono in grandezza aumentante nello spazio secondo-avec una forza di spirale che parte da uno come livello di unità che si sviluppa che si può rappresentare come in spirale. Esse sono I tavoli sono anche livelli il livello a livello di cm 75 dal suolo le tavole rappresentano sono la necessità naturale dell'uomo di avere il suolo a livello portata delle mani sia in posizione eretta che in posizione seduta le tavole sono tuttora la rivoluzione dai attraverso i tempi dalla pastorizia ai tempi della alla fabbrica senza tavoli a oggi che lavora sui tavoli. Esse in spirale rappres. sono anche il primo elemento di una casa che realmente sia per gli uomini uno spazio vivente in apertura e non uno spazio determinato da leggi precedenti" (Mario Merz, proposal, c. 1973, to John Weber, Staatlichen Museen, Berlin).

⁴⁴⁷ See the provenance and the analysis of the work in NEW HAVEN 1978.

⁴⁴⁸ "Merz möchte sehr gern eine Ausstellung seiner Zeichnungen haben, die entweder im Foyer der Akademie der Künste, im Haus am Lützowplatz oder im Grafikraum der Nationalgalerie realisiert werden könnte. [...] Zu den Zeichnungen will Merz ein grosses Projekt und einen Video-Film über eine Aktion in Mailand (Iglu in einer alten Kirche als Raumdefinition) zeigen" (Karl Ruherberg, January 18th, 1974, report of a conversation with Mario Merz, DAAD Archives, Berlin).

for the catalogue, as the critic described “his new drawings, the notebooks full of sketches of hands,⁴⁴⁹ leaves, crystals, the table projects, the plan of an igloo, the Milan photos”.⁴⁵⁰ Then, Schmied understood the centrality of Merz’s practice on paper:

“Drawing is perhaps the most important part of his work, what is actually creative about it, the pivot, the decisive station between idea and object, just as the object – the igloo, the table – are important to him as definitive steps toward reality. In drawing the space, that projects thoughts into an unwritten universe gets measured. Mario Merz's drawings are direct transcripts of his concepts. They do not take any aesthetic detours, especially not well-trodden ones. They are particularly convincing in their palpable simplicity. A few strokes, straight and curved lines, backed by a single colour – preferably a dark red –, wide swaths of wax, a stain penetrating the surface and caught by a second, backed sheet – that's pretty much all that is implied by Mario Merz, spontaneously, improvised, as if spirit and life were mixed anew on every sheet, as if the line of thought had to be connected to the material of actual life – the wax or a burn mark. The means could not be simpler and naive, and planetary systems arise from them, star paths, star houses, labyrinths. Again and again, it is the simple sequence of the numbers 1-1-2-3-5-8-13-21 that gropes its way into the room and leaves its mark. The sequence presents itself from the centre of the sheet mostly as its spiral movement, which, as it moves outwards, rises and falls in increasing rhythms, and which, once it has reached the edge, can also be reversed: the labyrinth back into itself, the construction lines of the world building remain legible as an igloo, as a shelter. Seen from its centre, each drawing contains the idea of the house”.⁴⁵¹

Schmied’s comprehensive reading was the first in acknowledging the importance and the quality of Merz’s drawings, but it is not extraneous to some biases. The agreeable definition of Merz’s drawings as “a station between idea and object” points out how they do not anticipate or substitute the sculptures or the spatial installations but act parallelly to them. Precisely by virtue of their autonomy, however, the 1973 works on paper appear rather layered and complex devices to visualise ideas about the Fibonacci House, rather than “direct transcripts of his concepts”. We already saw how such a cliché about drawing and planning was also still valid within conceptualism, and it is curiously at work here despite Schmied’s punctual analysis of the material complexity of Merz’s practice on paper. Instead of a functional information, limited to a metaphorical sense (“The drawings should help us to learn to read space and to find our way around the house of the universe”),⁴⁵² most of the drawings appear overtly obscure.

⁴⁴⁹ A rare record of the presence of the hand drawings, only known from later publications, see TURIN 2007: nn. 71-77. They were also mentioned in GRÜTERICH 1976: 148 (“Merz has represented the progressions of spatial relations in human acting [“Handeln,” in German] in ten, correlated watercolours of hands [“Hände”]. From the centre of the carpus a bundle of rays is drawn through the five fingers, which continues into the outer space and with increasing number of the hand potentiates its relations to it”).

⁴⁵⁰ See also note 164: the reference is to the filmed performance *Igloo e laser*, realised in May 1973 at the Centro Internazionale di Brera in Milan, that is in the abandoned Chiesa di San Carpofo, in which Merz installed an igloo and pointed a laser light toward it, while he sat inside.

⁴⁵¹ Wieland Schmied, “Notizen zu Mario Merz,” in BERLIN 1974: [6].

⁴⁵² Ibid.

It is the case of the seven-elements series, known as *Berliner Tasse* and now at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, whose five sheets were illustrated in the Haus am Lützowplatz catalogue (**figure II.89**).⁴⁵³ Curiously dedicated to a still life, the series is generally readable as a progression of cups or “vases” of wine and plates of cabbage on the table, all of which multiply on the page-table. On the Roma paper sheets, the technique used by Merz is very complex and includes layers of red and black felt tip pen, black and dark green gouache, red and black China ink, white pencil, red enamel (sprayed as auras around the objects) and eventually even applications of fat. Each object or unit corresponds to one or more round punched holes, through which a Fibonacci number is visible on a second, backed white sheet. The series progresses with increasingly crowded compositions. From the second sheet on, the Fibonacci sequence “falls” from the vase-like cups to the lower edge, in a stretched triangle that was a typical illustration of the series in mathematics,⁴⁵⁴ alongside the falling numbers reaching 10946, a caption reads “10946 consumed meals”.⁴⁵⁵ Such “spilled” numbers are covered by the transparent, slightly yellowing layer of fat, which echoes the colour of the paper on the dominant red enamel. On the third sheet, two further glasses are superimposed by a parabola captioned, “across space”, that evoked the “bent space” of his Berlin igloo; the last sheet shows an igloo-like plate next to a “grappa” glass: in the catalogue, it is titled, “To the table of the new ancestors” (while the previous elements were captioned “the vase of the ancestors that we are every day”). Merz’s thoughts about the relationship between the drawings and the table on which they are executed appeared as an equivalence: for instance, on the sixth element he wrote that “the bottom line of the sheet absorbs all the dropped numbers” (“la linea di fondo del foglio assorbe tutti i numeri versati”); moreover, Merz hypothetically could have used real bowls to trace the all same sized, round shapes of the drawn *tassen*, a further sign of the connection “to the material of actual life” indicated by Schmied. Interestingly, the theme of the cups and most compositional devices (above all, the elegantly balanced blank spaces) had been anticipated in a five-elements graphic edition published by Armin

⁴⁵³ See BERLIN 1974: [15-19]. It is interesting to consider that the current MoMA registration numbers do not respect the order in the 1974 catalogue (the number 3 was published as the last) and position the two unpublished elements as the 6th and 7th in the series (archival number 213.1996.7). A further untitled, single and signed drawing, made on the same format Roma paper, is known on the market, and can be considered as a discarded element of the series: it represents a plate, a glass and a bottle of “grappa” only traced in red and black pencil and covered with fat, without sprayed enamel nor gouache. On the back of the second element of the MoMA series (object number 213.1996.2), three red dots very likely correspond to the punched holes of this 8th discarded element, which was then probably executed as the third in the original series. For the possibility to closely view the drawings at the MoMA Prints and Drawing Department Study Center, I am thankful to Esther Adler and Sheldon Gooch.

⁴⁵⁴ For instance, see GARDNER 1969: 117.

⁴⁵⁵ Some “pentimenti” are left visible in the works: Merz corrected the former expression “part/s of” (“una parte/parti di vino/cavolo ecc”, often written in red pencil) with “consumed meal” (“un pasto / pasti consumato/i”). On the third sheet, an entire sentence has been covered by the black gouache in the internal area of the lower cup on the right: “this bowl’s space drops in the time comprised between 1 and 1” (“lo spazio di queste scodelle si versa nel tempo compreso da 1 a 1”).

Hundertmark in Berlin and titled *From the Fibonacci House. Five broken pieces* (**figure II.90**), fifteen exemplars that Merz executed by hand probably in the spring of 1973.⁴⁵⁶

If clarity succumbs to the figurative complexity chosen by Merz, the drawings of the *Berliner Tasse* testify a remarkable “aesthetic detour”, albeit denied by Schmied. It is important to think about the poverty of means in the 1970 Krefeld projects to understand the new status of these objects, obviously thought to be autonomous and marketable artworks, in which the conceptualist tension is conveyed through articulated stylistic choices. In particular, Merz revitalised a recognisable Turinese lineage of sophisticated painting, that ascribed to Felice Casorati’s school (**figures II.91-92**)⁴⁵⁷ up to the artist Carol Rama, an influential personality in Turin in the sixties and seventies. In the late sixties she was arranging blots of dripped or sprayed ink and intrusions of writing and objects, like plastic doll eyes, providing examples for Merz’s painterly quality and the nervous linearity of the figures, as well as the carefully planned estrangement of the interrupting holes.

Among the other drawings illustrated in the 1974 catalogue⁴⁵⁸ and possibly exhibited in Berlin, *Auf dem Tisch* is the most abstract: the usual column of the Fibonacci numbers, made illegible by the

⁴⁵⁶ The correspondence between Merz and the editor (who was already famous for Fluxus editions) were in contact since September 1972, when Merz was “working about an idea” for the edition to present when he arrives in Berlin (see Mario Merz, September 8th, 1972, card to Armin Hundertmark, Armin Hundertmark Archives, Gran Canaria). The first idea elaborated a memory from Merz’s own years in Pisa in the early sixties: “Dear Armin, dopo e quando guardavo la tua fantastica storia di uomini mi sono ricordato che nell’anno 1962 ho fatto incetta in tutti i mercanti che avessero anche il telefono a Pisa Viareggio e Firenze di tutti i colori a olio in tubi che avessero e ho fatto in un anno pressapoco [sic] di lavoro un grande quadro che quanto ho voluto trasportarlo ho fatto molta fatica a farlo perché era molto pesante. Mario Merz (il quadro da qualche parte ci sarà pure)” (Mario Merz, October 18th, 1972, guest book, Armin Hundertmark Archives, Gran Canaria). See also a loose, undated piece of paper reporting the information (“1962 / öl color farben / in 1 Jahr alles farben in 1 bild / PISA / Florenz / VIAREGGIO / For Armin Hundertmark / Mario Merz”). The anecdote is also listed in CELANT 1983: 72. After proposing an image of the Fibonacci spiral (on a loose sheet dated November 1972), Merz asked for a box edition (on a restaurant napkin dated 1973, where Merz also asked Hundertmark for a “good musician”). Then, in January 1973, Merz went to Italy promising the editor to be back in early February “with the work for your edition” (Mario Merz, Sonntag [January 1973], letter to Armin Hundertmark, Armin Hundertmark Archives, Gran Canaria). The last document of their correspondence is the drawing of two communicating, six-metre large igloos dated February 5th (see guest book, Armin Hundertmark Archives, Gran Canaria). However, in the catalogue of the 1973 Internationale Kunstmesse (March 13th-18th) the edition by Merz was still listed as “in Vorbereitung” (see BERLIN 1973A: p.n.). I am thankful to Armin Hundertmark for sharing information about his archival documents about Merz with me. Due to its proximity to the Hundertmark edition, the drawing *Parti di alcool tutte versate* should be dated to 1973 rather than 1970 (see TURIN 2007: n. 112).

⁴⁵⁷ In particular, the “scodelle” and their shape closely resembles Casorati’s 1919 painting *Scodelle* that was re-executed in 1952 and exhibited that year in a retrospective solo show at the Venice biennial.

⁴⁵⁸ Five central pages were printed in two colours (red and black), presenting three page-like, drawn notes and partly typewritten: mantric fragments of theoretical discourses about numbers (“the living imagination is in continuous movement / Visions are in continuous movement / stacked images or still images / without circulating energy / proliferating images or images with high circulation of continuous energy / proliferating images or express not only their tautologies / but the dynamism / that the proliferation triggers continuously / 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13 / 21, 34 / 55 / numbers get alive continuously / images become continuous visions [...] / due to energy force they become visions or images in continuous movement / [...] / numbers have force of continuous succession of self or from self continuously / numbers have force of proliferation of self or from self continuously”, BERLIN 1974: [8]), energy and animals (“[...] animals are continuous numbers / or animals are in continuous reproduction”, *ivi*: [10]) merge with the counted hatching and other kind of linear repetition; a double-page, coloured and arched drawing is similar to the 1971 Guggenheim catalogue pages. Following the *Berliner Tasse* series, there is the illustration of the study for one of the installed sculptures, *The cabinet to infinity* (“Der Schrank zur Unendlichkeit”, BERLIN 1974: [20]), which is smaller and not executed on the Roma paper, see TURIN 2007: n. 83).

punched holes, generates a triangle filled with dark gouache (**figure II.93**). The title links it to the actual, triangular table that was built for the show, first to be occupied in a performance with local young people sitting on it with the artist, and then positioned so to enter a glass igloo, captioned in the catalogue as, “on the table that pushes into the heart of the igloo” (“auf dem Tisch, der hineinstößt in das Herz des Iglu”).⁴⁵⁹

A rare picture of the opening of the exhibition at the Haus am Lützowplatz documents the presence of two large drawings that are not illustrated in the catalogue (**figure II.94**). They hanged just in front of the long table that crossed the corridor and slid with its sharp vertex into the glass igloo. The spatial position was determining for deciphering the quite cryptic appearance of the two drawings, one of which is now known with the inscribed title (quite useless to understand the subject) *Do the houses turn around you or do you turn around the houses?* The exhibition at Haus am Lützowplatz was titled after this drawing and a short text by Merz published in the frontispiece of the publication. In both the drawings, a circular element associated with the igloo is perforated by a red triangle, in a composition that could have easily evoked El Lissitzky’s famous poster *Beat the Whites with The Red Wedge* (**figure II.95**). In *Do the houses turn around you or do you turn around the houses?*, the figure of the table, which is recognisable by its tiny legs, rotates, creating a raying pattern around the circular shape: so that the tables effectively “turn around” the igloo, a symbol of the house (**figure II.96**). Marlis Grüterlich paid much attention to this drawing in an important essay on Merz, published on *Kunstforum* in 1976. For her, it shows “the potential further development of this installation [the table into the igloo, titled *Auf dem Tisch*] in global space. The triangular table rotates as a surface between two proportional ‘perspective rays’ around the igloo world centre. The title of the exhibition asked: ‘Do we revolve around the houses – or do the houses revolve around us?’ One can also ask the question more briefly: Is it actually about us or about the houses?”. A crucial point in this argument was the reversal of the perspectival conception, certainly suggested by the title-question of the Berlin drawing: “the ray beam reverses and opens up the central perspective, which can only capture a rationally limited space. Merz’ use of the early mathematical series in the spiral- ray-bundle symbolism for life processes corresponds to the modern theoretical knowledge of nature, which lets space and time merge into the relations of pure numbers”.⁴⁶⁰ In Grüterlich’s essay, that was translated in Italian and remained one of the fundamental readings about Merz’s work; a direct comparison was proposed with a Paul Klee’s progression drawing and Merz’s works, an obvious reference for the Italian artist’s biological approach, that had already been indicated in a 1975 Lucern exhibition.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁹ See BERLIN 1974: [21-24]. The triangular shape helps in link this single drawing to the series on black paper sheets, *Voglio disegnare le montagne* (“I want to draw the mountains”), published in TURIN 2007: 132-133, n. 100.

⁴⁶⁰ GRÜTERICH 1976: 150.

⁴⁶¹ See *ibidem*, and LUCERNE 1975, where the same drawing was included.

The occasion for Grüterich's article was the great show that was held in the Kunsthalle Basel at the beginning of 1975, and then travelled to the Institute of Contemporary Art in London in September. The core of the exhibition concept was the monumental hall lit by the skylight, where Merz displayed two works, in a scale that was impeded in Berlin: the 20-metres long *Tavole con le zampe diventano tavoli* ("Boards with legs become tables"), painted with various materials on an unstretched, Cotton Duck canvas and already exhibited in Milan at Galleria Toselli in December 1974;⁴⁶² and a new untitled work. According to Grüterich, the latter was a literal "practical application" of the drawing *Do the houses turn around you – or do you turn around the houses?*, also exhibited in Basel (**figure II.97**): "At the centre of the beam of rays there was a static point of the skylight hall supported by rods under its vaulted ceiling. From there, on one of the longitudinal walls, strings stretched at Fibonacci intervals (golden ratio by eye), starting from the nearer corner to the lower boundary of the wall. Only neon numbers pointed to the string beams corresponding to the ninth and tenth numbers, since these distances could already no longer be measured on the wall".⁴⁶³

The role assigned by Grüterich to the drawings in understanding Merz's work allows us to recapitulate the function of the drawing project in his practice since about 1970. Two opposing aspects connote the status of such planning. On the one hand, drawings and proper artworks retain a respective autonomy, and projects remained within their *genre*: they are materials with a specific destination, like the heliographies, catalogue illustrations, and works on paper hung on the walls in rooms occupied by installations. It is no accident that Merz requires actual "cabinets" dedicated only to graphics, as at Lambert's in 1970, Weber's in 1973, or the "sala dei disegni" in his important show at Galleria Sperone in Rome in 1976.⁴⁶⁴ Of course, his graphic production also responded to a market need, since much of Merz's work remained unsold, or was simply impossible to sell.⁴⁶⁵ On the other hand, and contrary to this dimension of autonomy, however, is the strong projecting tension of the artist's practice drawing, and its application to space and reality. This is proved by material and theoretical evidences. There is curiously abundant documentation of Merz's use of paper materials and working drawings for exhibitions making, as already noticed in relation to the Sonnabend exhibition. In 1975, 40 "dessins non signés, du papier Canson noir, des plans explicatifs servant au

⁴⁶² Merz had also executed an artist book edited by Franco Toselli about this work and its first installation at Cascina Ova near Tortona, in South Piedmont, see MERZ 1974.

⁴⁶³ GRÜTERICH 1976: 150-151.

⁴⁶⁴ "Numerous drawings on paper bear the image of a spiral: in the centre a snail shell, solid as a mineral and drawn in a spiral too. They appear as the multifaceted exercise of rotational and radial symmetries (from the centre of the palm of one hand to the end of the fingers and beyond). Among the materials used to make the drawing, an impressive system of relationships, always: mineral shells, clay to fix them on the paper, glue, charcoal for the marks... [...] Fibonacci's generating series illuminates the drawing room: a succession of neon numbers - 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 114, 223 - from ceiling to floor like a totem of proportions" (CORÀ 1976: 61).

⁴⁶⁵ For instance, Ruhrberg asked for "graphics or drawings relatively small in dimensions" for a possible acquisition of the DAAD in Bonn, see Karl Ruhrberg, May 14th, 1974, letter to Mario Merz, DAAD Archives, Berlin. He added: "By the way, some time I would very much like to buy one of your drawings, but we can talk about it in Berlin, I hope".

montage de l'œuvre" were sent from Berlin to the Basel Kunsthalle together with other works;⁴⁶⁶ and from Basel to London, "a bunch of 17 sheets of paper 50 x 60 cm, mostly rejected drawings or just leftover paper. [...] If Mario sorts them out, he will probably throw away most of them, so you better not include them in your custom list".⁴⁶⁷ From a theoretical point of view, Merz repeatedly stated his aversion of tautology, embracing the most-timely criticism of conceptualism as a utopian and self-referential tendency. Merz rejected the self-standing, authoritative historical and social examples of planning practices he could find in Mies van der Rohe's conception of functional architecture, as well as in New York City's "violent [...] space",⁴⁶⁸ that is entirely *a priori* projections which excluded the organic progression and dynamism of "life". His answer to the crisis of planning (and to La Pietra's desperate act of tracing of lines over an "unchangeable" space), was found through the proliferating properties of the Fibonacci sequence and its diagrammatic drawn configurations, so that the project literally expanded into the projected space.

⁴⁶⁶ Kühne & Nagel Corp., January 8th, 1975, sending from the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdiens, Berlin to Kunsthalle, Basel, Fondazione Merz, Torino. I am thankful to Luisa Borio for sharing the materials about the Basel exhibition.

⁴⁶⁷ Anonymous, August 26th, 1975, letter to Barry Barker [ICA Director in London]. There is no checklist in the Basel catalogue and archives, but possibly in the sending lists to London report the drawings included in both the shows: on a checklist from the ICA archives, "8 double drawings – 2 layers = to brown paper with holes underneath white with numbers [apparently, the seven elements of the *Berliner Tasse* and *Auf dem Tisch*]; 9 drawings – hands [probably the series of "ten" hand-themed drawings mentioned by Grüterich too]; 14 assorted drawings; 9 drawings, yellow tables; 19 drawings, 50 x 60 cm" (checklist from ICA Archives, Tate Gallery, London).

⁴⁶⁸ CELANT 1983: 68.

Appendix 2 Plans and projects as art (1966-1974)

- 1966 Exh. *Working Drawings and Other Paper Materials Not To Be Viewed As Art*, New York School of Visual Art, December
- 1967 Exh. *Scale Models and Drawings*, Dwan Gallery, New York, January
- 1968 L. R. Lippard, J. Chandler, "The dematerialization of art", *Studio international*, February
 Exh. *Earthworks*, New York, Dwan Gallery, December
- 1969 Exh. *Lichtdrukken. Op Losse Schroeven*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, March
 Exh. *Konzeption/Conception*, Morsbroich Museum, Leverkusen, October
 Exh. *American Drawings*, Munich, Galerie Heiner Friedrich, Munich, Fall
 Exh. *Pläne und Projekte als Kunst*, Kunsthalle, Bern, November
- 1970 Exh. *Conceptual art and conceptual aspects*, New York Cultural Center, New York, April
 Exh. *Art in the mind*, Oberlin College, Oberlin (Ohio), April
 Exh. *Processi di pensiero visualizzati*, Kunstmuseum, Lucerne, May
 Exh. *Information*, MoMA, New York, July
 Exh. *Visions, Projects, Proposals*, Midland Group Gallery, Nottingham, July
- 1971 Exh. *Situation concept*, Galerie in Taxispalais, Innsbruck (Austria), February
 Exh. *Entwürfe, Partituren, Projekte: Zeichnungen*, Galerie Block, Berlin, March
- 1972 Exh. "Konzept"-Kunst, Kunstmuseum, Basel, March
 Exh. *Diagrams and drawings*, Kroller Muller, Otterlo, August
- 1974 Exh. *Progetti di Mochetti*, La Salita, Rome, December
 Exh. *Disegni progetti*, Galleria Sperone, Turin, May
 Exh. *Lo Savio. Progetti per metalli*, La Salita, Rome, December
 Exh. *Progetti di arte povera*, Galleria Diagramma, Milan, December
 M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Progetti di Melotti, 1932-1936*, Turin 1970
 U. Apollonio, L. Caramel, D. Mahlow, *Ricerca e progettazione: proposte per una esposizione sperimentale*, Biennale, Venice, June
 Exh. *18 m3 x 23 artisti*, Acireale, October
 Exh. *Cose possibili. Rassegna San Fedele*, Milan, December
- 1972 Exh. *Progetto intervento verifica*, Palazzo Reale, Milan, February
 G. Contessi, ed. *Crisi della progettazione*, "Marcazero", Milan, July
 Exh. *Basta il progetto*, La Cappella, Trieste, November
 Exh. *Dal progetto all'opera*, Museo di Castelvecchio, Verona

II Plates

Chapter 3 *Analytic draftsmanship: Paolini, Boetti and the paradigms of drawing*

0. *Introduction for a dialogue*

This chapter proposes a compared analysis of two major Italian artists of the seventies, Giulio Paolini and Alighiero Boetti, whose relevance for the history of drawing will be argued and articulated in the following paragraphs. To individuate them as the centre point of this thesis is both an historical and theoretical proposal. Historically, I acknowledge their role in shaping Italian conceptualism, both among the national art system of the decade and abroad: more precisely, my thesis is that their research brought drawing to the core of major conceptualist practices as well to an outstanding position in the Italian critical debate. Although Paolini and Boetti have early been canonised in Italian art and (more recently) in Western art history, their specific relevance for the historical study of drawing has yet to be fully accounted. In fact, their work did not contribute to the early discussion of Post-Minimalist drawing, with lasting consequences and for precise historical reasons. Their absence in *Drawing Now* is meaningful, since in 1976 both artists had had at least one important solo show in New York private galleries (Sonnabend and John Weber) and their work had been presented at the MoMA too (as Paolini was assigned the 18th edition of the Projects series⁴⁶⁹ in spring of 1974 and Boetti participated in Jennifer Licht's *Eight Contemporary Artists* at the end of the same year).⁴⁷⁰ Paolini and Boetti both showed great self-awareness in the theoretical discourses they were approaching with their drawing practice, as evidenced first and foremost by quite a few titles of their catalogue. Works like *Disegno geometrico* and *Due mani e una matita* appear to be intentionally paradigmatic, that is, they are conceived in order to express a specific, even prescriptive idea about drawing. In this sense, both artists cultivated a self-image of draftsmen, as much in their artworks as in their public images conveyed by photography, books, interviews and movies: Paolini's thoughtfully tidy atelier in Turin and Boetti's chaotic desk in Rome have early symbolised their respective attitudes, paper practice tools being a fundamental constant between the two. Moreover, coeval criticism about their exhibitions introduced for the first time in the Italian debate some concepts or references that long lasted as classic tropes in the theory of drawing. Such is the case with

⁴⁶⁹ The Elaine Dannheisser Projects exhibition series began in 1971 and was meant to “report on recent developments in art”. In addition to Paolini's show, that was curated by Cora Rosevear, the programme hosted relatively few European artists, see the following list from the early 1970s: Keith Sonnier, Mel Bochner, Sam Gilliam in 1971; Nancy Graves, Richard Long, Emmanuel Preire, Richard Tuttle and David Novros in 1972; Luis Fernando Bedit, Chuck Close and Liliana Porter, David Tremlett, Carl Andre, Robert Whitman, Eleanor Antin, Klaus Rinke in 1973; Barry Flanagan, Paolini, Rafael Ferrer, Sonia Landy Sheridan and Keith Smith and Marlene Scott in 1974.

⁴⁷⁰ Two artists of *Eight Contemporary Artists* were then included in *Drawing Now*, namely, Hanne Darboven and Dorothea Rockburne.

Dibutades' shadow drawing of her lover as the origin of painting, Diderot's *Lettre sur les aveugles* and the relationship between touch and drawing; or the left hand as "anti-dexterous".

On the other hand, isolating drawing in the production of these two artists is challenging, partly problematic, and must be continually justified. The use of graphite pencil, paper sheet or linear drawing is pervasive in Paolini's work and it is inseparable from his reflection on "painting". On his part, Boetti carries out a draftsmanship constantly altered by extra-artistic paper practice, from mathematics to mail systems to geographical classification, and so on. This ambiguity or instability of the medium, extremely productive on a critical level, reflects itself in the literature and in particular in the catalogues raisonnés of both artists, which are based on solid scientific research. Paolini's general catalogue is now ordered online⁴⁷¹ and separates "Paintings, Sculptures, Installations" from "Works on Paper". A recent monograph about Paolini's drawings (BERNARDI 2017) exemplifies well such technical tendency: born as a PhD dissertation linked to the archival research of the general catalogue, this study focuses on the insofar neglected, small-sized "works on paper" of the artist, which include drawings but also collages, photographs and other techniques so called "da scrittoio",⁴⁷² which are often minor variants or preparatory studies for larger works. Paradoxically, though, some important work addressing "drawing", such as *Apollo e Dafne* or *Il vero* are quite ignored in this study as they ended up catalogued as major works. As for Boetti's catalogue raisonné, an analogous separation would be unthinkable because since 1970 he turned to a studio work almost entirely based on paper, announcing the stage of his production that Mark Godfrey described as the "Kingdom of Papers" in his fundamental monograph.⁴⁷³

Since the literature about the two artists is quite exhaustive and it is possible to access their work by a faithful, philological perspective through the *catalogues raisonnés*, I have tried to approach their "draftsmanship" through three alternative strategies. Throughout this study, the definition of drawing has not been bound to a specific technique or size of artworks: Paolini often transcends "works on paper" (in the very sense that he draws on walls and canvases) when he investigates fundamental features of the medium like hand, graphite sign, line, geometry and perspective; while Boetti's materiality includes much more variety. Instead, a set of paradigms was privileged, emerging from their practice: in the following paragraphs, I will expand on concepts like "hand-body-eye channel",

⁴⁷¹ See: <https://www.fondazionepaolini.it/eng/>. It constitutes an update of the printed 2008 volumes (DISCH 2008) and is now acknowledged as the official catalogue raisonné. In what follows, references to Giulio Paolini's works will be put in through the progressive archive numbers "GPO-[n]". This number allows for the identification of the work and its full documentation and description by Maddalena Disch (together with the unpublished English translation), by digitizing in the research field on the website. I am thankful to Fondazione Anna e Giulio Paolini and in particular to Giulia De Giorgi and Maddalena Disch for their help in my research and the discussion of many themes and documents presented in this chapter.

⁴⁷² Expression used recently by the artist himself, quoted in BERNARDI 2015: 43.

⁴⁷³ GODFREY 2011: 262.

“time”, “verticality/horizontality”, “truth/copy”; but also “inventorial capacity” of drawing, and “reduction”. My third and main strategy is to counteract the monographic tendency of the existent literature, firstly by structuring the chapter as a dialogue and comparison of two artists; secondly, by pointing out how such paradigms worked for a broader community and for younger generations in the Italian context, mainly in Rome and Milan, therefore shaping the central season of conceptualism and post-conceptualism.

The possibility to construct a comparison between the two artists is also sustained by their biographies, and the coherency of the periodising function of their work. Paolini and Boetti were both born in 1940, they were friends, and the decade of the 1970s constitutes a mature stage of their career. They debuted in the mid-sixties in Turin, affiliated to different galleries, and by the beginning of the next decade both were recognised as major conceptualist artists who had definitely gone beyond the *arte povera* label they were associated with since 1967. Although Paolini’s work tends to be read in a strong continuity, the passage to his career’s second decade introduced new important attitudes, of which perhaps the most crucial is the return on his own works from a retrospective perspective. Instead, Boetti later remembered that 1969 constituted a clear turning point in his career. At that point, his objectual, “Baroque” production (typical of his participation in the 1967-68 *arte povera* exhibitions) reached an exhaustion, expressed as a “nausea” for the richness of materials. The crisis led to a more “Calvinist”⁴⁷⁴ practice, based on a radical address to works on paper, a constant throughout the next decade when Boetti moved to Rome.

I Hand drawings

I.1 Paolini’s hand: from Vedo to Apollo e Dafne (1970-71)

In late 1969, the Roman critic Tullio Catalano recapitulated Paolini’s production from 1960 to 1968 (**figure III.1**). His training at the Turin Institute of Graphic Arts and his first activity as a graphic designer were expunged, while his artistic production began all of a sudden with an unexpectedly precocious painting entitled *Disegno geometrico* (“Geometric drawing”). Illustrated for the first time in an Italian journal,⁴⁷⁵ this work “consists of a rough canvas, the common visual support, squared geometrically with pencil and compasses. The focus on the artist’s first gesture, the structuring of the space on which to draw a series of marks, more or less intentional [...] is already painting, in its being

⁴⁷⁴ See BANDINI 1973: 4-5.

⁴⁷⁵ See BELLONI 2019: 15. The work was reproduced for the first time on the Spanish journal, within an article by Celant.

still “before” painting”.⁴⁷⁶ An overcoming of the monochrome paint trend of the early sixties toward a radical and “conceptual” meaning (the term “concettuale” was used for Paolini’s work since 1968),⁴⁷⁷ “a kind of image entirely in its surface and wholly retraceable in the making, which established the preliminary meaning of every further development too”.⁴⁷⁸ *Disegno geometrico* was read as the first step of a systematic analytical research on the image, the artist’s authorship and the essentials of painting itself. The other works illustrated in the article testified to Paolini’s use of the canvas as an object, including both its *recto* and *verso*, the quotation of image from a classic tradition (*Saffo II*, 1968) and the investigation on the presence and absence of the author by photography, like in *Delfo* (1965) or in the self-referential *mise en abyme* in *Diaframma 8* and *D867*. The resulting portrait highlighted Paolini’s “intellectual vocation, subtly ironic and critical”. Notwithstanding their evident materiality, his works were understood in a conceptual way, as they activate the “mental duration [...] of the close-circuit of an open demonstration, or permanent inference, or a methodically denigrating and persistent doubt”. A contradictory stillness of the process, staged in works like *Disegno geometrico*, justified the term of “tautology” in a positive sense: “it is not necessarily the case that the short way of tautology is more blocked and more random than infinite, separated space of what is visible, assuming the visible is really to be seen”.⁴⁷⁹

By 1970, such profile was stably articulated by a number of artists’ statements and critical readings by people close to the artist, namely Carla Lonzi, Marisa Volpi or Celant, who all agreed on a precise narrative of Paolini’s artistic path: a perfectly coherent, seamless path of isolated research, that developed rigorously by itself since 1960.⁴⁸⁰ At just 30 years of age, Paolini was recognised as authoritative; he was called “Master” and already collected tributes from artists and poets⁴⁸¹ – an eloquent symptom of his early paradigmatic function.

A way to partly counter this (plausible) narrative is to argue Paolini’s careful response to the coeval artistic scene and debate, which I argue it is possible to verify by looking at his work around 1970. Although being involved in Celant’s *arte povera* 1968 exhibitions and 1969 volume, Paolini did not take part in the international shows that launched Conceptual art in Europe, namely *When Attitudes*

⁴⁷⁶ CELANT 1967A: 269. Observations about the thematisation of the artist’s “debut” are in VIVA 2018.

⁴⁷⁷ See TRINI 1968.

⁴⁷⁸ CATALANO 1969.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁰ Paolini carefully controlled the criticism about his own work, especially by editing his catalogues; in this sense, at an early date like 1968, he contested a presentation by Maurizio Fagiolo dell’Arco, see BELLONI 2018: 90-91.

⁴⁸¹ See BELLONI 2019: 65. At the 1970 Venice biennial (where Paolini was having a personal show too), the painter Claudio Verna exhibited a painting carrying a squaring process, with the title *Omaggio a P.* (“Homage to P.”). Already in 1968, the Turinese poet Nico Orengo published *Omaggio a Paolini*, a two-page visual poem in four parts, with themes already recognisable as *à la Paolini*: for instance, the typed sentence “quello che scrivo” (“What I write”) with the word “scrivo” written by hand; or three lines simulating a corner added with the letters of the title “un angolo appoggiato” (“a leaning corner”), a possible hint to Paolini’s series of corner canvases made in 1966 (from *Narciso* to *Meno sei* or + *T*, see GPO 94-104).

Become Form, Op Losse Schroeven and Konzeption / Conception, probably because of the afferece to Galleria Notizie instead of Galleria Sperone. However, it can be hypothesised that during that very year Paolini delved more and more into processes of reduction, cancellation or “dematerialisation”, putting himself into the dialogue with the latest international debate on Conceptual art. The work titling a Milanese show, *2121969* (that is February 21st, 1969, the opening date) was a picture of the empty gallery exhibited in the show in order to “annul the images of the works to record as an absolute given the time and the space of the place, beyond the same exhibition underway”.⁴⁸² A few months later, a show in Rome titled after the work *Una copia della luce* (“A Copy of Light”) reduced the artist’s intervention to a 1 cm large spot of fluorescent paint on the wall glittering in a darkened room. However, what is possibly the most meaningful argument for a “dematerialising turn” in Paolini’s work around 1970 is the work and exhibition title, *Vedo* (“I see”), whose importance has already been acknowledged. Held with variants in two following stages in Rome and Turin from January to March 1970, this exhibition gathered ten works conceived in 1969.⁴⁸³ Some common traits through the ensemble contributed to a remarked conceptualist appearance: an almost absolute aniconicity, a strong presence of writing, and a new adoption of drawing. With neutral and plain sobriety, Paolini used graphite pencil to write on canvases or paper sheets as well as to trace essential diagrams and figures. Surprisingly, a figurative image found its way into this kind of show: *La dea Iride* (“The Goddess Iris”, **figure III.2**) was silhouetted with a line of multiple colour crayons directly on the wall, in a fine balance between diagrammatic neutrality and details. In this case, linear drawing states an independence from the support, as the divine personification (the goddess of the rainbow) carries the canvas by herself. The support was put in tension in another work too, *Di un quadro del 1961* (“About a painting dating to 1961”, **figure III.3**), as Paolini covers with graphite the entire surface of a previous painting of his own: a comment on this work eloquently omits the material use of graphite: “the hand retraces the surface of a canvas, painted eight years before”.⁴⁸⁴ The relationship between hand and pencil, graphite and support, were recapitulated in the eponymous work, *Vedo* (“I see”): standing in front of 15 paper sheets pinned to the wall, Paolini traced myriads of little pencil marks, covering the area corresponding to the extent of the artist’s sight (and the viewer’s, as the sheets were hanged in the gallery after the execution in studio).⁴⁸⁵ In the leaflet published for the 1970

⁴⁸² GPO-0162.

⁴⁸³ *Io (frammento di una lettera)*, 1969; *Di un quadro del 1961*, 1969; *Vedo*, 1969; *Quattro immagini uguali*, 1969; *La dea Iride*, 1969; *Elegia*, 1969; *Mlle du Val d’Ognes (da Jacques Louis David)*, 1969; *Una copia della luce*, 1969; “... ora, se tu mi dici: – Mostrami il tuo Dio –, io potrei dirti: – Mostrami il tuo uomo, e io ti mostrerò il mio Dio –. Presentami dunque, in atto di vedere, gli occhi della tua anima, e, in atto di ascoltare, gli orecchi del tuo cuore...”, 1969 (only in Rome); and two lost works, “*La gloria di Dio è di celare le cose, la gloria dei re è di investigarle*”, 1969. The last work ⁴⁸⁴ Paolini’s statement in TURIN 1970A.

⁴⁸⁵ See GPO-0188. *Vedo* was first exhibited at the Paris biennial in 1969, where Paolini pinned on the wall the paper sheets on which he had previously performed the work, in his studio on July 15th, 1969.

show, the artist captioned the work as “il deciframento del mio campo visivo” (“the decipherment of my visual field”),⁴⁸⁶ and selected eight photographs taken by Giorgio Bressano in order to show the making process (**figure III.4**), consciously echoing the photographic sequence chosen by Luciano Fabro for a leaflet of the same gallery three years earlier.⁴⁸⁷

Such photographs, some of which soon achieved a broader visibility as the advertisement of the Galleria Notizie and were reused by the artist in other works and a lithographic edition (**figures III.5-6**),⁴⁸⁸ express a paradigmatic iconography of drawing that is worth analysing in its theoretical implications. Within a show full of references to mythology, religion and art history, *Vedo* is stripped of any cultural meaning; it is reduced to primary phenomenological terms: and the conceptual apparatus of phenomenology was used by the artist himself when he spoke of his “assoluta dedizione al fenomeno, antico, di vedere” (“absolute dedication to the ancient phenomenon of seeing”) in a statement commenting on the exhibition published on the same leaflet. Maurice Merleau-Ponty was one of Paolini’s documented readings in 1969,⁴⁸⁹ and not a surprising one given the philosopher’s broad intrusion in the critical debate of the time, and specifically in the latest art criticism. The circumscription of a “campo visivo” (visual field), the standing body and the performative dimension⁴⁹⁰ highlighted by the photographs prevent the finished work being read merely as a pattern of signs on the surface, despite a possible analogy with Sol LeWitt’s first, hardly visible wall drawings; all these elements articulate the work as an “abstract and conceptual scheme of vision”.⁴⁹¹ Moreover, the ideation of this work coincided with the Italian edition of *Le visibile et le invisible* and a revitalisation of the debate around the French philosopher’s so-called “ontological turn”⁴⁹² – a debate that might have been overheard by Paolini, as he also stated the equivalence of “true” and “visible” in the mentioned text.

A specific paradigm of drawing comes from such a reduction to the phenomenological scheme, vehicled by the photographic sequence. Firstly, it is portrayed as a channel through the artist’s eyes, the moving hand, the pencil and the little dots, albeit almost invisible. In the same months, Robert Morris described the “phenomenology of the making” as a form of behaviour (“what the hand and

⁴⁸⁶ TURIN 1970A.

⁴⁸⁷ Paolini’s interest in the 1967 leaflet is exceptionally testified by a photographic artwork, *To L.F.* (1967, GPO-0143) in which the Turinese artist looks at the Gallery catalogue.

⁴⁸⁸ These photographs were widely illustrated in later catalogues and articles about Paolini, see LUZERN 1970. **Figure III.5** is a graphic project for the advertisement the Notizie Gallery made by Paolini on the basis of the photograph of the installation of *Vedo*, published in multiple journals. A detail of the same photograph was then used by Paolini as a photolithograph and printed in a limited edition in 1973, sponsored by the Turinese art journal, *Bolaffi Arte*.

⁴⁸⁹ Paolini’s contribution to the catalogue of *Gennaio 70* consisted in three long quotes, respectively from the XVIII century philosopher Giambattista Vico, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jorge Luis Borges. Merleau-Ponty’s fragment comes from the 1962 Italian edition of *Sens et non-sens*, and in particular from the famous essay *Cézanne’s Doubt*.

⁴⁹⁰ See DISCH 2019.

⁴⁹¹ PAOLINI, OLIVA 1971: [3].

⁴⁹² See SAFFIRIO 1970.

arm motion can do in relation to flat surfaces is different from what hand, arms, and body movement can do in relation to objects in three dimensions”), compromising “the artificiality of media-based distinctions”.⁴⁹³ In Paolini, although a traditional category of “drawing as a medium” is also disconfirmed, a quite definite iconography is put in place. Indeed, a stress on the act of drawing and/or writing, more similar to graphic design than to painting, was already expressed in a 1967 graphic edition, a collage of the silhouette of a hand holding a pencil, die-cut from the same-coloured paper of the square support (**figure III.7**). Moreover, Paolini was appropriating a quite typical device in graphic advertising (**figure III.8**), that is, the tautological image of the drawing hand itself on a page, a *mise en abyme* that thematises the intimate dimension of the draftsman on a desk. *Vedo*’s performed gesture staged a different, public exercise based on verticality: in fact, Paolini’s position slightly conditions his motion and he raises both hands on the wall, so as to put the visual field into focus on the wall. Such a vertical encounter of author and artwork in the pictures inevitably recalls a further fundamental reference for Paolini at the time, that is, Lucio Fontana and the already famous sequence captured by Ugo Mulas in 1964 (**figure III.9**).⁴⁹⁴ The comparison with Fontana’s hieratic gesture and the stressed temporality in Mulas’ pictures highlights that the connection between gesture and sign in Paolini is much less charged with existential implications. The resulting signs are less charged with “authenticity” or rhetoric of “hand as vehicle of the idea”⁴⁹⁵ than a staid exercise of the “decipherment of the visual field”, deprived of any virtuosity. The dimension of an exercise, determined by instruction and therefore repeatable, characterises *Vedo* and the other works drawn on wall in the 1970 exhibition, independently from the fact that they were effectively re-executed as ephemeral installations.

Drawing as detection of the phenomenological structure of vision, drawing as a staged, vertical act, drawing as conceptual exercise: all of these elements connoted Paolini’s iconography of draftsmanship, and nevertheless he rarely defined his works as “drawings”. His use of the term in the early sixties had been generic (referring to small works on paper, mostly collages or photographs)⁴⁹⁶ or ironically provocative;⁴⁹⁷ in the titles of his first works, namely the already quoted *Disegno geometrico* (see **figure III.1**) and *Disegno di una lettera* (“A Letter’s Design”),⁴⁹⁸ the term addresses

⁴⁹³ MORRIS 1970: 62.

⁴⁹⁴ Mulas’ photographs were published repeatedly and broadly from 1965 on, see for instance RUSSOLI 1965; and in a single volume in MULAS 1968. Paolini participated in a celebratory issue of *NAC* in March 1970.

⁴⁹⁵ MONTANA 1970. The comment refers to the coeval work of the artist Bice Lazzari, an eloquent example of ongoing research on the sign within a long tradition of abstraction, that in the late sixties encountered structuralism.

⁴⁹⁶ An unidentifiable “drawing” exhibited in a 1965 solo show in Turin was probably a printed photograph; the “six drawings” quoted in the catalogue of another 1966 Milanese personal exhibition were collages, see BERNARDI 2015: 34.

⁴⁹⁷ In December 1964, Paolini exhibited at the Roman Galleria La Salita some *Disegni* which consisted of folded sheets containing a 1,000 lire banknote (**figure 0.11**), see *ibid*: 33.

⁴⁹⁸ *Disegno di una lettera* (1960, OPG-0004) is a primed canvas on which Paolini traced in ink the letter “A” as the first letter of the alphabet; its relationship to *Disegno geometrico* and the preliminary operation of tracing the surface was noted already in CELANT 1967A.

the execution process and the subject, so to say: not the works themselves, that he always mentioned as “paintings”.

A year after the *Vedo* exhibition, Paolini adopted the term “disegni” in order to describe the 15 elements composing *Apollo e Dafne* (“Apollo and Daphne”, **figure III.10**).⁴⁹⁹ The choice of a more traditional term may be coherent with the context in which the artwork was exhibited in May 1971, that is a small room adhibited to graphics exhibitions at the Libreria Stampatori in Turin. The bookstore was co-owned by Ippolito Simonis, who at the time owned *Disegno geometrico* and other works by Paolini; *Apollo e Dafne* was nevertheless likely bought in by Sperone, as it was shown again in his Roman gallery in 1973.⁵⁰⁰ Because of its importance and the public visibility of its exhibitions, *Apollo e Dafne* can be situated in a turning point in Paolini’s practice of drawing.

The work consists of cardboards of the same dimension, 29 x 42.5 cm, then each presenting a “subsequent action on the sheet” that did not imply a strict order.⁵⁰¹ On one element, a clip holds a page illustrating a drawing by Poussin, *Apollo Guarding Admetus’ Cattle*, situated in the Royal Library in Turin, as the caption printed with the reproduction reported (**figure III.11**). The real dimension of Poussin’s sheet corresponded to that of the cardboards, as the critic Mirella Bandini was told by Paolini himself. The title also quotes Poussin, since the drawing was considered preparatory for the French painter’s unfinished painting *Apollo and Daphne*, now at the Louvre. Interviewed by Germano Celant a few months after the exhibition, the artist explained:

“I started with one of the studies Poussin realised for this painting, and one can say that the image of this series of drawings is only the very format of these sheets, that is the same of Poussin’s drawing. [...] I considered the sheet, that is the sheet in that certain format, as an occasion still open to me, as the observer of the Poussin’s drawing, to a work of identification with that drawing, but with the means available to me and with my proper language”.⁵⁰²

Paolini’s “linguistic means” articulated writing, collage and graphite drawing within an overall strategy as “metteur en page”.⁵⁰³ Following the order in which the cardboards are archived, the XII element contains the title of the work, on the XI his signature and date are written; three others (III,

⁴⁹⁹ The term appeared on the invitation card for the exhibition.

⁵⁰⁰ GPO-0223. Immediately after the exhibition in Turin, *Apollo e Dafne* traveled to Brescia for a solo show at Studio C gallery. Another same-name work *Apollo e Dafne* dating to 1978 (GPO-0382) only evokes the myth by the title and it is based on photographic detail from the Monument to Niccolò Demidoff by the Neoclassical sculptor Lorenzo Bartolini.

⁵⁰¹ BANDINI 1971. Paolini did not state a precise order in which the series should be exhibited: the elements “are so to speak a translation in different separate stages of a single possibility of intervention, diversified through different sheets, but seen in transparency, and therefore aimed at a single result that you do not know if it starts from or arrives at the reproduction of the original” (PAOLINI-CELANT 1972).

⁵⁰² Ivi.

⁵⁰³ See BRIZIO 1971: 38.

XI, XV) are captioned with short statements about Poussin's painting and its mythological subject.⁵⁰⁴

A recurrent material is millimeter paper:

“just because the dimension [of the original sheet] is so prominent, I used in various cardboards the millimeter paper, to point out exactly that the millimetre measurement was already a way to read the drawing. At one time the millimeter paper is crumpled up so that the space itself appears coagulated in the middle of the surface [figure III.12]; another time, the same millimeter paper is marked at each crossing of line by points of contact of the pencil on the sheet” [figure III.13].⁵⁰⁵

Paolini used graph paper from the very beginning of his career, as it was a typical support from his school education and a professional tool as a graphic designer. From 1960, it stood as a tautological image of the surface itself as the mere measurement of its extension. Among the busy lineage of artists using graph paper, from Eva Hesse to Agnes Martin, Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt and Boetti himself, and innumerable other American and European examples, Paolini's position does not follow the instrumental usage of this “convenient” and “conventionalised” support. Mel Bochner, the first to point out this trend, also resorted to tautological measurement of supports (sheets, walls, streets) in what he called *Generic Drawings*.⁵⁰⁶ What distinguished Paolini's measuring elements appears to be the value of graph paper as an image for itself, a sort of degree-zero icon, with which the artist manipulated scale and space. However, Bochner's 1966-1968 photographic works on grids and perspective, possibly known in Italy in the form of the off-set lithograph *Surface Dis/Tension* (figure III.14), can be productively compared to the crumpled graph paper present on the second element of *Apollo e Dafne*: not so much for the visual outcome, that has been better linked to some graphic design sources,⁵⁰⁷ but for the “coagulation of space” mentioned by Paolini and the tension of geometry and materiality within the image.⁵⁰⁸

In short, *Apollo e Dafne* shows a repertoire or a “precise evolutive line”⁵⁰⁹ recapitulating a decade of “actions on paper” that had mostly remained private thus far. However, it also introduced a new

⁵⁰⁴ The captions are about Poussin's painting (“This drawing is one of Poussin's studies for his last painting, *Apollo and Dafne*, today at the Louvre, inspired by Ovid, left unfinished by the artist”), the god Apollon (“As an archer, as head of the Muses, as god of the sun, or even as the ideal of beauty”) and the iconography (“This metamorphosis is, among other things, the subject of a mural painting of the House of Vettii in Pompeii”).

⁵⁰⁵ PAOLINI-CELANT 1972.

⁵⁰⁶ Bochner's *Generic Drawings* was first realised in 1970 in Turin at the Sperone Gallery and consisted of the large-scale marking out of 90, 180 and 360 degrees on the walls.

⁵⁰⁷ See BERNARDI 2015: 101-110: in addition to some references to Manzoni and Tapiés, Bernardi suggests (according to Valentina Russo too) that a source might be found in a 1963 cover by Pierre Mendell for *Gebrauchsgraphik* and published in an *Annual Graphis* issue that is still in Paolini's library.

⁵⁰⁸ In this sense, the element in *Apollo and Dafne* is close to *Les Promenades d'Euclides*, a 1968 work of nine elements in which Paolini crumpled some paper geometric solids (an expression of regular space). When *Apollo e Dafne* was reexhibited at Galleria Sperone Fischer in Rome in 1973, *Les Promenades* was repurposed for a 1973 show at Galleria Françoise Lambert.

⁵⁰⁹ BRIZIO 1971: 37.

tension and dialectic between the geometrical grid of graph paper and the phenomenological primate in Paolini's work around 1970. In the X element, he directly quoted *Vedo*, dotting an area of the cardboard around a blank shape of a hand, for which he used the actual template of the "silhouette of my hand" from 1967 (**figure III.15**).⁵¹⁰ Also, the definition of the graphite dots as "points of contact" is reminiscent of *Vedo*, whether they spread around the hand or gathered as a central cloud or point to the centre, see **figure III.16**). Nevertheless, other elements appear to compromise the eye-hand-pencil channel with the geometrical configuration format of the millimetre grid. A decorative effect is produced when the printed millimetre grid is regularly marked at every centimetre, while the points of contact are instead "randomly" traced on the fourth element (**figure III.13**); or, in the next element, when the inexorable grid corresponds to collaged fragments of millimeter paper (**figure III.17**), which are pasted obliquely so as not to match with the orthogonal graphite lines.

Apollo e Dafne's source, a book about Old Masters' drawings that attests Paolini's interest to the medium, also introduces implications that go beyond a merely phenomenological structure. The artist teared the illustration pinned in the first element out of a book by Pierre Rosenberg about XVII century drawing in France, that was part of the series *I disegni dei maestri* ("Old Masters' Drawings"), edited by Fabbri in 1971. Moreover, the choice of Poussin is neither surprising nor accidental in his own production: he had already manipulated the French painter's famous self-portrait now at the Louvre in *Autoritratto* ("Selfportrait", 1968), that anticipated the self-identification with the Old Master; in another 1968 photographic canvas, Paolini cropped Poussin's hand from Ingres' painting *Apotheosis of Homer* "indicating the Ancients as fundamental example".⁵¹¹

Rosenberg's 1971 book not only informed Paolini of the precise dimensions of the Turinese sheet, it could also trigger his identification with Poussin's hand.

"At a first sight, Poussin's drawings are actually very delusional. [...] Beyond an ability which is only a means", - in Rosenberg's words - Poussin shows rather "an ambitious way to approach mythology [...], a profound emotion, sprung not only from a careful reading of the ancient texts, but also from a surprising cognition of the great myths of the antiquity, translated in a modern language".⁵¹²

Paolini described *Apollo e Dafne* as originating from an "identification" with the Old Master's drawing that follows a double track. On one hand, he certainly responds to the material and formal

⁵¹⁰ See the 123 exemplars edition *Untitled*, 1967, in which a silhouette of the hand made in die-cut paper is superimposed on a squared sheet of the same colour. Related to the edition are a preliminary collage from 1966 (GPC-0057) and variants from 1967 (GPC-0087, GPC-0088, GPC-0089, GPC-0117, GPC-2202) and one work on paper where the template used in GPC-0098 is outlined with a pink crayon onto the image of a ruler (GPC-0171).

⁵¹¹ See respectively GPO-0174 and GPO-0178. Francesco Guzzetti delivered a paper presentation about Paolini and Poussin in a study day devoted to the artist on the occasion of his exhibition at the Museo Novecento in Florence, on June 10th, 2022. The filmed recording can be watched here: <https://www.fondazionepaolini.it/eng/video/about-paolini>.

⁵¹² ROSENBERG 1971: 14.

aspects of the drawing, i.e., the size of the format as well as the dry and schematic style that appears so compatible with his own linear and diagrammatic language. On the other hand, he might have identified with Poussin's *ante litteram* "conceptualism" expressed in the criticism about him, analogously to the way he had referred to Piero della Francesca or Ingres in earlier works.⁵¹³ The formal compatibility between the respective "hands" (in the Italian sense of "personal style in drawing") resulted in a "mental substitution",⁵¹⁴ or appropriation. Among the elements obtained and aligned from the conceptual deconstruction of the drawing (its reproduced image, its format, its title, its history and iconographic/mythological data), a tension is triggered between Poussin's proto-conceptual hand and Paolini's "phenomenological" one, actually depicted as tracing the "points of contact", like in *Vedo*.

I.2 Boetti's hands: from process to geometry

Boetti's "nausea" from "Baroque" earlier seasons of work was described as a turn to intimacy and private studio practice; nevertheless, throughout 1969 it publicly manifested itself in the form of performative drawing. "Performative" photographs document his participation to *When Attitudes Become Form* during the set-up work on the day before the opening: while being quite distracted by the photographer Harry Shunk, Boetti executed *in situ* *La Luna* ("The Moon", **figure III.18**), covering a blackboard hanging on the wall with white chalk. The quality of the chalk made the rapid hatching remain visible on the resultant surface with a disquieting sense of impermanence and precariousness: it is no coincidence that *La luna* was reworked at least twice during the exhibition⁵¹⁵ and triggered "vandalising" acts by visitors (a smiling face traced with fingers). A paradoxical confirmation of the non-institutional immediacy with which these works were perceived at the time, the same fate would befall the first version of *Vedo*, presented by Paolini at the VI Paris biennial a few months later, where a visitor drew with a pencil on the dotted paper sheets on the wall.⁵¹⁶ Both the artworks correspond to the classical definition of process art as "works in which the making of drawing becomes the drawing itself":⁵¹⁷ the temporal dimension of the execution, perfectly readable in the chalk hatching, emerges over the final image, as well as a careless automatism of the gesture. Analogous parameters

⁵¹³ Paolini used to draw images and quotes from the popular art history editions, see FERGONZI 2004.

⁵¹⁴ BRIZIO 1971: 37.

⁵¹⁵ This is proven by three photographs by Harry Schunk, each documenting a different disposition of the chalk hatching. In one of them, some childish sketches of smiling faces traced with the finger appear, possibly made by a visitor of the exhibition; Boetti may have cancelled these vandalising signs by retracing the entire blackboard. In the first version (**figure III.10**), the title of the work is visible on the right edge of the blackboard.

⁵¹⁶ Paolini then tore the original sheets exhibited and vandalised at the Paris biennial, collaging them in a 1971 new work titled, "*Vedo*" (*15 Luglio 1969*) (July 15, 1969, the date of the first execution in the studio, GPO-0209).

⁵¹⁷ BUTLER 1999: 89.

frame the meaning of a work on paper probably first exhibited at the Bern Kunsthalle on the same occasion, in which Boetti retraced with a pencil the printed grid of a set of graph paper sheets: its full page illustration in Trini's review of *When Attitudes Become Form* reveals its "almost paranoid obsession".⁵¹⁸ Later titled *Cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione* ("The contest between harmony and invention", **figure III.19**),⁵¹⁹ the work included a tape recording that reproduced the sound of its making, and the titles inscribed on the back of the sheets report exactly the amount of time of the execution, for example, on the first exemplar, "12 sheets finished on 10th June 69 at 43 hours". Discussing processual drawing, Pamela Lee names three kinds of "duration": entropic, transitive or aleatory, all opposing "quantifiable notions of time".⁵²⁰ Within such a theoretical frame, Boetti's stress on the measure of the execution time may indicate a further category among the possible processual temporalities, one associated with game: the time of drawing corresponds to the completion of each work, as the "internal purpose" in the "self-enclosed, circular sense of the activity of play", to quote from Eugen Fink's philosophical theorisation about playing that has been associated to Boetti's work by Francesco Guzzetti. Such game-form temporality corresponds to a "possibility of human sojourn within time [...], one that does not have the character of tearing away and driving forward but rather allows one to tarry and is, as it were, a glimmer of eternity".⁵²¹ Such simple drawing materiality fits at best the self-closeness of a game-form: the printed grid is a determined limit for the irregular trace of Boetti's hand and the recorded sound, now lost, might have been a very familiar crackling with no interruption. The efficacy of this connection of sound and drawing might explain another work by Dennis Oppenheim, exhibited in 1970 in Paris and realised after possibly seeing Boetti's graph paper drawings at *Prospect '69*: "[Oppenheim] has covered a sheet of paper with looping charcoal lines that become lighter as the charcoal runs out toward the bottom of the page; the artist has recorded the sounds of his drawings on a cassette (12 minutes) which comes with the work".⁵²² If the work described in this review can be identified with *Diagram for Solo Dance* (**figure III.20**) that was lent by Yvon Lambert for *Drawing/Transparence* in 1976,⁵²³ the American artist inscribed the name of the charcoal pencil, "Ebony #6325", as well as the measurements of the room where the drawing took place, "80 x 100 inches", in addition to the "duration" (8 minutes).

⁵¹⁸ "The only artist to work on signs, Boetti covers a blackboard with chalk to turn it into a «moon», or traces in pencil the geometry of a sheet of squared paper with an obsession that is almost paranoid, recording the sound and the rhythm of this operation" (TRINI 1969E: 46).

⁵¹⁹ The title quotes Antonio Vivaldi's famous collection of music pieces and alludes to a "tension between the artist's hand and the degree of control implied by 'purposes of spatiotemporal quantification, surveillance, and registration' of the standardised signs of the diagram, which is in this case is the conventional grid of graph paper" (GUZZETTI 2019B: 110).

⁵²⁰ LEE 1999: 37.

⁵²¹ FINK 2016: 21.

⁵²² APPLGATE 1970: 81.

⁵²³ I am thankful to Amy Oppenheim for her help in finding information about this work, now in the Yvon Lambert Collection.

While the theme of exhaustion belongs to other works and performances by Oppenheim at the time, the comparison with Boetti highlights the self-closeness and material readability of the drawing process.

The first work carrying the title *Cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione* was exhibited in Bologna at *Gennaio 70* and its display might have coordinated with Boetti's *Viaggi postali* ("Mail travels") that was hanging on the opposite wall, as documented by two photographs of the room (**figures III.21-22**).⁵²⁴ In addition to causing a paper invasion of the artist's Turin home, the mail art projects started in 1969 testify to Boetti's rapprochement with examples of American conceptual peers, such as Douglas Huebler.⁵²⁵ In respect to the serial display (which may appear as automatic and the most obvious for same format paper), some determining examples and specific meanings can be pointed out. At *When Attitudes Become Form*, Harald Szeemann had displayed together two works by Hanne Darboven and Mel Bochner in the same room of the Kunsthalle (**figure III.23**): the former (Darboven's *6 Bücher über 1968*) appeared as thick volumes of Xeroxed, progressively numbered sheets, positioned in two showcases; the latter (Bochner's *13 sheets*, 1968)⁵²⁶ consisted of blank sheets of graph paper that were measured, that is inscribed with the 21 inches, and posted on the wall without intervals. Boetti opted for the same contiguous disposition, which is also documented for further installations of the *Cimenti*, such as those at two solo shows at Galleria Sperone in Turin and Galleria Toselli in Milan, both opening on May 22nd, 1970 and respectively including: "Six studies for the *Cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione*" (six horizontal, 100 x 70 cm sheets,⁵²⁷ **figure III.24**); and "11 studies for *Cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione*",⁵²⁸ for the first time accompanied by the artist's portrait as a wooden silhouette, made by the Turinese artist Pietro Gallina. Only at the end of the year, at *Vitalità del negativo*, three groups of *Cimenti* (with four, five and six elements each) were framed and matted, and hung on three walls of a room: the three rhythms produced by dark frames and the different intervals between the sheets introduced a musical breath and elegance to the installation. The earlier uninterrupted flow of aligned graph sheets and graphite squiggles, intimately readable without the glass, as well as the simple pinning and the consequent slight warping that denounced the physical presence of the paper, were consistent with a process-based practice.

⁵²⁴ See GUZZETTI 2019: 119, note 45.

⁵²⁵ See GODFREY 2011: 201, note 5.

⁵²⁶ I refer to the titles present in the Kunsthalle Bern Archiv papers.

⁵²⁷ The title appears in TRINI 1970: 43, where the illustrations are labelled "Torino, Galleria Sperone" so to dispel the doubt that the image refers to the exemplars exhibited in Milan. Both exhibitions presented for the first time the work *1970*, a cast iron grid with the spelling of the work "millenovecentosettanta", onto which Boetti sprayed green varnish (slight differences in the spray shape appear, comparing the two *1970* illustrated in *ibid*: 42 and the Milanese room view in CELANT 2019: 158-9).

⁵²⁸ This title appears on the invitation card of the Galleria Toselli, see *ibid*: 143, 156-7. On the back of two 1970 *Cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione* now in the collection of Giorgio Marconi, Boetti wrote the same title, "STUDI per Cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione", see AMMANN 2012 I: 268, nn. 333-334.

Boetti also overtly asserted the childish approach at the base of such drawing-as-an-exercise when he organised a solo exhibition at Konrad Fischer's Gallery (the only one of the decade), titled *16 drawings*. According to a letter by the critic and wife Anne-Marie Sauzeau held in the Fischer archive, he sent groups of *Cimenti*: seven made with graphite pencil and nine executed with the red and blue crayon, that were "devided [sic] in a group of two a group of four and three single ones". In the same letter, a statement was sent, to be printed on the invitation card, apparently quoting from eight-year-old Boetti's diary about a crayon box: "Once it was open, 12 red and blue pencils were lying in perfect symmetry. It was April 1948".⁵²⁹

Given the ascription of the *Cimenti* paradigm of drawing to process art, and its self-referential time, a theoretical friction can be noticed with the theme/genre of the project and its projective, futuristic temporality. It appears all the more evident in the original context of the series, that is, the already mentioned 1969 European, conceptualist exhibitions. Just after *When Attitudes Become Form*, Boetti exhibited *Ritratto di Walter de Maria* ("Portrait of Walter De Maria") at Galleria Sperone in May 1969: he appropriated a proper "project" –the poster of De Maria's 1968 show at the Galerie Heiner Friedrich, probably provided by Sperone himself (**figure III.25**).⁵³⁰ Boetti retraced it with carbon paper, reproducing a photograph by Angelika Platen, the captioned plan of the gallery and some statements by the artist. With its mute presentation on the wall, under glass, the retraced project counts as a "portrait" and is brought to an iconic dimension, possibly as "traces" of the persona just like the silhouette of Boetti himself in *Alighiero Boetti che prende il sole il 24 febbraio 1969* ("Alighiero Boetti catching the sun on February 24, 1969") that lay on the floor in the same exhibition. A few months later, the works sent to *Pläne und Projekte als Kunst* openly invalidated the theoretical frame proposed by the curator Felix Zdenek about planning. In addition to two letters to the curator, two photocopied artworks figure under his name in the catalogue. *Liste der beteiligten Künstler* ("List of the participating artists", **figure III.26**) is a photocopy of the three-page official checklist with the artists' names and addresses, that had been mailed to each artist by Zdenek. Boetti inscribed alongside each name some signs, diagonals, verticals and horizontals, apparently articulated according to a preset code. He had already invented and used symbols in relation to names in a 1967 work titled

⁵²⁹ Anne-Marie Sauzeau Boetti, letter to Konrad Fischer, January 12th, 1971, Dorothee und Konrad Fischer, A096_V_002, ZADIK, Cologne. A possible identification of the red and blue crayon pieces in the general catalogue: AMMANN 2012 I: 270, nn. 337, 338 carry the inscription "destra" ("right", as they're missing the left element); n. 380 single 1971; n. 381 single from Konrad Fischer; 382 group of four; 385 rocking snake n. 8; 386 two elements still together; two new sheets in English, 1970. A project is also to refer to this exhibition (AMMANN 2012 I: 303, n. 388), for an action titled *Twelve marbre [sic] pieces*. Probably, the stones (of 2 cm should have been inscribed with 12 different compositions of the letters from the collectors' names ("Dorothee Kasper Konrad") and "collocated in 12 locations in Düsseldorf that Konrad Fischer loves", as captioned in the work on paper.

⁵³⁰ By 1969, the poster must have already been famous in Italy and "fascinating" (NISBET 2013: 49); it hangs in Gian Enzo Sperone's office in a room view of Giovanni Anselmo's solo show inaugurated on January 14th, 1969.

Manifesto, a list of Italian avant-garde artists of the time.⁵³¹ As in that case, the Bern code is clueless and all that emerges is a *nonchalant* play with the possibility of making each personality a mere combination of the simplest signs. Interestingly similar to Sol LeWitt's orthogonal variants of geometric drawing, Boetti's code is rather uncanny for it does not reveal its (possible) meaning. His second work consisted of an original photocopy of his face, realised lying down on the Rank Xerox machine, titled *Ultima sbirciatina alla Rank xerox prima del novembre 69* ("Last glance toward the Rank Xerox before November 1969", **figure III.27**). This is the only exhibited exemplar of some 1969-1971 private works, known in a wider series and titled *Self Portraits* or *Alphabets*, in which Boetti repeatedly photocopied his face while pronouncing the letters of his name or his wife's, Anne Marie Sauzeau.⁵³² Bruno Munari's public and theatrical experiments with the photocopy machine, which involved self-portraits distorted into strong graphic motifs, has been indicated as the most obvious precedent.⁵³³ However, Boetti is not interested in elegant or funny composition allowed by the use of the Xerox machine as an optical device. Instead, he might have looked with amusement and attention to a closer source: a series of Xeroxed self-portraits by Andy Warhol that was published in the 1969 September issue of *Playboy*, which was then circulating under-the-table in Italy (**figure III.28**). In Warhol's work, more than in Munari's images, the disturbing indexicality⁵³⁴ of the mechanical evoked what the media scholar Lisa Gitelman wrote about the "incongruity" to read one's body as a document, since at the time a photocopy was strongly linked to the bureaucratic impassibility of collecting (even personal) data.⁵³⁵ A detail of Warhol's humorous work alludes quite clearly to the Duchampian operation on the *Mona Lisa*, that is, the handmade ink signs adding beard and other decorations to his own face. The drawing intervention was helped and triggered by the texture of the photocopies themselves, their black-and-white uniformity, blurred focus and the silky quality of the toner powder immediately after the printing process. These are qualities that come to mind when in front of the (now heavily faded) Boetti self-portrait: his profile and half-closed eye are transformed in neat, short lines, and his stubble beard is rendered as a dissemination of points, very similar to slight pencil strokes.

⁵³¹ See AMMANN 2012 I: 178-179, n. 151. Boetti exhibited 50 copies of the *Manifesto* at Galleria Franco Toselli in October 1970, and on that occasion, he performed a miming comment on the secret code of geometrical symbols, see VADUZ 2019: 383.

⁵³² This work was unpublished and unknown to the catalogue raisonné curated by the Alighiero Boetti Archive. It probably wasn't recognised as a proper and original artwork since it was filed as a document in the Kunsthalle Bern archive.

⁵³³ See GUZZETTI 2017: 24. On Boetti's Xeroxed works see also CAT. VENICE 2017.

⁵³⁴ The concept of indexicality has widely entered the art historical discourse since it was first applied by Rosalind Krauss in the analysis of the use of photography in the seventies. Xeroxing obviously produces "indexical images" as "indexes established their meaning along the axis of a physical relationship to their reference. They are the marks or traces of a particular cause, and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify" (KRAUSS 1977: 70).

⁵³⁵ On Xeroxies as material documents and their semiotics, see GITELMAN 2014: 83-110.

Boetti's title stresses the act of looking at the photocopy machine, and a phenomenological reading may point out further consequences to his practice of drawing. The indexical remains of the photocopying process activate in this case a double-sided look, the one depicted in the image and the one that was performed by the author and now corresponds to the observer's point of view. The artist also wrote to Zdenek an indication to hang the two works vertically, the three-sheet *List* being clipped on the top-left corner: this made the gaze reciprocal, and radically contradicted the typical status of the Xerocopy as a mere informational and archival document. These phenomenological observations introduce a possible comparison with Paolini's *Vedo*, in particular in light of Boetti's response to the Turinese installation of the work: in fact, a week after the *finissage* at Galleria Notizie on March 20th, Boetti executed a performance on the wall of his studio that was photographed by Paolo Mussat Sartor (**figure III.29**). The artist simultaneously wrote with both hands, from the centre and in opposite and mirroring directions, the current day and time: "Oggi è venerdì ventisette marzo millenovecentosettanta ore..." ("Today it's Friday, March 27th ..."). As he stands very close to the wall to reach the maximum breadth of the open arms, his left hand follows symmetrically the movements of the right, tracing a blurred and rough calligraphy. In later works, Boetti himself defined this exercise as "drawing" (*Scrivere con la sinistra è disegnare*, "Writing with the left hand is drawing") and repeated the performance with different sentences, such as *Ciò che sempre parla in silenzio è il corpo* ("It is the body that always speaks in silence").⁵³⁶ Interpreted as a response to *Vedo*, this drawing performance also discusses the phenomenological structure of the eye-hand-sign connection, but only to impede it by doubling the hands and by putting their unreflected muscular motion before the intellectual control of the eye. Eloquently, the outcome on the wall is very different from Paolini's close cloud of dots, as it starts from a definite centre but extends with uncertainty only until the artist's hand arrive. However, the meaning of the left hand goes beyond a perceptual motif. In Merleau Ponty's writings, in addition to the references to symmetrical principles of the body (for instance, in the discussion of phantom limbs), the polarities of the two hands concern anthropological meanings too: "For the augur, right and left are the sources from which the blessed and the ill-fated arrive, just as for me my right hand and my left hand are respectively the embodiment of my dexterity and of my clumsiness".⁵³⁷ At the time Boetti formulated this performance, writing with the left hand was still popularly considered as a defect in education and commonly corrected in catholic schools.⁵³⁸ In a text accessible to the artist in French, *Éloge de la main*, Henri Focillon addressed this

⁵³⁶ Both inscriptions written with the left hand appear on two tables of the 1976 portfolio *Insicuro noncurante*. Boetti had already repeated the performance on the wall in 1974 as it was filmed for Boetti's video work made for the Florentine gallery art/tapes/22.

⁵³⁷ MERLEAU-PONTY 2012: 298.

⁵³⁸ For instance, the news reported that in 1976 a girl who was left-handed due to an impairment in her right hand, was denied enrollment in the magisterial course by the Dominican sisters in Vigevano.

discriminating conception in terms that resonate with some themes of Boetti's work, such as blindness and the body-that-speaks (hands are defined "visages sans yeux et sans voix, mais qui voient et qui parlent") or duplicity ("Elles ne sont pas un couple de jumeaux passivement identiques. [...] Je ne crois pas absolument à l'éminente dignité de la droite [...]").⁵³⁹ Coherently with the doubled persona staged in many of the artist's other works, the two-handedness in Boetti's drawing moves away from the *docta manus* that is implicit in Paolini's single-handed work. The latter's right hand might effectively be assigned the etymological meaning of *dextera* ("dexterous, skilled"), in light of Paolini's competence and rigor in graphic design as well as his cultured reference to Poussin. Although the two-hands drawing corresponds closely to Leonardo da Vinci's mirror writing,⁵⁴⁰ Boetti's left hand is openly clumsy, deskilled and opposes "mastership": what is defined as "drawing" in Boetti's practice is then the material result of the uncontrolled irregularities and imprecise movements, analogous to the slight deviation of the handmade trace from the graphed grid in the *Cimenti*.⁵⁴¹ Contrary to the various art educational methods based on the equal training of the two hands, Boetti emphasises the unconventionality of the uneducated sign of the left: his symmetry rather points out the difference between the two hands (as Focillon puts it, "c'est un bonheur que nous n'ayons pas deux mains droites").⁵⁴²

Such an original iconography of the two hands developed into a public dimension, typically by photographic works such as *San Bernardino* or the later *Due mani e una matita*, but also as public performances at the Munich Aktionsraum, where Boetti was invited on April 11th, 1970. In addition to a conference that was simultaneously translated into German, he wrote with two-hands on the wall

⁵³⁹ FOCILLON 1981: 107.

⁵⁴⁰ In 1952, doctor Norman Capener diagnosed the origin of Leonardo's "scrittura a specchio ("mirror writing") as the consequence of an aggression when the artist was 21 years old, that damaged his right hand. According to this hypothesis, "Leonardo was obliged to learn the left-hand movements from those of the right hand, as he was not born lefthanded. Therefore, he needed the mirror writing, that is, to reproduce in exact symmetry from right to left the graphic inclinations of his normal calligraphy (from left to right)" (MUSELLA 1952).

⁵⁴¹ In his discussion on "Beihändigkeit" as a counter-dispositive against the conception of *docta manus*, Hildebrandt differentiates between "symmetrical" and "ambivalent two-handedness", respectively exemplified by Dieter Roth's 1977 *Zweihändigen Schnellzeichnungen* and William Anastasi's *Subway Drawings* executed with two hands from the 1990s on, see HILDEBRANDT 2017: 176-195.

⁵⁴² FOCILLON 1981: 107. It is interesting to discuss at this point an early, unpublished work by Mimmo Paladino, in which the themes at the base of Boetti's paradigm of drawing of the early seventies cross each other. Known with the title *Study of hand*, it is a panel collecting five photocopies of Paladino's left hand (**figure III.31**). An inscription on the top left photocopy reads: "Documento. Copia della mia mano sinistra effettuata per stabilire fino a che punto la realtà possa essere trasformata; [cancelled words] le linee sono state accentuate per rilevare tutta la sua struttura geometrica e quindi permettono una lettura di natura (altra). Mimmo Paladino 3 marzo 1972" ("Document. Copy of my left hand made to establish to what extent reality can be transformed. The lines have been accentuated to detect all its geometric structure and therefore they provide a reading of (extraneous) nature. Mimmo Paladino, March 3rd, 1972"). On the bottom right corner, a Xeroxed paper note dated July 12th, 1934 and signed but unreadable, reads: "situazioni analoghe ai fenomeni medianici inerenti al soggetto sottoposto a radiazione" ("situations analogous to the mediumistic phenomena inherent to the patient under radiation"). Paladino drew on the Xerocopies with ink to "accentuate" not only his hand lines but also the wrinkles on the fingers and back. The theme of the lines of the hand, linked to the possibility of reading a drawing of destiny, had been analogously dealt with by Sigmar Polke in his *Korrektur an der Handlinien*, published in 1968 within the portfolio *...Höhere Wesen befehlen* (**figure III.32**).

“Puntopuntinozerogocciagerme” (“dot, little dot, zero, drop, germ”), a quote from Brown’s *Corpo d’amore* he intensely read and used in the spring of 1970. The terms define the Sanskrit term “bindu”, that is “the point from which internal space and external space have origin and return as one”,⁵⁴³ possibly in relation to the point of contact of the two pencils as the starting point of the performance. Two other works executed on the wall in Munich dealt with geometry. *Il sistema decimale fa acqua da tutte le parti* (“The decimal system holds water all over the place”) was first ideated in 1969 and illustrated in the catalogue of *Gennaio 70* (**figure III.31**): the numbers 1, 10, 100, 1,000 are translated into graphic grids that highlight the fact that only 1 and 100 are perfect squares, while 10 and 100 “spill” into additional little squares outside a regular form.⁵⁴⁴ A second documented wall drawing was possibly presented as a riddle (on the Aktionsraum publication it was captioned “Was heißt es?”): Boetti composed into a grid the German spelling of the year 1970. In previous versions, Boetti noticed that the Italian word “millenovecentosettanta” fits in a squared grid, while the German word (“neunzehnhundertsiebzig”; as the Esperanto, “milanaŭcentsepdek”, also experimented once in a work on paper)⁵⁴⁵ leaves over some letters. In a fourth performance, the artist lay a progression of paper sheets on the ground, each sheet was the half of the previous one, obtained by simply folding them in two parts.

As exemplified in the Munich performances, Boetti’s drawings consist of exercises that minimised any compositional interventions that would exceed the basic rules he set for himself or simple mathematical principles. From 1970 to 1975, a large number of works on graph paper maintained this compositional restraint. The occupation of the sheet is a mere progression, such as 16 different dispositions of ten squares (*Sedici dieci*);⁵⁴⁶ or three rows of the graphic representation of the numbers from 1 to 39, made by drawn rectangles, external little squares (to be added) or internal ones (to be subtracted);⁵⁴⁷ or sequences of the different possible representation of the same number (74 or 43)⁵⁴⁸ by the same method. In these drawings, the process emerges less as a material execution than as combinatory and arbitrary variations. The detachment typical of the “serial attitudes” of the sixties is converted into lively curiosity for the infinite possibility of geometry, what Bochner himself pointed out as the “surprising and diverse [...] results of this method”.⁵⁴⁹ In this sense, it is possible to explain the title formulated around March 1970, *Per una storia naturale della moltiplicazione* (“On the

⁵⁴³ BROWN 1969: 222.

⁵⁴⁴ Boetti found in the squared numbers an “equilibrio” (“balance”) as he wrote under the graphic representation of “5000”, which needs two units to become the sum of two perfect square that is 51 and 49 (“ $51 \times 51 + 49 \times 49$ ”), see AMMANN 2012 I: 261, n. 315, where the transcription (“61x61”) is erroneous.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid: 249, n. 289.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid: 261, n. 316.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid: 264, n. 323.

⁵⁴⁸ Respectively, ibid: 263, n. 321 and 322.

⁵⁴⁹ BOCHNER 1967: 28.

natural history of multiplication”). Quoting Konrad Lorenz’s 1969 book, *Il cosiddetto male. Per una storia naturale dell’aggressione* (“So called evil. On the natural history of aggression”), Boetti possibly hinted to an “ethological” position in observing the “behaviour” of the numbers. Timely information and attention on the modalities of Sol LeWitt and Bochner is all the more probable as the Turinese artist was aware of their work since 1969, meeting them both in person in 1970. In particular, in the same months in which LeWitt started adding colours in his linear wall drawings (famously, for *Information* at the MoMA in June 1970),⁵⁵⁰ Boetti was permuting colours both in mail works (using the stamps) and drawings. For example, in an untitled 1970 collage documented in a later show of international graphics (**figure III.32**), four colours are permuted by vertical lines traced on little business cards, which are then collaged in a gridded sequence on the sheet.⁵⁵¹ As usual, the Italian artist avoided the ruler, allowing space for irregularity of the signs and demonstrating a certain playful joy of the brilliant colours. In other words, “the visual aspect of the drawings that are produced in the process is as important as considerations of another nature and suggests a more intimate relationship between perceptual experience and concepts, and a more consciously active visuality”.⁵⁵²

II *Drawn registries: perspective, reduction*

II.1 *Paolini’s exhibition at the Sonnabend Gallery: drawings and paintings*

A feature that may also have drawn Paolini to Poussin’s drawing is that the Louvre painting *Apollo and Daphne* was “his last painting, [...] left unfinished by the artist”,⁵⁵³ as reported by the caption

⁵⁵⁰ See NEW YORK 1970: 73, and Lippard’s memory about the result: “I disliked the results of this last piece and wrote to LeWitt, who was out of town. He replied: “I have no idea how my MoMA piece looks. Don’t particularly care whether it is beautiful or ugly or neither or both. The ugly factor was not built in but the result of the perversity of the draftsmen” (LIPPARD 1978: 24).

⁵⁵¹ See SANTA MARIA CAPUA VETERE 1973: 26-27. The drawing is not included in the general catalogue of the artist: the loan to the exhibition at the time might have come from the Galleria Schema in Florence, which also borrowed a drawing by Bochner (that was exhibited in the inaugural show of the gallery in the spring of 1972). Another work of the same permutating 1970 drawn series *Untitled (24 fiumi)* (“24 rivers”, Archivio Alighiero Boetti, n. 7156, yet to be published in Boetti’s general catalogue) appeared at an auction on November 24th, 2021 (Sotheby’s, Milan). It is probably related to a 1970 postal work that dealt with the classification of the first 24 longest rivers of the planet, each described on a paper sheet contained in an envelope with permuted stamps (see AMMANN 2012 I: 271, n. 340). In the inedited drawing, 24 business cards typewritten with the same data (the river’s name and its length) are collaged one after another as a stripe running from the front to the back of the support, a 66 x 49 cm graph paper sheet. A seamless sequence of segments runs with different permutations (of red, yellow, green and blue) in correspondence with each of the cards.

⁵⁵² MARZOT 1972: 26. These words are drawn from a statement by the artist Livio Marzot published on *DATA* in 1972, that commented on some drawings that translated “a chain of codifications and re-synthesis of an elementary digital concept” (**figure III.34**): the visual result associated typed, numerical permutations to schemes of binary elements (dots and diagonal lines) handwritten on graph paper and illustrated in the journal pages. At the time, Marzot, who had been a Minimal painter, lived in the United States and knew Sol LeWitt well: in the same statement, he admitted to following a precise paradigm of combinatorial drawing (“this work [...] makes free use of the results of other artists”). Aiming at “non-aprioristic” results, Marzot contributes to Boetti’s paradigm of processual, geometrical, but handmade, drawing.

⁵⁵³ Paolini quoted exactly Rosenberg’s text, from ROSENBERG 1971: 82.

inscribed on the third element of Paolini's own work. The position of an artist "at the end of his career", able to look back to his own corpus as a unity, started to interest Paolini in 1971. In that year, while working on *Apollo e Dafne*, he gave a new, impactful visibility to *Disegno geometrico*, by organising the exhibition titled, *Un Quadro* ("A painting"): it consisted of 14 photographic canvases exactly reproducing the 1960 painting, each captioned with different and imaginary authors and titles.⁵⁵⁴ This creative resumption of his first artwork inaugurated a retrospective inversion in Paolini's research, one that looked back to his past production and was formulated more broadly for his first American personal show, held in late 1972 at the Sonnabend Gallery in New York. A retrospective impulse echoed in the "catalogue" edited for the occasion, that is the first extensive monograph about the artist – a 127-page book compiled by Germano Celant.⁵⁵⁵

Geometric drawing has a special function in the construction of Paolini's retrospective inversion, despite the rich early comments about the Sonnabend show, it has never received specific attention. In literature, it has always been reported that Paolini only sent paintings to New York, always acknowledged as a sort of unitarian *suite* (**figure III.34**). An archival list from the Sonnabend Archives, only recently published,⁵⁵⁶ includes 14 drawings on graph paper in addition to the eight canvases already known. It is possible to identify some of these drawings by their titles and by the fact that they figured as part of the Sonnabend Collection in the checklist of the second of Paolini's New York solo shows, held at the MoMA in 1974 (**figure III.35**).⁵⁵⁷

A precedent for the Sonnabend juxtaposition of paintings and drawings can be pointed out in an earlier solo show held at Galleria Notizie in January 1972. There, among other works, Paolini hung *Nove quadri datati dal 1967 al 1971 visti in prospettiva* ("Nine Paintings Dated from 1967 to 1971 seen in perspective", **figure III.36**), that was bought by Sonnabend, and two drawings on millimeter

⁵⁵⁴ GPO-0204. See MILAN 1971 and the review on *DATA*, with the full-page illustration of nine canvases of the series, in PAOLINI 1972.

⁵⁵⁵ See CELANT 1972. Celant's long essay is based on an inedited interview, frequently quoted in the text, the transcript of which is held at the Fondazione Giulio and Anna Paolini, see PAOLINI-CELANT 1972.

⁵⁵⁶ Celant screened them with no comments in a conference held in 2016 at CIMA – Center for Italian Modern Art in New York, see: <https://vimeo.com/207693406>. It is now published in ROME 2023: 134-135.

⁵⁵⁷ The Sonnabend checklist reports the following numbered titles. After the paintings listed in nn.1-8, n. 9 Studio per "Indice Prospettico delle opere"; nn. 10-15 Untitled; n. 16 Study for "Elegy in a Due Scene"; n. 17 Study for "Inventory"; n. 18 Study with "Self Portrait with the Bust of Heraclitus and Other Works"; n. 19 Study for "Transcription of Biographical Notes"; n. 20 Study for "Trentadire [sic] tele disposte a reacchiera [sic]"; n. 21 Study for "Geometric Drawing"; n. 22. Study for "An Index of the Works which are Inscribed in a Decorative Motif". All are dated to 1972 and are 200 x 300 mm large, except n. 15 which dates to 1971 and measures 130 x 210 mm. Of these, nn. 16 and 18 are registered in Bernardi's catalogue; titles of the nn. 9, 17, 19, 21 and 22 correspond to six of the drawings in the Sonnabend Collection exhibited at the MoMA in 1974. Other three *Untitled* were exhibited in 1974, corresponding to three drawings among nn. 10-14.

paper also dedicated to the “proiezione sommatoria” (“summative projection”) and “the memorisation of the artist’s entire creative arc”.⁵⁵⁸

Despite their quantity and their recurring presence on public occasions, the drawings have never been studied as an integral part of the Sonnabend cycle. Celant himself ignores them in his monograph, and avoids any works on paper at all (with the exception of *Apollo e Dafne*), letting it be understood that they are basically minor works.

All the Sonnabend drawings realised in 1972 are made in 200 x 300 mm large millimeter paper sheets, and the standard support is an interesting point in common with *Apollo e Dafne*. The 2/3 proportions allude again to *Disegno geometrico*, whose dimensions are 40 x 60 cm, and which are also found in all the eight large paintings (measuring 200 x 300 cm).⁵⁵⁹

The gallery checklist titles some of the drawings “Study for...[the works on canvas]”, but the term studio needs to be discussed thoroughly. They are not truly preparatory sketches, since the image has already arrived at a final definition, often coinciding with the painting. Sometimes, the drawing shows a variant of the motif or an idea that was not developed into a painted work. Variations within a series of drawings should not be read as traces of correction or “pentimenti” and are instead fully accomplished. Rather than any preliminary process, these works on paper demonstrate other, more subtle characteristics of Paolini’s practice at that moment: the apparent, one might say “theoretical” equivalence between monumental and small scale (despite an obvious difference in the making and in the reception of drawings and paintings). However, only a few of the drawings directly correspond to the painted versions and most of them can be interpreted as *d’après*, that is, exercises or further verifications on a theme. The ensemble of drawings at Sonnabend, hypothetically hanging in a separated accrochage of small formats, might have given an appearance of a graphic laboratory for the image structures and strategies put in place in the canvas *suite*.

Going back to the origin of the show and to its overall meaning, Paolini’s point of departure was *Disegno geometrico*, not only in the proportions of all the supports, but also in the first executed work of the series (“*Disegno geometrico*”, 1971, see **figure III.34**). It puts into quotation marks the original title and, in parallel, “quotes” the 1960 artwork, both by repeating the squaring process with compass and lines on the larger canvas and by collocating at the centre the image of a 40 x 60 cm rectangle painted in white. In its closest study on paper, the central rectangle fits the millimetre grid and measures 40 x 60 mm, so that the proportional ratio between drawing and canvas is maintained

⁵⁵⁸ BANDINI 1972: 27. One of the drawings was *Studio di “senza titolo” (1965) su sfondo di rovine classiche* (“*Senza titolo* (1965) on a background of Classical Ruins”, see GUASCO 1972: 18; hypothetically to be identified with GPC-0227), mentioned for its classical references that matched with the white columns of *Early Dynastic*, also installed in the show.

⁵⁵⁹ Only one untitled drawing, dated to 1971, is smaller (about 13 x 20 cm). These proportions are maintained in all the archived works on paper linked to the Sonnabend series, although sometimes the 20 x 30 cm millimeter paper has been pasted on larger paper sheets. For instance, the 30 x 50 cm *Study for Elegia in una scena di duello* (GPC-0223).

in scale 1:10 (**figure III.37**). However, “*Disegno geometrico*” collects the most numerous archived studies on paper, five in total, most of which have a free relationship to the same-title canvas.⁵⁶⁰

Although the *Study for Elegia in una scena di duello* (“*Elegia* in a duel scene”) sent to New York is undocumented, two other works on paper exemplify at best Paolini’s *d’après* practice. In fact, he used tracing paper to reproduce the image (representing Paolini’s 1969 plaster sculpture *Elegia*, lying on a field, in the middle of a fencing duel of two doppelgangers of the artist dressed as a XVIII century swordsman),⁵⁶¹ hypothetically retracing it directly from a photograph of the painting itself or an original drawing. In fact, the overall proportions between the figures as well as those between them and the 2/3 format coincide.

Sometimes a “study” happens to shed light on some preliminary meanings later removed from the final work. It is the case with *Transcription of Biographical Notes* (**figure III.38**), which should be considered a variant for *Appunti per la descrizione di un quadro datato 1972* (“Notes for the Description of a Painting Dated 1972”, 1972, see **figure III.34**). This is the first attestation of Paolini’s illegible writing,⁵⁶² and the former title helps to make precise the meaning he associated with this device. In fact, at the time Paolini executed his “appunti”, some examples of asemantic writing circulated, above all in the field of Visual Poetry. One of the most eloquent cases is that of Irma Blank, whose work emerged to the public debate only around 1974, although her *Eigenschriften* (“Private Writings”) date back to the late sixties. On single pages, she filled compact rectangles with meaningless, tiny signs that imitated text and lines. Blank appeared “constrained by the page she occupies with a certain recursive obsession” and “faces repetition as the resolution of every writing’s sense: a sort of continuous writing or writing of the negative, of the equalisation of signs”.⁵⁶³ In later works, also titled *Transcriptions*, the display of a large number of elements/pages, now minutely translating into illegible writing actual printed books, acquired monumentality and was read as “a challenge to word and its insufficiency as a means of communication” (**figure III.39**).⁵⁶⁴ An

⁵⁶⁰ I will return to GPC-0201, GPC-0202 and GPC-0205. GPC-0221 is the closest to the eventual canvas, while GPC-0203 presents an effect of trompe-l’oeil as the drawn canvas projects a shadow (somehow recalling De Chirico’s sunset shadows in the most theatrical paintings of Italian Metafisica), as it is standing on a stage-like basis that finishes at the middle of the sheet.

⁵⁶¹ The swordsmen might have been inspired by the illustrations of *écrit* in the *Encyclopédie* (Paolini bought some loose sheets of the XVIII edition in Paris in the early sixties, see BERNARDI 2015: 226).

⁵⁶² One of the studies titled to *Disegno geometrico, 1971* (GPC-0202) should actually be related to *Appunti per la descrizione di un quadro datato 1972* and the *Transcription of Biographical Notes* sent to Sonnabend. In 1972, Paolini also contributed to an artist book, see BOETTI FABRO MERZ PAOLINI SALVO 1972, that was published in the summer by Franco Toselli, see CELANT 2019: 232. Paolini contributed by occupying three pages with the same illustration of his drawing *Appunti per la descrizione di un disegno datato 1972* (**figure III.40**, GPC-0206, but the image on the website of Fondazione Anna e Giulio Paolini is curiously turned upside down in respect to the one on Toselli’s book). The title of the contribution, however, is *Appunti per la descrizione di tre disegni datati 1972* (“Notes for the Description of Three Drawings Dated 1972”).

⁵⁶³ FAGONE 1974: 23. See also Blank’s work within the exhibition *Écrire en dessinant*, GENEVA 2020: 106-107.

⁵⁶⁴ BLANK 1977: 70.

analogous display characterises Paolini's *Transcription*, that also simulates the random occupancy of the lines in the page/rectangle, and that in the final canvas hints to the visual substitution of the "painting dated 1972" by the notes referring to it – not deprived of a certain decorative quality. A determining difference lies in the two artists' postures. Blank's is overtly subjective, resulting in an appropriation of the standardised text that enters a personal dimension of handwriting, warmed both by nervous traits and coloured ink. Paolini's mechanism is instead analytical, albeit possibly also ironical in respect to the actual trend of dematerialisation of the art object in favour of verbal or numeric description. In early 1972, when Paolini first developed his "appunti", the work of Hanne Darboven was discussed on *Flash Art* in a way that explored the "formal tactics of a «plaisir esthétique»" and "the structural grammar of image" of the sequence of numbers. For the first time, a close reading of Darboven's drawings, illustrated full page on the large format of the journal (**figure III.41**), pointed out precise formal strategies, such as "una successione numerica diagonal-simmetrica cernierata" or a "simmetria medio-assiale"⁵⁶⁵ ("a hinged diagonal-symmetric numerical sequence [...] mid-axial symmetry"). An overcoming of mere information that opened to "a loss of objectivity" and psychological reading, up to references to autism and mania. Paolini's former title addressed his own "biographical notes", in a way that could hint to Darboven's numeric series about year-based periods of time.⁵⁶⁶ Instead of stressing the autobiographical quality of calligraphy, Paolini's unreadable writing is impassively balanced, rhythmized by the millimeter paper, almost overturning Darboven's apparent contradiction of aesthetic and information by simply annulling the latter.

At the exhibition in New York, a typewritten statement by Paolini was available to the public as a leaflet. Titled *Is the Vision Symmetrical? (note on eight pictures dated 1971-72)*, it gave some clue to the mechanism of the series; admitted its inedited, "pictorial, scenographic" style, "as if the pictures add up to a reference to something (in space or in time) which comes after and stands in front of them"; above all, he stated that, "these pictures are really a screen between my work and my way of considering it now".

The term translated with "screen" was "diaframma" ("diaphragm"),⁵⁶⁷ which defines the value of the surface in the Sonnabend suite of paintings as "thresholds" placed between the observer and the images. This value emerges all the more clearly by considering the millimeter paper drawings as the starting point for the series. This kind of material is both transparent (a sort of measured field ready to host images) and opaque, as a dense millimetre grid printed in red. A diaphragm function based on the grid echoes in the strongly two-dimensional layout of *Indice delle opere inscritto in un motivo*

⁵⁶⁵ NABAKOWSKI 1972: 5.

⁵⁶⁶ Darboven's first Italian solo show was held in Turin in 1970 at the Sperone Gallery.

⁵⁶⁷ Celant quotes from the original Italian statement and publishes a different translation of the excerpts in his monograph, see CELANT 1972: 101-102.

decorativo (“Index of the Works Inscribed in a Decorative Motif”, 1972, see **figure III.34**). The corresponding study on paper might have actually helped Paolini in setting more easily the grid of rhombuses, by tracing diagonals across the millimeter paper (**figure III.42**). However, the autonomy of the study excludes a strictly instrumental use as – for instance – a grid for enlargement in scale. Rectangles of various proportions are inserted in each rhombus and allude to all the artist’s previous paintings, generating a “decorative motif” (also reached by the gold painting covering the areas between the lines). Another unidentified study in the exhibition possibly varied this diaphragm-like, two-dimensional layout as it was titled “thirty-two canvases arranged in a chequered pattern” on the checklist.⁵⁶⁸

This work, like the simulated written pages in *Appunti per la descrizione di un quadro datato 1972*, is reminiscent of the preliminary horizontal practice on paper on the studio desk. The passage to the verticality of painting is determining in the works overtly dedicated to perspective. Not only the mentioned *Nove quadri datati dal 1967 al 1971 visti in prospettiva*, but also “*Senza titolo*” (1965) *su sfondo di rovine classiche 1972* (see **figure III.34**) stages a literal “putting in perspective” as a metaphorical regression in time and in history. For the artist, perspective provides “a definitive image [...] a visible outline or guideline along which all my previous pictures fit”.⁵⁶⁹ Paolini’s retrospective investigation also included the image of himself among his past artworks, as in *Autoritratto col busto di Eraclito e altre opere* (“Self-portrait with the bust of Heraclitus and other works”, 1972, see **figure III.34**). Its studies⁵⁷⁰ document an interesting variation in the standing figure III.in tails, a copy from an illustration in a 1961 volume on the history of costume:⁵⁷¹ following the original source, the head originally appeared in profile (**figure III.43**), whereas in the final canvas Paolini transformed it into a self-portrait and turned it frontally. This device seems to emphasise the fundamental problem of the point of view, as it was discussed by Celant:

“The work shows the formal and impersonal figure of Paolini himself, surrounded by squares which tend toward a distant point placed beyond and above the figure. Thus, the self-portrait is no longer determined from the point of view of the author or of the artefact or of the spectator (as in previous self-portraits) but by a focal point which lies outside them and inside the work – in such a way that, given its position, the author, the artefact, and the spectators can themselves all move in perspective”.⁵⁷²

⁵⁶⁸ The number indicated prevents from identifying this title with GPC-0217, where 70 little squares are arranged in a regular grid.

⁵⁶⁹ CELANT 1972: 103.

⁵⁷⁰ In two *Studies for “Autoritratto col busto di Eraclito e altre opere”*, Paolini drew on tracing paper and superimposed it on a photographic reproduction of a cloudy sky at sunset (see GPC-0199) or millimeter paper (see GPC-0200, for which the use of tracing paper has not been verified and remains hypothetical).

⁵⁷¹ See GPO-0234.

⁵⁷² CELANT 1972: 108.

The critic stressed the importance of the perspectival device for the whole *suite* exhibited at the Sonnabend Gallery, titling *Item perspectiva* the last chapter of his 1972 monograph, also published as an article in *Domus*. As he specifies in the essay, the Latin expression⁵⁷³ comes from Dürer's etymological definition of *perspectiva* as "seeing through": in this sense, these perspectival canvases are diaphragms with which Paolini sees his own past research. In Celant's words, "The adoption of a structural canon that is the perspectival vision, eludes the subjective criteria of the protagonist and it legitimises the research externally, as objective".⁵⁷⁴

In fact, perspective was not an issue of obvious relevance in the contemporary art agenda around 1972. Celant probably found the quote from Dürer in the very first line of Panovsky's text, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, which was edited in Italy twice in the previous decade, in 1961 and in 1966, with a broad impact.⁵⁷⁵ Panovsky's text was a historical, erudite demonstration of the relativity of each spatial representation, which corresponds to the philosophical and cultural concepts of space. Renaissance perspective theorised by Alberti, Dürer or Vignola was presented not simply as a correct realistic and figurative system, but the visual expression of humanistic values and anthropology. It would not be improbable that Paolini knew Panovsky's book, which in the same months allowed Giovanni Romano to discuss Beppe Devalle's application of perspective. Some general assumptions match undoubtedly with Paolini's use of perspective as "a translation of psychophysiological space into mathematical space; in other words, an objectification of the subjective".⁵⁷⁶

Although the frequent use of the grid, graph or millimeter paper, has generated theoretical comparisons between Paolini's work and Dürer's famous perspectival device,⁵⁷⁷ it appears evident how Paolini never engaged with any technical procedure or rule, and did not hesitate to force perspectival laws to fit other principles, such as the format of the canvas or its symmetry. He privileged an aprioristic construction and a simplified geometrical structure, based on a single plane

⁵⁷³ Celant erroneously includes in the quote the adverb *item*, meaning "and also", which was common in old German treatises containing lists.

⁵⁷⁴ CELANT 1972: 102.

⁵⁷⁵ See DALAI EMILIANI 1968 and QUINTAVALLE 1967, but also Achille Bonito Oliva's discussion of perspective within his reading of Mannerism, in BONITO OLIVA 2012 [1976]: 28.

⁵⁷⁶ PANOVSKY 1991: 66. Another passage, although a minor consideration, is striking in relation to Paolini's retrospective inversion: "When work on certain artistic problems has advanced so far that further work in the same direction, proceeding from the same premises, appears unlikely to bear fruit, the result is often a great recoil, or perhaps better, a reversal of direction" (PANOVSKY 1991: 47).

⁵⁷⁷ "This diaphragm is not by chance reminiscent of the device for representing perspective, the effects of which Dürer variously depicted in his woodcuts. An essential element of this 'drawing machine' is a frame that must be placed between the (fixed) position of the 'painter's' eye and the 'world' to be represented. Within this frame is a glass plate or grid whose purpose is to define the visual field within its limits. And it is within this frame that the 'world' is constituted as 'image', that the visible takes on a gestalt. This frame is, however, the place where "world" and "painter" reflect each other in the "picture", where they still form a virtual unity. The 'picture' in the frame, this mirroring of the 'seeing', is still pure idea, and further reflection on the part of the 'painter' is required to fix it concretely on paper or canvas, so that it again becomes the idea of a picture, this time, however, for the viewer" (WECHSLER 1981: 17).

and vanishing point to be grasped in one glance. The artist himself, defining the Sonnabend series as “scenographic”, linked it to his own experiences in theatre: indeed, the recurrent interruption of the plane along the horizontal median of the canvas generates an effect of a stage, so that the most figurative among the 1972 works evoke many other examples of dramatic perspective, first and foremost the paintings of De Chirico.

All Paolini’s “perspectival pyramids” set their vanishing point in the midpoint of the upper edge of the canvas. In the traditional perspectival construction,⁵⁷⁸ the horizon corresponds to the point of view of the observer: at the Sonnabend show, although the canvases were hanged only a few centimetres from the ground, this correspondence was impossible since the vanishing points inevitably found themselves at a height greater than two metres.

Other drawings further document the primacy of the format and the bidimensional grid over any correct illusion of depth. Two 1972 studies (**figures III.44-45**) can be referred to the canvas entitled *La visione è simmetrica?* (“Is the Vision Symmetrical?”, 1972, **figure III.46**) as they only represent a geometric ground in perspective. The subsequent foreshortening of the rectangles and squares along the vanishing lines is arbitrary, as Paolini obviously did not calculate it by the use of an external point on the horizon, according to classical perspective. The result is a pseudo-perspective which appears to fit simply the millimetre grid: for instance (see **figure III.44**), the closest line of squares is 3 cm high, but then the second and the third are 2 cm, the fourth and the fifth 1.5 cm, so they do not foreshorten at all.

The meaning of “diaphragm” can be specifically understood in such primacy of the surface (both on canvas and paper) over a verifiable system of vision. Verticality is not bound to the point of view of the artist himself, and the Sonnabend series marks an overcoming of the phenomenological structure of another vertical work like *Vedo*. To explain this contradiction, Tommaso Trini would later speak of Paolini’s “conceptual [not visual] pyramid” in which “all the possible points of view are assumed, as many as the components of the artistic context”. Therefore, he resorted to Jacques Lacan’s “theory of the gaze” from Seminar XI, which had just been published in French in 1973:⁵⁷⁹

“in psychological terms, the gaze establishes the subject in the scopic field, and it is the instrument through which language (art) builds up its enigmas. On the basic plane we find the art, all the artworks by all the artists, including Paolini’s work. But this work constitutes also the middle plane which intersects the pyramid: it is its singularity. Canvases as diaphragm, artwork as a screen, that is art as place for meditation and reflection”.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁸ “All the perpendiculars or ‘orthogonals’ meet at the so-called central vanishing point, which is determined by the perpendicular drawn from the eye to the picture plane” (PANOVSKY 1991: 28).

⁵⁷⁹ Returning to Celant’s reference to Dürer, Trini quotes the invention of the perspectival window by the German artist. Lacan referred to this invention in the chapter called *L’anamorphose* in the section *Du regard* of his 1964 Seminar (See LACAN 1973: 78-79); furthermore, Trini quotes directly the following famous chapter *Qu’est-ce qu’est un tableau?*.

⁵⁸⁰ TRINI 1973C: 67.

Trini himself, however, highlighted how Paolini translated this conceptual pyramid in the (approximate) perspectival diagram in graphite lines. At the time, the artist is unlikely to have read Lacan's writings: he might have heard about the "reciprocity of the gaze" ("I am seen") but a title such as *Is the Vision Symmetrical?* should be still read in phenomenological terms. What Paolini meant for symmetry is first and foremost the graphic distribution of the canvas and millimeter paper support.

Like *Apollo e Dafne*, which was defined a "closed-discourse exhibition",⁵⁸¹ the 1972 *suite* had no reading order but appears recapitulated in a canvas, *Teoria delle apparenze* ("Theory of Appearances", see **figure III.34**). The corresponding graphical study is entitled *Study for "Inventory"* (**figure III.47**),⁵⁸² and represents a two-dimensional geometrical and symmetrical diagram composed of eight rectangles of the usual proportions 2/3 (four meet their corners at the centre, four lay on the orthogonal midlines). The obtained image is a geometric "generative inventory" of the eight canvases exhibited at the Sonnabend Gallery, a "a priori" visual "theory" that produces theatrical "appearances" rather than visions.

The Sonnabend works conclude as an intense parabola if analysed in terms of drawing practice from 1970 to 1972. The primacy of the act of seeing in the graphite works of the *Vedo* exhibition almost "dematerialised" the practice of this medium, strengthening the subjective presence of the seeing author. Then, *Apollo e Dafne* marked a significant stage, also showing Paolini's compromise with a more traditional conception of drawing. The resort to Poussin's draftsmanship and to the use of millimeter paper (which is in itself a preliminary geometric drawing), results in a different paradigm of the medium. Geometry shapes the artist's drawing not as an external fixed set of rules; he can arbitrarily force it within his own tools. It is crucial as a device to counteract the optical subjectivity of perception, while remaining in a field of pure visuality.

II.2 Reduction by drawing

By the end of 1972, when he had definitely moved to Rome, Boetti was finding his own way to reach large scale and painterly effects. Not only the first embroidered series of the *Maps*, but also the ballpoint pen works (*Il progressivo svanire della consuetudine, Mettere al mondo il mondo, I sei sensi*

⁵⁸¹ BRIZIO 1971: 38.

⁵⁸² It is worth noticing that *Theory of appearances* was the title of a 1949 "psycho-bio-physical" treatise by Marco Todeschini, edited by the Istituto Grafico where Paolini's father worked in the fifties. The volume was quite influential in the debate around the limits of Einstein's relativity in the fifties and early sixties.

see **figure III.48**) that presented vast, brilliant and glossy surfaces of colour,⁵⁸³ or later, the sequences of *Storia naturale della moltiplicazione*,⁵⁸⁴ a wall ensemble of combinatory sequences of black and white graph paper sheets clearly evoking a pattern *à la Mondrian*. Like Paolini's work, but by completely different techniques, these works challenge a substantial distinction between drawing and painting.

Parallely to this magniloquent impulse, some private works on paper dated to 1972-73 testify a small-scale practice, based on reduction and made with the intention of recapitulating the artist's oeuvre realised thus far. It can be only hypothesised that such practice corresponded somehow with Boetti's move from Turin to Rome, where he eventually reached his family in October 1972; likewise, undefinable is the connection with a scarcely documented exhibition held earlier that year, when Franco Toselli organised a show *c/o* ("at") the artist's studio in Via Luisa del Carretto 64 in Turin,

⁵⁸³ Ballpoint pen works were first presented in the spring of 1973. In January, Boetti sent two small formats (*Alighiero e Boetti* and *Abeeghiiloortt*, both 1972, 47.5 x 67 cm, see AMMANN 2012 II: 55, nn. 395-396) to Amsterdam for the group show *Eight Italians*, which travelled to the Galerie MTL in Bruxelles in mid-February and also included Merz, Zorio, Anselmo, Paolini, Salvo and Penone. In February, his solo show at the Galleria Marilena Bonomo was titled, *Il progressivo svanire della consuetudine* ("The progressive vanishing of habit") like a 1973 work that was possibly exhibited (see *ibid*: 82, n. 458). Opening on May 12th at the Galleria Gian Enzo Sperone & Konrad Fischer in Rome, an exhibition titled, *Alighiero Boetti. Mettere al mondo il mondo* was documented by photographer Mimmo Capone, see <https://mostrearoma1970-1989.palazzoesposizioni.it/eventi/alighiero-boetti-mettere-al-mondo-il-mondo>.

The general catalogue only refers to the show, without uncertainty, a 1972-73 diptych which does not appear in Capone's room views (see *ibid*: 58, 405; n. 403); instead, seven other works are photographed and identifiable. On the first wall, two large formats titled *Mettere al mondo il mondo* are recognisable as the diptych n. 404 (see *ibid*: 59; now the paper sheets are canvased) but the picture also reveals the original inversion of the two 150 x 250 cm large elements pinned to the wall. On a second wall, a sequence of four 100 x 70 cm large formats is composed by: from left, *Alighiero Boetti* (1973, see *ibid*: 91, n. 482), *ALIGHIERO E BOETTI* (1973, see *ibid*: 91, n. 480), *ABEEGHIILLOORT* (1973, see *ibid*: 92, n. 483); *AELLEIGIACCAIEERREOEBIOETITII* (1973, see *ibid*: 89, n. 474). Although hanging at the same short distance that divides the two elements of the diptych *Mettere al mondo il mondo*, these smaller, ballpoint pen works were not considered as a single polyptych and were probably sold one by one. The identification of the works also reveals that the room was blue-themed. In July, Boetti's solo show at the Galleria Toselli in Milan included the mentioned *Mettere al mondo il mondo* that was exhibited in Rome (see *ibid*: 59, n. 404) and the eleven elements of *Omonimo* (1973, see *ibid*: 94, n. 487), of which a possible original title (*UNDICIONONIMI*, "eleven Ononimo") and the execution time (the spring of 1973) are inscribed on some of the backs. Some Boetti's ballpoint pen works passed from Sperone to John Weber in New York, and later formed Boetti's room in the already mentioned MoMA exhibition *Eight Contemporary Artists*, curated by Jennifer Licht from October 1974 to February 1975. The room views now available on the MoMA website (see <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2510?>) confirm the information in the archival checklist as well as correct the information in the 1974 catalogue and in the 2012 general catalogue, in which six works are registered as exhibited at that exhibition (some with uncertainty). Only two works occupied Boetti's room, divided from Jan Dibbets's symmetrical space by a corridor hosting the serial drawings by Hanne Darboven: the large 1972-73 *Mettere al mondo il mondo* already exhibited both in Rome and in Milan (see *ibid*: 59, n. 404) hung on the shortest wall, while *vederegustaretoccareudireodorarepensare* ("To see to taste to touch to hear to smell to think", 1974) developed as a sequence of 11 sheets crossing the corner of the room. In addition to the original title (the work is now catalogued as *I sei sensi*, see *ibid*: 82, n. 457), the MoMA installation testifies a different order in the last five, fully blue sheets (the current order from element VII to XI was originally IX, XI, VIII, X, VII; also, current elements VII, X and XI are framed the wrong way up in respect to the MoMA installation): probably Boetti himself hadn't foreseen a specific order for the last elements, a "coda" of pure coloured surface (and an abstract painterly effect) following the first alphabetic drawings. Moreover, in the 1974 catalogue, the caption for the exhibited *Mettere al mondo il mondo* is associated with the illustration of the single element of a work with the same title not included in the show, see NEW YORK 1974: [6].

⁵⁸⁴ Boetti first exhibited a large series of *Storia naturale della moltiplicazione*, composed of 11 elements, in his solo show at John Weber Gallery in February 1975, see HEINENMANN 1975. See AMMANN 2012 II: 162, n. 640, in which the work is illustrated the wrong way up in respect to its installation in the artist's studio in 1975, documented by many pictures by Giorgio Colombo (see, for instance, the one illustrated in BOETTI 2016: 30, where the last two elements hang separately on a shorter wall).

from February 15th to 20th, as written in the invitation card. However, the exhibition title, *Primo regesto dell'opera di Alighiero Boetti* ("First inventory of Alighiero Boetti's oeuvre") suggests that the theme of listing and collecting information had turned on the artist's own production.⁵⁸⁵

The 19 works in question share the format of the support, a 40 x 30 cm paper sheet, and the layout: the centre is occupied by a single drawing, or collage or stamp, etc.; a paper strip is glued to the top or the bottom of the sheet, carrying the typewritten title of the drawing; together with the signature, Boetti titled the sheets "insicuro noncurante" (the last two interventions might have been made in a second moment to collect all the sheets). This inscription proves that this series of handmade works was preliminary to the graphic edition *Insicuro noncurante*, edited by Rinaldo Rossi in Genoa in late 1975. It consisted of 81 mixed-media tables (from lithograph to photography to handmade stamps or drawing), each dedicated to a past or new work and edited as loose sheets contained in an elegant box. Boetti exhibited *Insicuro noncurante* multiple times as an autonomous work, and its importance goes beyond the usual status of an edition. If many tables are handmade and contain slight differences, one is titled *Originale* ("Original") and intentionally changes in every edition, as a self-referential play with the idea of the multiple. *Insicuro noncurante* brought to full expression an original and constant vein of Boetti's practice, that of a "reductionist inventory" based on drawing, that will be described in the next paragraphs. An analogous sensibility for small scale, reduction and accumulation reflects itself in his peculiar collection of images, objects, artworks often made by other artists and friends, prints, poems, mostly on paper, that he started to gather, frame and install on a wall of his house in 1973, and later known as a proper artwork as *Muro* ("Wall").⁵⁸⁶

Such a vein can be detected since Boetti's early years, and seems to originate from his specific relation with industrial design as a possibility to reduce a work to its graphic project. In his earliest drawings, executed before his debut and never exhibited at the time, images of technological and daily objects and furniture (microphones, cameras, window shades, lamps, radios) were silhouetted in profiles that highlighted their shapes. In fact, some close-ups and composition cuts seem to derive from the contemporary photography for advertisement of industrial design.⁵⁸⁷ A major issue concerning this fascination with design emerged when Boetti started to arrange exhibitions of furniture-like objects like *Scala* ("Ladder"), *Sedia* ("Chair") or *Catasta* ("Stack"). Celant's critical readings of that time

⁵⁸⁵ The only documentation of the show is the invitation card, which is not mentioned in the chronology of Galleria Toselli in CELANT 2019: 228-229. The "regesto" exhibition corresponds curiously to an empty space in the calendar of the gallery in February.

⁵⁸⁶ See CHERUBINI 2016. *Muro* was exhibited in 1979 in Gavirate, when it included, among others, drawings by Ramon Alejandro, a Cuban artist that Boetti met in Paris in the early sixties, Salvo, Sandro Chia, Marco Tirelli.

⁵⁸⁷ See, for instance, a 1966 report from the second biennial of industrial design in Lubjana in *Marcatré*, IV, 26-29 (December 1966): 110-111. "In the autumn of '64 I began a series of Indian ink drawings. I was especially attentive to the optical framing, to the passepartout effect, and to the difference in values resulting from the isolation of the subject thus highlighted. After a series dedicated solely to these optical diaphragms, [...] I began the series of microphones, cameras, cameras, lamps and viewers" (Alighiero Boetti, 1967, quoted in TURIN 1996: 199).

aimed at a distinction from Arte Programmata, and were centered on the opposition against “inventions and technological imitations”.⁵⁸⁸ Boetti himself declared as superficial “the formal relationships between the natural ‘modularity’ of the *Catasta* and the modularity of certain industrial-design, or with the modularity of a certain Brancusi”.⁵⁸⁹ Curiously enough, though, the artist inserted some handmade or lithographic “progetti” within the catalogue of his 1967 exhibition at La Bertesca in Genoa.⁵⁹⁰ At the time, the intervention could not but resonate with Minimal planning (for instance, Donald Judd’s finished drawings), a reference also excluded by Celant;⁵⁹¹ nevertheless, a careful look at such planning images might suggest the pleonasm and possible irony. A coincidence between plans and objects rests on the graphic readability of the latter, their reduction to drawing (or design) structures, rather than on technical information.⁵⁹² The result is the autonomy or speciosity of the project (the floor plan of the work, its elevation or section, or a detail) first and foremost as a simple drawing motif: “a three-dimensionality that tends to reduce to a privileged surface, a construction that exposes a façade, an object reduced to a support of an image”.⁵⁹³ Among many examples,⁵⁹⁴ *Tavelle refrattarie* (“Fireboards”) may best clarify this aspect: the work consists in the squared, non-orthogonal section of a gridded floor made in the title’s material (**figure III.49**) and the graphic rendering of its lithographic project simply illustrates this principle as its plan (**figure III.50**).

It is not a coincidence then that, in a sequence of details/ciphers in the catalogue of the 1970 Turin exhibition *Conceptual Art Arte Povera Land Art*,⁵⁹⁵ Boetti inserted *Tavelle* not with a photograph but the same plan/drawing (**figure III.51**). The four pages, an embryonic inventory of 12 works from 1966 to 1969, prove that Boetti’s turn to paper practice or his “nausea for objects” in 1969 maintained and even encouraged his approach to graphic reduction. In fact, the works conceived after his “processual turn” appear all the more liable for an equivalent translation into small-scale, bidimensional, acronym-like images able to preserve their meaning. So do the squared details in the

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid: 218.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid:

⁵⁹⁰ See AMMANN 2012, I: 184-186, nn. 160, 162, 165-166. Also known as *Prefissi*, these works on paper have the same 20 x 20 cm format (the same as the 1967 catalogue, see GENOVA 1967) and some were later manipulated in a table of *Insicuro noncurante*.

⁵⁹¹ “Boetti’s wood pieces, concretes, pipes, metal sheets [...] do not identify with Primary Structures” (Germano Celant in GENOVA 1967).

⁵⁹² See, for instance, Boetti’s own comment from 1967: “In *Scala* or *Sedia*, by fixing their structure as in a drawing, one joins the dots and tries to continue the line in its natural course, one encapsulates in it all their prerogatives of interest thus concentrating them in a pure theoretical-abstract vision” (Alighiero Boetti, 1967, in TURIN 1996: 199).

⁵⁹³ Tommaso Trini in GENOVA 1967.

⁵⁹⁴ The same principle originated the first version of *Pack* (AMMANN 2012 I: 184, n. 164) from the cracking of drying concrete in a bucket: Boetti then repeated the random tectonic composition in many drawings from 1972. See also *La tritella*, 1969, that was reduced to a graphic pattern in the table 14 of *Insicuro noncurante* with the title *Itervallo* (see *ibid*: 247, n. 283).

⁵⁹⁵ TURIN 1970B: 48.

Turinese catalogue for *Cimenti, Il sistema decimale fa acqua da tutte le parti*⁵⁹⁶ and *La Luna*, a photographic detail of the lost work that obliterates the material support to focus on the hatching gesture of the making. The sixth drawing evokes a lost work from 1969 titled, *Una tra le cinque possibilità di assenza* (“One of five possibilities of absence”)⁵⁹⁷ that corresponds to an intervention used in later works too: the cutting of a circle from a paper sheet, starting by making a hole from inside the eventual circle. Again, to fully understand this work, it must be considered in its graphic reduction. In fact, it appeared as one of the four drawings sent to be printed in another catalogue of the same months, *Processi di pensiero visualizzati* (**figure III.52**). There, Boetti added some personal notes (“Absence and presence. Orbit. Open is broken”) and a quote from William Butler Yeats (but found in Brown’s *Corpo d’amore*) as a textual comment on the meaning of the work: “Nothing can be unique and complete if it has not been ripped”.⁵⁹⁸

Once such meaningful and elegant clusters of title-figure-philosophical comment are found, their typical destiny is to be preserved in a sort of artist’s repertoire. Four years after the first formulation of the *Five possibilities of absence*, Boetti returned to this drawing in order to visualise duplicity as the two ways in which the scissor obtains a circle in a sheet of paper. Lastly, with its new title, *Due modi [diversi per fare due cose diverse]* (“Two different ways to do two different things”, 1969-1973, **figure III.53**), it was eventually inserted in *Insicuro noncurante*.

The daily practice that stands behind the formulation of such reduced graphic ciphers as *Due modi*, is difficult to reconstruct in material terms. The artist himself constructs a spontaneous allure around his images, often describing their formal process as a “discovery”. Nevertheless, a few material traces remain and can shed light on Boetti’s daily work that brought to his “findings”: the prolonged work-in-progress for *Insicuro noncurante* is a useful sample for such investigation, as well as its intermediate steps like the editing of the artist’s catalogue by the Kunstmuseum Luzern in June 1974. Curated by Ammann and considered Boetti’s first proper artist book,⁵⁹⁹ it restaged the small scale, “writing desk” practice by printing some of the pages as graph paper sheets. The catalogue also contains the first appearance of the two-hand writing *Ciò che sempre parla in silenzio è il corpo* that will be at the origin of the format size of *Insicuro noncurante*;⁶⁰⁰ curiously enough, though, it was printed inverting the two hands’ writings (**figure III.54**).

⁵⁹⁶ The drawing is a handmade grid of 361 squares, composed of a rectangle (20 x 18 squares) and an extra square “spilled” from the figure. Instead of representing the perfect square number (361 is the square of 19), Boetti gave it an irregular form. The choice of 361 might relate to the fact the sum of its digits is 10.

⁵⁹⁷ This title is published by Celant in the final index of the catalogue, together with the indication of the total elements (five cardboard) and their diameter of 35 cm, see TURIN 1970B.

⁵⁹⁸ On Boetti’s contribution to the 1970 Luzern catalogue, see ROBERTO 1996: 32; and GUZZETTI 2019: 106-9.

⁵⁹⁹ See Boetti recente sui libri. Some of the original drawings reproduced in the book have been recently collected in a single work, see AMMANN 2012 II: 165, n. 645.

⁶⁰⁰ The total extension of the work corresponds to the breadth of Boetti’s open arms and occupies four tables of the edition, see GODFREY 2011: 113.

Strategies of reduction first depend on the kind of works inventoried from Boetti's corpus. Text-based works are the most obvious to reduce: for instance, *Ordine alfabetico* or *Spelling*, eventually discarded from *Insicuro noncurante*; or the dialectic couple about writing itself *Millenovecentosettantadue* (related to the *Calligrafia* series) and *Scrivere con la sinistra è disegnare*.⁶⁰¹ Works that were based on stamps or stencil (*Autonomo*, *Uno a zero inizio di una lotta*, *Contatore* or *Estate 70*) or photographic images (*Città di Torino*, *Pavimento*, *Strumento musicale*) also adapt to small scale.⁶⁰² At some point, Boetti returned to the first motif or early experimentation for works that in the meantime had become monumental. It is the case of *Vedereudireodoraretoccarepensare*, that brought back the ballpoint pen works to their origin on graph paper dating to 1969 (see **figure III.54**);⁶⁰³ or two works on the decimal system ($31 \times 31 + 39$, $32 \times 32 - 24$, two representations of 1,000 as an “imperfect square number” spilling units, an idea from 1969, see **figure III.32**).⁶⁰⁴

As a form of synthesis, Boetti's reductive impulse could oppose the infinite possibilities of variants in the combinatorial works on graph paper, as he selected and discarded various attempts to determine a single, extremely balanced image that can be repeated but not varied. *Ma cosa fai? Ma cosa dici?* (“But what are you doing? What are you saying?”, see **figure III.54**) is one of them: in its geometrical terms, it can be described as the superimposition of two (wrong) cavalier projections of a cube, developing symmetrically from the same frontal square face, on axes that are parallel and equal to its diagonals.⁶⁰⁵ The “ensorious” character of the title may match with the conclusion of the drawing itself, that is both wrong or disputable, and perfectly balanced. *Rocking snake* (**figure III.55**) analogously constructs its meaning equally by the title and image: a waving line (the snake) is harmoniously drawn all along the concave side of a “rocking” curve. In a statement from the same year, Boetti cryptically reports that, “I left my skin and feathers among my blue papers. Now I am back to my rocking snake position”.⁶⁰⁶ The “blue papers” being the large ballpoint pen series made

⁶⁰¹ See respectively AMMANN 2012 II: 56, n. 398-9; 62, n. 408; 65, n. 420. In the eventual edition, Boetti substituted *millenovecentosettantadue* in two different works, that is *Calligrafia* and *1970*.

⁶⁰² See respectively, *ibid*: 65, n. 417-8; 66, n. 421, 423; 63, n. 412; 66, n. 422, 424.

⁶⁰³ See *ibid*: 57, n. 402. Boetti had formulated the system with the alphabet between 1969-70 (first he “portrayed” the name of Antonin Artaud, see Ammann 2012, vol. I: 231, n. 257; and then he experimented with various arrangements for his own name, see *ibid*: 266, still using “x” instead of commas). From 1971 he adopted commas and stencil plus ballpoint pen technique for a few large formats, but went on making smaller exemplars on graph paper as presents for friends (Lorenzo, Camilla and Emidio Greco, Paolo and Olga Pellion) as documented in a photograph by Giorgio Colombo, in which Boetti is making the “portrait” of his himself on a little block of notes (the image is published here: https://www.archivioalighieroboetti.it/timeline_slider_post/1973/; see AMMANN 2012 II: 87; the work in Colombo's photograph is n. 467).

⁶⁰⁴ See *ibid*: 64, n. 415-6.

⁶⁰⁵ Another version of the work, see *ibid*: 65, n. 419, shows a similar image turned 90 degrees and corrected to a more probable axonometry.

⁶⁰⁶ NEW YORK 1974: 13. The statement is dated 1974 and appears under the illustration of *vederegustaretoccareudireodorare*.

with collaborators, the “rocking snake position” might refer to an attitude that goes against expansion (in size, series and open authorship) and outward elements (“skin and feathers”), to turn to a private dimension that privileges “oscillation” – an image of duplicity and ambiguity frequent in Boetti’s work.

Such drawings identify image and gesture in an economy of means that makes them seductively iconic. To get to such efficacy, Boetti probably experimented with variants and solutions; some of his quite messy notes and working sketches are documented in photographs of his desk. One of them, later manipulated in multiple 1976 works,⁶⁰⁷ shows a lot of transparent paper fragments and cutouts. Among many graphic studies, titles and short texts for hypothetical works, a sequence that can be related to the *Giogare*, the tenth table of *Insicuro noncurante* (**figures III.56-57**): in a comic strip layout, some frames illustrate a black ribbon getting knotted, crossing various geometric shapes or spiraling around a horizontal rod. The title was assigned only to the variant which became the final drawing: in fact, *Giogare* is a word-pun that mixes *giocare* (“to play”) and the image of a yoke (“giogo”), evoked by way the ribbon now “rests” on the rod.⁶⁰⁸

This kind of drawing practice is at the origin of numerous famous images ideated by Boetti in the seventies, like *Collo rotto braccia lunghe* (“Broken neck, long arms“), *Nè capo cè coda* (“Neither head nor tail”) or *Saint Patrick*. For their typical autonomy and self-closeness, such images would intrinsically reject an interpretative hypothesis of punctual visual sources. On the other hand, there are parallel experiences sharing the paradigmatic impulse to reduction by drawing, as well as unequivocal traces of Boetti’s model in his. Among the former are a few graphic symbols conceived around 1972 by Gino De Dominicis, resulting in an edition of serigraphs edited by Pio Monti’s Artestudio in Macerata. Representing a mysterious iconography of the family and a self-portrait,⁶⁰⁹ a tiny face of a young boy appears drawn in the middle of the blank sheet as inextricable from two curved, elegant segments; in the second print, we understand that the calligraphic curls are adjusted to allow 22 repeated figures to fit together in a continuous circular crown (**figure III.58**).

⁶⁰⁷ See AMMANN 2012 II: 237-239, n. 816-825. These diptychs associate an image of Boetti’s studio desk and the first page of an issue of *Corriere della sera*, once as a photographic print and a handmade drawing (by a collaborator, like Marco Tirelli). Two variants exist, with a different view of Boetti’s desk and two issues (September 24th, 1976 and September 24th, 1976). For the images of his studio, Boetti photographed his desk where a bunch of sheets, scraps and notes partly cover a photograph by Antonia Mulas, in its turn a shot of the same table made in 1975. It is not clear what lies behind the choice of the two *Corriere della sera* first pages, where two illustrations stand out (a public execution by hanging of three Palestinian terrorists in Damascus; and the arrest of a black protester in Johannesburg following the “racial tension”).

⁶⁰⁸ One of such variants was retraced in the large work *Collo rotto braccia lunghe*, 1976, see AMMANN 2012 II: 242, nn. 833-834. Another work, *ibid*: 234, n. 810, includes a framed sheet on which ten almost identical drawings of *Giogare* are copied.

⁶⁰⁹ The two serigraphs were respectively printed in 300 and 100 exemplars by Artestudio in Macerata. A further 1972 edition of 100 exemplars is made of three elements that portray a family: father, mother and boy are also coloured in an overtly childish way (the serigraphs imitate coloured pens).

Boetti's private, daily exercise on tiny drawings and the search for clusters of title-image is probably the most influential and overt heritage transmitted to the younger generation of artists that associated with him in Rome from early on. The most well-known case is Francesco Clemente, whose drawing practice will be analysed in the next chapter, pointing out his direct debts to Boetti's example. A drawing like *Diagrammi* ("Diagrams", 1973, **figure III.59**) works as a repertoire of 12 symbols associating verbs with drawings, in which two or more elements interact graphically (for instance, a crutch-like shape "sustains" a soft stripe; a vase-like form inside a heart-like silhouette stands for "remember", echoing the etymology of the Italian "ricordare" from the Latin word for hearth, "cor"). "Symbol as practice" is the title of the last table from *Insicuro noncurante*: a photographic portrait of Boetti drawing a circle on a sheet of paper by tracing the outline of a sphere.

III *Shadow, contour, retracing: operative paths of drawing as copying*

Paolini's *Il vero* ("The true", 1971-72, **figure III.60**), exhibited in 1973 in Milan and purchased by Ileana Sonnabend,⁶¹⁰ consists of five framed elements, each made by four paper sheets layered onto one another as framing mats or passe-partout; each element carried at the centre the same photographic reproduction of the frontispiece of a XVII century treatise on anatomical drawing. The rare illustration of Odoardo Fialetti's *Il vero modo et ordine di dessegnar tutte le parti et membra del corpo humano* ("The true method and order to draw all parts and limbs of the human body") was probably found on an art journal at the time⁶¹¹ and might have intrigued Paolini by the somehow ambitious declaration of the title, from which the artist drew his own. In a way that echoed *Apollo e Dafne*, he operated four different "drawing gestures" directly on the photographs, namely a graphite scribble, an ink dripping, a scraping and a tearing apart of the photograph in the last two elements. What these gestures, all already employed by Paolini since the 1960s, have in common is evidently their quality of tautological acts deprived of any right or wrong quality, therefore being inevitably "true". Then, against the prescriptive statement of the frontispiece that got covered, erased and disrupted, Paolini's true drawing detaches itself from any technical expertise or learnable knowledge. Moreover, the kind of scribble inserted in the work is not one that reveals unconscious automatisms

⁶¹⁰ See GPO-0243. The artwork is mentioned in GUZZETTI 2023: 78-79.

⁶¹¹ I argue that the printed source that was photographed, enlarged and printed, might have been found in an article published on a very famous, albeit academic, journal in 1970, that is David Rosand, The crisis of Venetian Renaissance, in *L'arte*, 1970, 11-12: 7. The artist doesn't remember the source and scholar Maddalena Disch has been sceptical about this source in a conversation with the author. Nevertheless, the photograph used by Paolini shows some print defects that correspond to the illustration in *L'arte*: in particular, a dot above the letter "a" of "Altezza" in the bottom lines is absent in the originals; or the bottom right corner of the print is faded.

and “subjectivism”⁶¹² that can be found in other contemporary examples: *Il vero* also disrupts the traditional cliché of drawing as revealing a subjective, inner truth.

From the mid-seventies, other occurrences of the term “vero” multiplies, from the series of 1975-76 works titled *Copia dal vero* (“Copy from Life”, but the Italian “vero” is the same “true”) to *Liber Veritatis*, which quotes Claude Lorrain’s collection. An exemplar on paper of *Copia dal vero*, held at the MoMA, a work on paper is currently framed in a wrong way as the five sheets of different kinds of paper (from left, a standard white paper, a photograph, a silvered and a black sheet and a millimeter paper) touch their long side (**figure III.61**). Instead, the staging of the work involves an interval of few centimetres between each element, so that the graphite rectangles traced onto the sheets and the sheets themselves are effectively same-proportioned. Only in this way the hand-drawn rectangles are the “copy” of the five sheets, and the title’s “copy from life” is nothing but the representation of the supports on themselves.

In this case, Paolini’s typical diagrammatic, linear drawing works as a copy as the most reduced representation of an original (by its mere format). To explore this theme further, that may appear self-enclosed in its tautology, it can be useful to approach it from an operative point of view. When the drawing is sufficiently schematic or generic, such as the rectangle that stands for the painting, Paolini drew free-hand with the simple support of a ruler. In cases of more complex images on canvas or on wall, he obtained an analogous essential, reductional drawing by using templates, some of which are still preserved in his studio. *La dea Iride* (**figure III.2**) inaugurated in 1970 a long series of figures to be drawn on a wall, albeit constituting an intermediate case. In fact, only the goddess’ head was taken from a visual source (a 1921 cover from the art magazine, *Emporium*), of which the photographic enlargement used to create the template is still preserved in the artist’s archive.⁶¹³ The body represented in the act of carrying the actual canvas was probably drawn free-hand, as suggested by the fact that it varies slightly but evidently in two known installations’ views. However, Paolini first traced the lines with a pencil and then covered them with segments of different colours with crayons.

In the case of the 1971 room installation, *Early Dynastic*, in which the large figures drawn on walls are pretty geometric (the elevations of the four identical white columns arranged in the middle of the room, see **figure III.62**), Paolini prepared a life-size paper template of the elevation, but transferred onto the wall only the points that could then be connected with straight lines by a ruler, or centered

⁶¹² Leslie Cozzi frames as an “indexical trace of the artist” works such Mirella Bentivoglio’s *Soggettivismo oggettivato* (“Objectified Subjectivism”, 1972), a graphic work which presents a tangle of line from which the word “groviglio” (“tangle”) departs, ending by the printed letters “io” (“I”), see COZZI 2013: 217.

⁶¹³ The photographic enlargement, printed in black and white by the photographer Mario Sarotto, measures about 50 x 65 cm and cuts out the decorative frame in the original cover image. However, a template is recorded to accompany the work and is located with the owner.

by a compass to draw semicircles. This usage has left graphite smudges and heavy marks at the key points on the paper template, since it served for more than one re-execution of the installation.⁶¹⁴ In an interview published in 1973, Paolini himself defined this kind of linear drawing, repeating an image in its essentials as “riporto grafico”,⁶¹⁵ eloquently dismissing a paradigm of skilled execution and preferring an instrument from graphic design. In *Early Dynastic*, the drawn elevations interacted with the shadow profiles of the columns, thematising a multiple *mise en abîme* that amplified graphically the theme of the copy.

The use of templates sheds light on the mysterious quality of Paolini’s linear drawing of figures that quote precise images, which are at the same time perfectly proportioned, synthetic and fluidly traced; neutral, antivirtuosistic but harmonious. This effect is especially needed when a figure III is copied/reported on the primed canvas, where the economy of the lines is combined with flawless execution on the white surface. Although in the absence of a corresponding template, the 1972 canvas from the Sonnabend series “*Elegia*” in *una scena di duello* must have been made using a single template for the image of the swordsman, that is repeated specularly, with identical proportions notwithstanding slight differences among details like the hair, collar and sleeve pleats or the ribbons, all traced with great fluidity. Rather than a silhouette template that repeats an outline, Paolini might have used a tracing paper sheet on which he could retrace the same figure in two verses. A tracing paper template such as this is documented for *Edipo e la sfinge* (“Oedipus and the Sphinx”, 1976, **figure III.63**), a two-element work that juxtaposed the black and white reproduction of the famous painting by Ingres with its symmetrical copy on the right, drawn in graphite on a primed canvas of the same format. Comparing the original image (retraced from a large photographic print) with the drawing copy,⁶¹⁶ one can appreciate the subtle selection and correction of details (some are emphasised as plastic or even sensual indicators in the anatomy of the male nude, others are absorbed in the continuous profiles of the long lines), a balanced spacing between the lines that never thickens beyond a certain degree, an overall detachment in the homogeneity of thicknesses of the pencil strokes. The drawing on the tracing paper template looks heavily marked, almost pierced, in a way that might indicate that the artist trod on it to transfer the image on the canvas. However, Paolini made a quite ordinary use of similar *riporto grafico* in his graphic production on a smaller scale: in

⁶¹⁴ The life-size template measures about 45 x 190 cm and it still carries two yellowed tapes on the upper edge, where it was hung for the transfer on wall. In the archive, a small sketched project refers to the dimension and the scheme for the enameled wood columns.

⁶¹⁵ PAOLINI, OLIVA 1973: [4].

⁶¹⁶ An analogous template on tracing paper in two large sheets was used for *Eco e Narciso* in 1977-78.

fact, it is a horizontal technique, typical of a desk-based practice, and can be effectively re-staged in interventions on multiple pages of books and catalogues.⁶¹⁷

Following this kind of analysis, the broad theme of the copy, linked to other central subjects in Italian early Conceptualism, such as truth, identity and falseness, can be explored from a material side that positions drawing at the core of various practices. Artists from different contexts and backgrounds can be compared along such an operative theme: templates, shadow, contour, silhouette, retracing; and gathered in paths that also show how the possibilities of drawing could be expanded by a seemingly tautological gesture as copying.

III.1 *Shadow drawings*

In the sixties, the technique of silhouetting had extensively spread, riding on the thrust of the Pop wave, which contaminated the average studio practices with all sorts of possible stencils, spray paint and, above all, projectors. From Kounellis to Schifano, to Pistoletto and Paolini himself, all were associated with an instrumental use of such tools, indistinctly for painting and drawing, and a few critics had timely accounted for the implication of the “detached lens of the projector”⁶¹⁸ or the transparent effects of the figures reduced to silhouettes.

In the seventies, such Pop genealogy was still evident but it got interestingly charged with conceptual or rather anthropological meanings. Maurizio Calvesi, a Roman critic who was already involved with the early emergence of so-called Scuola di Piazza del Popolo, commented on the practice of another important Pop artist, Mario Ceroli, who cut silhouettes in wood as well as in paper works. In February 1972, Ceroli held a show at the Galleria de’ Foscherari in Bologna, titled *Geomanzia: studio della terra e classificazione secondo le forme e la teoria di Nicola da Cusa* (“Geomantics: study of earth and classification according to forms and theory by Nicola da Cusa”), where he installed giant geometric solids and positioned headlights to cast their shadows on the walls, together with those of the people at the opening. The artist then traced the multiple shadows with a marker on the walls, achieving detailed profiles and geometrical silhouettes (**figure III.64**).

“To derive a form by contouring the shadow cast by something or someone is an archetypal gesture that Ceroli has recovered precisely in its absoluteness. Few know the fable of Dibutade, narrated by Pliny the Elder: a

⁶¹⁷ See, for instance, Paolini’s contribution to *Projekt '74 Kunst bleibt Kunst* (COLOGNE 1974: 270-273), in which the artist repeated a sketch of the work *Dimostrazione* (“Demonstration”, GPO-0272) by retracing it as they have the same proportions. Needless to say, the installed work itself was a representation of the act of copying: “Two primed canvases, exhibited on two easels facing each other and located at a certain distance from each other, and on a diagonal axis with respect to the room, each present a perspectival drawing of the element situated before it. Each of the facing elements records itself or its equal, that is, it confirms or verifies the situation captured by our gaze before the work”.

⁶¹⁸ TRUCCHI 1965.

maiden of that name, living in Corinth, in order to possess the image of her beloved even after he had left her, sketched against a wall the outlines of his shadow; thus drawing was born, says Pliny, and with it painting. The legend was in vogue in the eighteenth century, when the brushes of [Robert] Tournière, [Jean] Raoux, Baudoin or Suvée depicted Dibutade: who, having projected the shadow with a flashlight, picks it up with a quick gesture, precisely Ceroli's technique. [...] Is it pure literary suggestion, acrobaticism on the part of the critic, to refer them [the silhouettes] to such an ancient wanderer, on the basis, moreover, of a myth perhaps unknown to Ceroli himself? But Ceroli has instinctively revived the elementary nature of the gesture; above all, of this elementary nature he has rendered the visual sense in the derived form; the sign is so sure, so simple, it cuts shapes and spaces sharply, scanned, and beyond, or on this side, of the outcropping dimension of jouissance or craftsmanship, which is another convergence toward "the origins," founded on a straightforward humanistic culture, on the Renaissance plinth, if you will".⁶¹⁹

Calvesi's passage deserves attention not only as a fine commentary on sharpness and simplicity obtained through the indirect technique of shadow tracing and silhouetting, but also as the first reference to Pliny's story: Dibutades' anecdote still works as a paradigm for the theory of drawing⁶²⁰ and for contemporary forms of shadow drawings, with more or less historical justification and always regardless of the actual knowledge of the erudite anecdote by the artists (that was improbable in the early seventies, as Calvesi testifies). The analysis of two important cases from Italian art of the seventies problematises such archetypical interpretation adopted by Calvesi and more recent literature: both might have referenced Pliny's story as they followed Calvesi's lamentation; but at the same they show how the paradigm could constitute a starting point for slight shifts and various overturning of its meaning. In late 1974, Marisa Merz held her first official couple's show with Mario at the Galleria Toselli in Milan. Mario's work was unprecedentedly bulky as he presented for the first time the 20-metre long *Tavoli*, made in spray paint on linen canvas, and an artist's book about the work was edited for the occasion too. Exhibiting an untitled drawing, Marisa decided to respond with a perceptive scale gap: using a single, extremely fine graphite line of a few centimetres, she portrayed Mario by tracing his profile, recognisable albeit distorted and compressed in a curve indifferent to anatomical proportion of the head. Unfortunately, no photographic documentation of the show is known, and two published versions of the untitled portrait have different formats, a very small (14 x 23 cm) and a larger size (100 x 70 cm, **figure III.65**); however, the dimensions of the distorted portrait might have been life-size in both cases. Hypothetically, Merz might have retraced a distorted shadow of her partner on the picture; or, also, could have drawn staring at him, without looking at the page:

⁶¹⁹ CALVESI 1974.

⁶²⁰ See HILDEBRANDT 2017: 21-30.

this process would explain the minute registration of physiognomic details and the overall disproportion, and would also match Merz's predilection for an indirect relationship with signs.⁶²¹

The delicateness and imperceptibility of the profile single line not only opposes to the painterly, geometrical magniloquence of *Tavoli*, but also to Ceroli's own profiles, which were obtained by positioning people parallelly to the walls, in theatrical poses and evident gestures, traced by a thick marker visible even at a distance of several metres. Instead, Merz's image avoids any sharpness and almost privileges the course itself of the line, with minimum deviations, rather than a faithful cast of Mario's shadow or profile. The coincidence with the Dibutades' story, also given the sentimental relationship between author and person portrayed, might be intentional and introduce a vague melancholic vein in the *profil perdu*.⁶²²

A second case of "shadow drawing" refers to a performative installation executed in 1977 by Anna Valeria Borsari, who at the time taught Romance philology at the University of Bologna and may have been well informed about Pliny's story. Her practice was based on photography and originated directly from her theoretical reflection on identity and its documentation. Her Venetian performance, *Autoritratto in una stanza*, took place in a prestigious but traditional gallery, Il Cavallino, and was translated into her first video work and artist book, both consisting in a reportage that narrates the process of installation but shows the multiple elements of the work only once they had been installed. Borsari manipulated the empty room by marking the false walls with her "self-portrait" – that is fragments of her silhouette traced in pencil. "I tried to study my body from outside": the images appearing on the walls correspond to her hands, her arm and her profile, possibly retraced by standing close to the wall; but there is also an image of her back that appears from a projection, and above all an image of herself with three different positions of the arms, evidently impersonating the "Vitruvian man" by Leonardo da Vinci (**figure III.66**). From the Vitruvian self, a horizontal line is traced at the highest point reached by her arms all around the room; in the last stage of the installation, a pile of humid earth of the same volume of the artist was lain on the floor and slowly dried, while the camera points to the canal outside the gallery. The "humanistic culture" remembered by Calvesi is directly addressed by Borsari, who in the image of Virtuvian self opposes an engendered, contextual measure of her presence. In a *Note* published in the artist book, she critically discussed the idea that "artists are seen as those who can affirm themselves over matter and the environment, on which they impress

⁶²¹ Among the few drawing experiences documented before the 1974 portraits of Mario Merz, one can remember Marisa Merz's participation in *Gennaio 70*, which included a "drawing by telephone" with Tommaso Trini, who drew "a sign" at the show communicated by distance by the artist; a few days later, in Rome, she flew with a Cessna F172G aircraft above Rome, communicating the progressive altitude to Mario Merz and Fabio Sargentini, who registered them in a diagram.

⁶²² A few months later, Marisa Merz would also portray her daughter Beatrice by embroidering her features with a similar economy of lines, for a 1975 exhibition. See TRINI 1975: 50.

their own mark and which they organise in their own image”. Instead, Borsari’s shadow drawings, or retraced silhouettes, aim to “portray” herself “in relation to his/her environment, not in any absolute sense”; the slender graphite fragments dialogued with the formless earth in the attempt to “cease to distinguish between subject, object, agent, matter, instrument, place, and the other categories we have been taught in prescriptive language”.⁶²³

III.2 “Neoclassic” contour drawing

Probably the most declarative shadow drawing installation of the early seventies, Sandro Chia’s show *L’ombra e il suo doppio* (“Shadow and Its Double”) had been thoroughly analysed by scholar Denis Viva, who discussed its eclectic philosophical and anthropological references (starting from the obvious reference to Antonin Artaud’s *Il teatro e il suo doppio* in the title) as well as its actual making.⁶²⁴ A few months after moving from Florence, where he had accomplished a traditional academic training in painting, the 25-year-old artist started to gravitate around the Galleria La Salita, where his show followed the Roman stage of Paolini’s already mentioned *Un quadro*. Chia arranged a light at the centre of the dark room and four personal objects around it (a crow, a rose, a toy plane and two vials), casting their enlarged and distorted shadows on the four walls where four groups of canvases hung. On the last day of the exhibition, he traced the shadows with pencil so that each single canvas carried a “shadow fragment”, as captioned by a stamp. In addition to mentioning Dybutades’s story as an inevitable but indirect reference, Viva has discussed the importance of Paolini’s model for the room display of the vertical, empty canvases that triggered the metadiscourse on representation and authorship. He also pointed out that the shadow drawings were corrected to make the “shadow fragments” on each (sellable) canvas more recognisable, opening up to possible comparisons with coeval photographic exercises of manipulation of true shadow.⁶²⁵

In the following few years, Chia often returned to contour drawing as a device to investigate the theme of copy. At La Salita, he collaborated with a group of other young conceptualist artists, such as Ferruccio De Filippi and Gianfranco Notargiacomo, all united by an experimental, eclectic and polymorphous practice of performance and installations, often formulating a sort of institutional

⁶²³ BORSARI 1978: [29].

⁶²⁴ See VIVA 2018.

⁶²⁵ To Viva’s rich analysis, it would be interesting to add some possible international comparisons that might indicate how Chia was carefully tuned to the most various conceptualist panorama. For instance, in a 1970 photographic work titled *Crow*, William Wegman positioned a stuffed parrot in front of a wall, where the shadow of a crow was projected instead (the same operation was repeated in *Duck* with a stuffed crow and a duck’s shadow). Shadow therefore functions as an image that problematises objectivity and indexical truth. *Crow* was published in January 1971 on Wegman’s first monographic catalogue (POMONA 1971) and later illustrated in LIPPARD 1973: 218.

critique on authorship, public, career and the art system.⁶²⁶ In a group show in early 1973, Chia installed in the gallery an early XX century, elegant wooden coat rack: in the zinc umbrella tray, a living eel was forced to assume a straight position (and consequently to die rapidly). To further complicate the meaning of the installation (linked to the figure of the uroboros, the circular snake that bites its own tail),⁶²⁷ a drawing transforms this work into a reflection about copy and originality. Documented by a photograph now in the Marzona papers at the Archiv der Avantgarde in Dresden, it presents two identical, mirroring silhouettes on a previously folded sheet: one can recognise the coat rack, taken from a room view of the gallery, probably retraced by carbon paper to simultaneously realize the two specular drawings (**figure III.67**).⁶²⁸ The title is formulated as a sort of logic or mathematical question, *Quale dei ricalchi coinciderà per primo col modello? (per colpo di vento)* (“Which retracing will match the model first? (for a gust of wind)”) and interrogates the concept of originality and repetition from the point of view of the execution process, as the copies were probably simultaneous, although the model would have been impossible to recognise without a comparison

⁶²⁶ Following his Roman debut in 1971 (preceded by other shows in Florence), Chia’s career included shows and performances yet to be fully reconstructed. His activity at La Salita, where he had been assigned one or two personal shows every year from 1971 to 1977, was unconventional and resembled a critical occupation of the space (Daniela Lancioni reported that Chia, De Filippi and Notargiacomo even received the keys of the gallery and “lived” there, informally, see CHIA, LANCIONI, VIVA 2012; one might read in the light of this information a work by Chia which consisted of the reproduced image, probably a Xerocopy, of *The studio key*, see PHILADELPHIA 1973: [27]). In 1972, numerous performances took place in Rome and Florence. At the Incontri Internazionali d’arte in Palazzo Taverna, on March 10th, he participated in the roundtable discussion *Critica in atto* curated by Achille Bonito Oliva, with an action titled *e/o intorno a catacresi* (“and/or about catacresis”): “Chia mounted a tautological structure, as part of his work on the double (shadow, copy), mirroring a question in an omological answer – by using a portable tape-recorder and two speakers, one positioned on the table at which the artists (the answer) sat, the other on a chair among the public [...] and actioned by two push buttons (DIACONO 2013: 99-100). A few days later, at La Salita, his solo show titled *Copia* (“Copy”) opened as documented by a room view showing three portfolios on a table, to be captioned by a text both apparently technical and nonsense, as usual in Chia’s writings (“In practical fictions, the disappearance of the mediating terms is most simple; that is, these terms disappear when the purpose is achieved. Certainly, however, they do not disappear from the psyche. This is the case, for example, with regard to the fiction of freedom, where the judge simply makes use of said fiction in order to be in a position to pass a judgement of punishment, which can be achieved by means of the fiction that the man, in the case of the delinquent, is free, as if the man were, that is, free”), documented in the archives of Galleria La Salita. In the evening on May 12th, 1972, Chia participated in the action titled *Bibliologia* (“Bibliology”) at Libreria Arcana, in Rome, with a book work (“two Bibles bound together, one reversed from the other; on one the title *Die Bibel*, on the other the title *Copia*; in *Copia* an obscure word was underlined in pencil”, DIACONO 2013: 101) and the intervention *Sillogica (non è possibile immaginare qualcosa che non si conosce)* (“Sillogic, it is not possible to imagine something that is unknown”), in which he bandaged his right hand. On November 23rd, Chia took part in *Mappa 72*, a survey performance that included 24 mostly Roman artists and collectives: his action, *Questo gioco è di prestigio* (“This game is a sleight of hand”), the artist seated in front of a solar lamp, dangerously intense, wearing sun glasses. On December 15th, lastly, the artist installed a work linked to death. All the actions have been commented in the recorded conversation CHIA, LANCIONI, VIVA 2012.

⁶²⁷ The show was organised to present artist books by the three artists edited by La Salita in a series titled *Le perle* (“Pearls”). Chia’s edition, *Bibliographie*, consists of the reprint of the bibliographical apparatus of a study on Giovanni’s *Apocalisse*. The book contained an etching (a technique that evidently showed the Florentine artist’s ability and academic training) representing the uroboros. In the photographs made for the invitation, Chia appears posing while nonchalantly hanging up his jacket on the coat rack, see <https://mostrearoma1970-1989.palazzo.esposizioni.it/MC-API/Risorse/StreamAttributoMediaOriginale.ashx?guid=E9EE5C96-75B0-4B5D-AEED-2DD4AAC86D8A>.

⁶²⁸ Archiv der Avantgarde, Dresden. Since the photograph bears no indication about the technique (only the title and the provenance from the Galleria Cesarea in Genoa), the carbon paper process can be only hypothesised on the base of the result and the slight smudges on the paper.

between the photographic source and the arabesque profiles. At the end of the year, in a two-artist show with Notargiacomo,⁶²⁹ Chia realised two copies of Verrocchio's *David*, hand-drawn with charcoal and minor touches of colour on large canvases, paradoxically titled, *Autoritratto* ("Self-portrait", **figure III.68**). The dependency on Paolini's graphite images on large canvases, but with a greater disregard of elegance, has already been noticed,⁶³⁰ and although Chia might have studied the sculpture during his academic training in Florence, he also paralleled the older artist by using a photographic image as a source and obtaining a silhouette-like image, unfinished yet nevertheless very precise in the outlined proportions. Alongside Chia's "disegnoni",⁶³¹ Notargiacomo exhibited *Idioletto* ("Idiolect", **figure III.69**), a self-portrait duplicated on two canvases that respectively bore the artist in the act of speaking and listening (for a reviewer, "a way to push the ordinary communication away")⁶³², the first hanging right side up and the second upside down. They revealed more clearly the persistent use of Pop techniques and spray paint. Interestingly, all the four canvases of the show are inscribed with the date "12/12/1973" and that might suggest that they were all executed at the same time (a hypothesis supported by the evident rapidity of execution), with analogous techniques and a common theme in the duplication of the self-image.

At the time Chia copied Verrocchio, Paolini was the most authoritative example of reactivation in a modern sense of classic and even academic art. He directly inspired exhibitions like *Appunti per una tesi sul concetto di citazione e di sovrapposizione*⁶³³ and *La ripetizione differente*, organised by Renato Barilli for the Studio Marconi in Milan. Quoting Gilles Deleuze's essay that was translated in Italian in 1971, it was the major systematic attempt to articulate the problem of "a return to the repertoire of codified, museum-like images, in a sort of revisiting of all previous cultural stages".⁶³⁴ Paolini's work functioned admittedly as a paradigm in Barilli's concept, and the artist was represented by collage works that manipulated photographic images of museum art, namely works by Manet and Canova. It has been down to Tommaso Trini, already in 1971, to highlight the analogies between Neoclassicism and Conceptualism through the example of Paolini, who had stated himself his predilection for that period in art history: "this reference is not just a cultural quotation or homage to this style, toward which I have a preferential attitude. Neoclassicism was in fact the first 'neo'

⁶²⁹ The duet show had a first stage in the Palazzo delle Esposizioni, opened on December 11th, 1973, where Notargiacomo suspended a coloured egg in the hall of the museum and Chia coloured in red one of the *ovuli* in the decorative frieze of the building. The second stage opened at La Salita on the next day.

⁶³⁰ See ROME 2013: 121.

⁶³¹ CHIA, LANCIONI, VIVA 2012.

⁶³² MUSSA 1975: 58.

⁶³³ See ROME 1971, organised by Tullio Catalano, who had reviewed Giulio Paolini's exhibition *Un quadro* at Galleria La Salita, demonstrating "Paolini's vocation for the method of the quote: a double quote, as you see, which draws its own source on itself, on the temporal distance that connects the premise and the conclusion of the almost mathematical, visual syllogism [...]" (CATALANO 1971: 31).

⁶³⁴ MILAN 1974.

movement, that is, it was the absence of a new style; it was the first time that a past manner was summed up, abdicating a new form”.⁶³⁵ Trini spoke of “rifigurazione” (“refiguration”) as a form of conceptual copy that admits “the impossibility of the recovery and of the model”.⁶³⁶ Within such a critical frame, and the broader fortune of Neoclassicism in the early seventies (mostly due to the influential exhibition *The Age of Neo-Classicism* at the Victoria and Albert Museum), a specific function of contour and linear drawing can be pointed out, as a further branch of the pervasive theme of copy, repetition and identity. Between 1972 and 1973, the artist Fernando Tonello realised a series of large, coloured crayon drawings that curiously repropounded Neoclassical iconographies (**figure III.70**). Tonello, who was “somewhat defiladed”⁶³⁷ around 1975, when he suddenly took his life, belonged to a group of young Milanese artists, including the Japanese Hidetoshi Nagasawa and the Argentine Antonio Trotta, who had exhibited together in group shows at Galleria Toselli and Studio Maddalena Carioni,⁶³⁸ and gathered around the more established figure III. of Luciano Fabro. Started by an installation practice around 1969, Tonello’s “discourse about knowledge, on the roots of language, on the sometimes-paradoxical variation, in time, of certain forms and meanings”⁶³⁹ encounter drawing after the involvement of all sort of materials. In order to copy them minutely on large sheets of paper, or to compose pastiches by bringing together fragments of different images, he photographed and enlarged the engravings of a rare, early XIX century art publication, that is *Annales du Musée et de l'École Moderne des Beaux-Arts*, only available in ancient and prestigious libraries (the closest to Milan being the Biblioteca Universitaria in Pavia). In the French journal, paintings and sculptures from the Paris Salons and the imperial collections were illustrated by *gravures au trait*, which elegantly reduced and levelled all artworks and styles to homogeneous outlines (**figure III.71**). By the paroxysmal exercise of copying what is a copy in turn, Tonello explored the conceptual distance from the original model expressed by Trini, while the surprising choice of using coloured

⁶³⁵ BANDINI 1972.

⁶³⁶ TRINI 1971: 54. On the fortune of Canova in the early seventies, and a discussion of Paolini’s position, see GUZZETTI 2019A.

⁶³⁷ VINCITORIO 1975.

⁶³⁸ Tonello had an important role, together with Alessandro Jasci, in the opening of the Studio Maddalena Carioni in 1972. Two respective solo shows of the two artists inaugurated the gallery in 1972, followed by important group shows. I am grateful to Alessandro Jasci and Marina Affanni for their help in finding information about Tonello.

⁶³⁹ ALTAMIRA 1972: 21. After presenting performances in group shows in province (“too succinct, and ultimately really povero, almost gratuitous, Tonello’s happening, which reproduced two human footprints on a layer of salt in which a bottle of Coca Cola was confined, accompanied by an ampoule for the oil flames used to signal road works, supplementing the whole with an explanatory text on the destruction of Carthage”, MARGONARI 1969), Tonello’s early works, such as the 1969 *Ianua novum iter* (a standing gate of plastered woven laurel, installed at his first solo show at Toselli in 1970), echoed directly the coeval analysis of space and classic iconography by Luciano Fabro, although never addressing sculpture as a medium. Together with Fabro, Tonello was invited to Aktionsraum in Munich in April 1970, where he arranged *Kreuzwortfelder (vom Publikum frei auszufüllen)* (“Crossword to be freely filled by the audience”). At the end of the year, he also participated to Rassegna San Fedele with large, chequered boards presenting the sequences of multiplication tables. His first solo show in 1972 at Studio Maddalena Carioni included *Venere in pelliccia* (“Venus in fur”), that is the mink cladding of a gallery pillar.

crayons for the retracing may declare an important precedent in Paolini's *La dea Iride* from 1970. Furthermore, exhibiting or publishing the drawings, Tonello had associated them with quotes drawn from classical or XIX century literature. For instance, in the catalogue of the group show *Della falsità* ("About falseness") organised in Parma in 1974, the drawing of a relief from the Augustan period that represents the *suovetaurilia* (animal sacrifices), mediated by the French XIX etching from the *Annales*, was illustrated alongside the transcript of the so-called *Carmen Fratrum Arvalium*, an archaic ritual text propitiatory against the war, typically intoned in the context of such sacrifices. The curator of the show, art historian Carlo Arturo Quintavalle defined it as an "intentional dissociation between image and caption"⁶⁴⁰ such text-image interactions, in which Tonello manipulated his sources. For instance, within an extensive article published on *DATA* to present the group of Milanese artists, Tonello illustrated five drawings alongside long quotes from Giacomo Leopardi's *Zibaldone di pensieri* about definitions of "perfection" or "simplicity", Lucian of Samosata's *The Dream* or unidentified, possibly autograph texts, dating them respectively to 1974 or 1972 (**figure III.72**).

In the same 1975 article, in which the single voices of the artists merged in a continuous interview orchestrated by Tommaso Trini, a position critical toward the concept of avantgarde was expressed: "the concept of avantgarde implies the concept of repetition, of revival, the only guiding concept from Winkelmann to nowadays [...]. Avantgarde is to destroy the Parthenon and to rebuild it in a shed, avantgarde is the sense of estrangement, unease and dissociation".⁶⁴¹ This commentary (in which Andrea Palladio is also mentioned as "the great surveyor of Cinquecento") can apply not only to the neoclassical operation of Fernando Tonello, but also to a famous work by Luciano Fabro. *Ogni ordine è contemporaneo di ogni altro ordine* ("Each order is simultaneous with every other order", **figure III.73**) was first presented at the Galleria Arte Borgogna in Milan in April 1973 and disoriented critics by a sudden "cultured upsurge".⁶⁴² Four monumental canvas-backed paper sheets illustrated respectively a prospect of the façade of Andrea Palladio's Chiesa del Santissimo Redentore in Venice (hanging isolated on one wall) and three manipulations of the same façade, in different formats but pinned contiguously. Fabro briefly explained his operation in a text published in the exhibition catalogue: "I have broken down the three architectural orders of the Redentore's façade as if Palladio

⁶⁴⁰ PARMA 1974: pag. n. The source for the engraving of the Roman relief, executed by Charles Normand, is *Annales du Musée et de l'École Moderne des Beaux-Arts*, 3, 1802, table 4, and it was described on page 15. The *Carmen Fratrum Arvalium* was commonly anthologised in textbooks of Latin literature. The other work on the catalogue applied the same system of quote/image to photographs of cultivated fields and verses from Virgil's *The Georgics*, in addition to a long quote from Lucian of Samosata's *The Dream*, an autobiographical fiction about the choice of Eloquence instead of Sculpture.

⁶⁴¹ TRINI, FABRO, NAGASAWA, TONELLO, TROTTA 1975: 72.

⁶⁴² TRINI 1973A.

had kept them loose, varying their spatial dislocation from time to time”.⁶⁴³ In what is considered as one of his late masterpieces, Palladio had effectively embedded different orders (in another presentation of the work at Galleria Sperone Fischer in Rome, in early 1974, Fabro added four other large drawings titled, *Sinottica degli insiemi e delle proporzioni* (“Synoptics of sets and proportions”, **figure III.74**):⁶⁴⁴ although difficult to interpret, this parallel set explains the complex system of angled projections of the orders (outlined as profiles only, and prolonged to match three different orders on each sheet) needed to compose the four variations of the elements of the original façade. In addition to a precise knowledge of the history of architecture, the artist intentionally assumed the graphic style of architecture textbooks; hypothetically, he might have looked at the numerous Neoclassical engravings of Palladian architecture too. “We read a space by analogies and we develop it by symmetries. Architecture drawing is not space yet, it is just syntax, a test of combinations: order, not yet space, and as such it constitutes by proportions. [...]”.⁶⁴⁵ The three statues of saints and prophets installed on Palladio’s façade are also subject to manipulation and substitution with various “figures” from the history of European art, from Van Eyck to Velasquez to Canova, indifferently drawn from paintings and sculptures. All are reduced to outlines, rendered into the same fine linear drawing, perfectly fitting the architectural prospect. In December 1973, *Ogni ordine è contemporaneo d’ogni altro ordine* was also published as a serigraphic edition of 120 exemplars by the printers Alfredo and Enrico Rossi in Genova, that is 56, 91 x 70 cm large silkscreens to be mounted together on the wall.

III.3 Retracing

In the sense of “riporto grafico” or medium for copying and conceptually analysing what is a copy, the retracing of shadows and silhouettes typically introduces a distance, albeit a technique of irreducibly linking to indexical contact. In the cases analysed so far, the image is “cooled”, through the selection and discarding of some details, to be consequently compatible with diagrams or architecture plans in Paolini’s or Fabro’s drawings. Marisa Merz and Anna Valeria Borsari partly oppose such analytical function of contour drawing, by valuing rather the lightness, distortions or fragmentations of their few lines, and charging the image with ephemeral, emotional or disturbing meanings.

⁶⁴³ FABRO 1973B. According to the artist, the process of recomposition in four images paralleled the theory formulated by Dante in *Convivio*, distinguishin four senses of interpretation of a text, “the literal, the allegorical, the moral and the anagogic. I constructed this work so that it is readable in parallel to this modes” (ibid).

⁶⁴⁴ The four drawings, now at the Collezione La Gaia, Busca, have been published in BERGAMO 2013. I am thankful to Manuela Galliano for sharing the photograph and information about this work.

⁶⁴⁵ FABRO 1974: 13.

A systematic alternative comes out from Boetti's practice of the seventies, in which retracing is pervasive. Already in 1977, the critic Corinna Ferrari individuated this technique among those principles of his work that have both infinite possibilities and expand endlessly the notion of art.

“Let's consider, for example, the concept, recurrent in Boetti's works, of tracing, which, of course, is never in a relationship of identity with its support, but is an additional and transmutative procedure, a transcription. The possibilities for the development of this procedure are virtually inexhaustible [...]”.

From its first applications, Boetti's “ricalco” (“retracing”) jeopardised the tautology of repetition and copy, for instance, generating “innumerable systems that can result from tracing with pencil the lines of a squared surface, as in 1969 «Cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione»”.⁶⁴⁶ In this paragraph, the trajectory of this technique will be delineated through some examples from Boetti's work of the seventies, in which it merges with other material features and process. In particular, two aspects stand out in Boetti's work, if it is observed from the perspective of the retracing practice: a narrative tendency within his conceptualist attitude, on one hand; and the function of collaboration by delegation of composition and execution.

Both aspects are already present in his first series of drawings made by retracing, elaborated throughout five years, from 1967 to 1971, by collecting *La Stampa* issues illustrated by maps about wars and territorial occupations of the time. Boetti retraced the maps onto sheets of the same newspaper format, juxtaposing the original and the isolated geographical retracing in works titled, *Formazione di forme* (“Formation of forms”, **figure III.75**).⁶⁴⁷ The series was concluded in 1971, when the retracings were translated into an edition of 12 copper plates and silkscreens, with the title *12 forme dal 10 giugno 1967* (“12 Forms from June 10th, 1967”).⁶⁴⁸ The artist's interest “in the ways in which the linear representation of a country's border was at once an abstract image and a picture which contained information about its recent political history” has been pointed out, and associated with the important following series of *Mappe* and a broader “geopolitics” of Boetti's work. It should be noted that in the first handmade series of *Formazione di forme* the artist did not copy or project the printed maps; he literally retraced the originals onto the blank sheets, exploiting pressure, and kept (and later framed) the original newspaper alongside the same-sized paper sheets. The irregular, rough quality of the handcrafted process is maintained in the edited silkscreens, as the thickness and slow course of the ballpoint pen is recognisable, and typed dates are not reprinted but retraced in

⁶⁴⁶ FERRARI 1977: 21.

⁶⁴⁷ See AMMANN 2012 I: 177, n. 150; 189, nn. 174-175; 232, n. 258.

⁶⁴⁸ For a comprehensive analysis of the edition, edited by Pio Monti's Artestudio in Macerata, see NEW PALTZ 2019: 50-67. Boetti's selection was not extremely systematic, as some maps related to war events in the same years (and published on first pages of *La Stampa*) were not taken into consideration, for instance, a map of Albania (December 8th, 1968), other maps of the Israel conflict (June 6th, 1967; July 2nd, 1967), an Austrian terrorist attack in Val Venosta (August, 27th, 1967).

turn.⁶⁴⁹ Drawn retracing remains the main visual difference from analogous, international works, such as Art & Language's strikingly similar and coeval results in *Maps not to indicate*, which was mechanically executed.⁶⁵⁰ Furthermore, in the final edition the compositional delegation of the technique emerged all the more clearly: not only are the jagged, nervous, or suddenly straight contours deprived of any identifying caption, they also float in arbitrary locations of the blank sheet, and the memory of the original newspaper layout is only hinted at by the date constantly on the top right corner.

Boetti resorted to retracing (after all, a process of multiplication in itself) for another edition in 1973, commissioned by Galleria Il Segnapassi in Pesaro, a provincial gallery which produced editions by artists of earlier generations like Antonio Calderara, Arnaldo Pomodoro or Ceroli.⁶⁵¹ Boetti's *Maschio e femmina* ("Male and female") was an exception in the gallery's catalogue as it was an entirely handmade multiple. In this case, the material execution brings together frottage and silhouetting. Each couple of thin paper sheets is laid over a pair of scissors, once closed, once open. Using the pressure of his hands on the object, Boetti obtains a relief on the surface and then he follows the object's outlines with a pencil, tracing them and letting some frottage-like smears to appear (**figure III.76**). The graphite signs stand as proper traces of the presence of the object beneath the sheet, as well as the paper dents, so that the image is more of a substitution by print rather than repeatable "copy". The external object is imported into the system of signs ideated by Boetti, which in this case is binary and links the concepts of "openness/closeness" to those of "female/male".⁶⁵² In other single exemplars, Boetti chose different kinds of scissors, pincers or other tools (a nail, a "tape snail", a compass, which was also used for a second edition made for Il Segnapassi, *Minimo Massimo*),⁶⁵³ and in one case he also overlaps the outline of his closed and open hand onto an open

⁶⁴⁹ The first work of the handmade series, now in the Ramo Collection in Milan (see ZUCCA ALESSANDRELLI 2018: 238, 317, n. 65., is dated to 1967 as Boetti used the first page from *La Stampa* of June 10th, 1967. From a close observation it is possible to notice that the artist heavily retraced the illustration frame and the Sinai and Israel territories with black ballpoint, in order to transfer the line onto the cardboard sheet placed under the newspaper. The superimposition of the sheets appears confirmed by the same folding mark at both centres. On the sheet, Boetti uses only blue and black ink, and no traces of carbon paper appear, the use of which would have been more obvious to achieve the same image.

⁶⁵⁰ See MESSINA 2013: 212-213.

⁶⁵¹ The gallery was founded in 1972 by Milena Ugolini, Franca Mancini and Renato Cocchi. In a review of an important Ceroli show in 1972, Trini informed about their contacts with Alberto Boatto and the painter Concetto Pozzati who taught in the Accademia di Belle Arti in Urbino. From May 17th to 19th, Trini, Menna and Boatto delivered three public lectures about Conceptual art in Pesaro, organised by the gallery and the Accademia.

⁶⁵² The structure of the double had already met the one of gender in some pairs of *Mettere al mondo il mondo*, in which the dyptich elements were executed respectively by a male and a female assistant, in order to link the respective "style" in ballpoint hatching, see **figure III.48** and MUNICH 1975: 46-47. However, it is rather interesting that Boetti never doubled himself into a male and a female, notwithstanding important examples (for one, Marcel Duchamp) and numerous companions in those years (from Urs Lüthi to Tomaso Binga).

⁶⁵³ See AMMANN 2012 II: 172, n. 658. *Minimo Massimo* was edited in 49 exemplars and dated 1974, possibly also exhibited at Galleria Il Segnapassi from March 22nd to April 18th, 1974.

and closed compass.⁶⁵⁴ The result is also an animation of otherwise static objects, not only in terms of gender or measure,⁶⁵⁵ but also as an iconic individualisation: in other words, “portraits” of tools. In this sense, they can be compared to Jim Dine’s famous graphic series, that were enjoying a seamless fortune throughout the seventies.⁶⁵⁶ For instance, from the image of two scissors from the *Photographs and etchings*, the portfolio co-authored with Lee Friedlander, Boetti might have echoed intentionally the isolation of the object at the centre of a blank sheet, the irregular shadowing smears around the outlines and the overall elegant outcome (**figure III.77**).⁶⁵⁷

A slightly later series of works on paper, titled *Sale e zucchero* (“Salt and sugar”, **figure III.78**), also seems to reread certain typical Pop features. The execution process is documented in Emidio Greco’s *Niente da vedere niente da nascondere*, partly filmed in the artist’s studio in 1978. Boetti had realised wooden stamps after the national packages of salt and sugar, marketed as state monopoly at the time: he stamped the red and blue labels of the products, called in Italian “droghe” (“drugs”),⁶⁵⁸ then silhouetted the rectangles of the respective “boxes”, either frottaging the stamps or tracing them free-hand. Finally, Boetti pierced two triangles on the paper sheet in an evident play (both visual and performative) with the current use of the two products, that were commonly opened by holes in the box corners. In addition to this performative execution process, the artist sometimes mounted *Sale e zucchero* in a series of two up to eight elements, in order to simulate the movements of the images stamped in different and progressive positions on the sheet.

The narrativity underlying the animation of objects in *Maschio e femmina* or the performative motion in *Sale e zucchero* was thematised directly in the series *Tracce del racconto* (“Traces of the story”), entirely based on retracing. Boetti composed some photographs of his messy desk realised by his friend, the photographer Antonia Mulas,⁶⁵⁹ side by side in long sequences, that were retraced in ink or pencil or pen on almost three-metre long paper sheets. The pure contour drawing levelled all the objects into an indistinguishable arabesque of single line contours and uninterrupted lines.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid: 174, n. 659. The motif of the silhouette of the hand, having an important precedent in the photographic work *San Bernardino*, where the artist appears with open/closed hands up, appears here for the first time and will be frequent in many works from 1978 on.

⁶⁵⁵ Two triptychs of similarly frottaged objects are titled *Piccolo medio grande*, see AMMANN 2012 II: 174, nn. 660-661.

⁶⁵⁶ Jim Dine had been very present in Italian exhibitions and critical debate since the early sixties (his first solo show in Europe took place at the Galleria dell’Ariete in 1961). His graphics started to have enormous visibility at the end of the decade, through dedicated shows in Amsterdam and Milan (for instance, *Arte Moltiplicata* at Galleria Milano in 1968), until the Complete graphics catalogue is published by Galerie Mikro in Berlin. From that moment on, most of the multiple edition galleries in Italy spread his works: see for instances the shows at Ariete Grafica, Milan in December 1970 and May-June 1973; at Galleria documenta, Turin, December 1972; at Sperone and Multipli, Turin, December 1973; at Multicenter Grafica, Milan, January 1974; etc.

⁶⁵⁷ Boetti had been a great admirer of Dine, as proved by the fact that around the mid-seventies he bought for his own collection the 1971 etching series, *Four Kinds of Pubic Hair*, that was hanging in his living room in Rome.

⁶⁵⁸ See BOETTI 2016: 78.

⁶⁵⁹ Three of Mulas’ photographs have been published in *ibid*: 35, 62, 147.

A recapitulation of the possibilities of retracing was arranged by Boetti in the catalogue of a 1977 solo exhibition at the Marlborough Gallery in Rome (**figure III.79**), a leaflet of some importance if its mock-up used to hang in the artist's studio.⁶⁶⁰ A sequence of full-page details of the exhibited works stages a fascinating repertoire of the artist's versatile devices: random agglomerates of two-dimensional forms, coloured in black as tectonic fragments divided by continuous contours;⁶⁶¹ an irregular repetition of stamps;⁶⁶² the fluid arabesque of *Tracce del racconto*;⁶⁶³ the unpredictable combinations of squares filled in graphite or ink on the graph paper grid.

Ferrari, who wrote a few months after the Roman exhibition, pointed out that it was through retracing that Boetti could materially realise his collaborations:

“[...] in the 1971 «Planisferi ricamati» [...] the transcription [of retracing] becomes intersubjective relationship by hand passage; to the Manifesto coloured by the children, made this year, where the slashes and circles that compose the myriad physiognomies of a face become the grid and background that the children cheerfully used to colour on the drawings of their imagination”.⁶⁶⁴

Not only was the embroidered *Mappa* based on the empty outlines of the globe map on the linen sheets, brought to Kabul to be worked by Afghan women;⁶⁶⁵ for the ballpoint works, such as *Omonimo* or *Mettere al mondo il mondo*, a stenciled outline of the alphabet and the apostrophes assured the collaborators' freedom in filling the surface in between those signs. The example mentioned by Ferrari as the “Manifesto”, *Faccine* (“Little faces”), involved a project made for another solo show at the Galleria dell'Ariete in Milan, in March 1977. The original drawing, which corresponds to the last detail in the Marlborough catalogue (**figure III.80**), served for a low-cost off-set edition. Fifteen copies were given to the children of the Milanese kindergarten “Casa del sole” to be coloured, and were sold at the gallery (with a slight price increase).⁶⁶⁶ The entire project probably responded to Bruno Munari's didactic initiatives: in the very same months, his educational programme entitled, *Giocare con l'arte* (“Playing with art”) was organised at the Pinacoteca di Brera,

⁶⁶⁰ It is filmed in Greco's mentioned movie in 1978.

⁶⁶¹ The first detail comes from *Domenica del Corriere (Prima e quarta di copertina)*, see AMMANN 2012: II, 240, n. 826.

⁶⁶² *Gli anni della mia vita* (“The Years of My Life”, 1976, see AMMANN 2012, II: 230, n. 801 and GODFREY 2011: 113-114) represented Boetti's age by a sequence of 36 encoded numbers: each number is a sequence of stamps differently oriented and repeated as many times as the digits of the date. Among the stamped images, a profile of De Chirico, the façade of Santa Maria in Trastevere (that was visible from Boetti's window), the spade symbol from card games, a version of *Giogare, Quadrare diagonalando*, an apostrophe like that used for ballpoint works, etc.

⁶⁶³ See AMMANN 2012 II: 177, n. 715.

⁶⁶⁴ Ferrari 1977: 21.

⁶⁶⁵ On the problematic aspects of such non-credited “collaboration” with unidentified Afghan women in Kabul, and the discussion of the intermediate materials sent from Rome, see MÜLLERSCHÖN 2016: 16-59, fig. 8.

⁶⁶⁶ Some photographs of the vernissage in the archive of Galleria dell'Ariete (Galleria dell'Ariete Papers, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles) show that the *Faccine* coloured by the children hung in the gallery office, where drinks were served too, occupying the entire wall surface in two rows. One of the manifestos represented the famous ballet dancer Carla Fracci at La Scala.

and Boetti's *Faccine* were clearly inspired by Munari's variations on human faces of the late sixties (figure III.81). Obviously, no educational intent shaped Boetti's work, which instead presupposed the children's "maximum of freedom" – what Munari wished to correct by a "precise knowledge of the means of expression".⁶⁶⁷

Delegation of authorship "cancels out the problem of quality: whether this work is done by me, you, Picasso or Ingres, it doesn't matter. It's the levelling of quality that interests me: here is the total distortion of quality as it is usually understood".⁶⁶⁸ Behind such overt echoes of LeWitt's Wall Drawings, Boetti's practice involved more specific openings to collaboration, often motivated by the talent of other draftspeople. It is the case of the important comics artist Guido Fuga, with whom Boetti conceived the large exemplars of *Aerei* in 1977-78,⁶⁶⁹ or Marco Tirelli, a young student of the Academy, who collaborated on most of the drawings and retracings from *Tracce del racconto* to *Due mani e una matita*, as well as on *Collo rotto braccia lunghe* or the three large drawings *Regno animale*, *Regno musicale* e *Regno delle carte*.

Collo rotto braccia lunghe, "a kind of diary-fascicle", was first published as Boetti's contribution to the journal *La città di Riga* in October 1976. By the analysis of this work, Ferrari expanded on the temporality thematised by the images, that is "newspapers covers, stereotypes even more flattened by the technique of retracing". If periodicals are by definition markers of real time, "to the entropy consumed by the linguistic processes of reproduction corresponds almost as a reward the truth of [the artist's] own exhaustion".⁶⁷⁰ From an operative and material point of view on this vaguely semiologic theme of exhaustion, it is worth introducing here a comparison with another and earlier systematic method of retracing, put into practice by Ketty La Rocca from 1973 in works known collectively as *Riduzioni* ("Reductions"). She assembled triptychs and polyptychs presenting the original image, a poster, a photograph, a tourist postcard, and the subsequent translations on paper, in form of handmade retracing and writings that curve and break following the major lines of the image. The first operations of this kind were made on photographic "studies" of a two hands (a male one occluding progressively the female one) related to a 1972 video piece, *Appendice per una supplica* ("Appendix for a plea"): La Rocca wrote repeatedly and directly within the images the word "you" and retraced some lines by ink.⁶⁷¹ In all the *Riduzioni*, the artist used a non-sense text as "a pretentious global issue brought back to the sign, removed from the delegated place of the parallel lines and

⁶⁶⁷ Bruno Munari quoted in GRIGLIÉ 1977.

⁶⁶⁸ Alighiero Boetti quoted in FAGIOLO 1977.

⁶⁶⁹ "I would like to do something similar: I would like to have a co-worker draw a thousand planes on a sheet of paper with a background that is bluer than the crib: precise planes with all perspectives, with all angles, that provoke desire. It must be an explosion!" (ibid).

⁶⁷⁰ FERRARI 1977: 21.

⁶⁷¹ See DEL BECARO 2008: 188-190. Non si nota che un particolare sembra proprio da Plagio di Pistoletto.

forced to undergo its exhaustion-downgrading". For her obvious deconstruction of language as a patriarchal structure, La Rocca's *Riduzioni* have been mostly discussed within other experiences of Feminism or asemantic writing.⁶⁷² However, the deliberate choice of stage the processuality/sequence of tracing in the polyptychs, and its arbitrary and manual values, allow to consider Boetti's drawing as a valid interlocutor. Above all, (re)tracing is, for both artists, an instrument of deconstruction. Contrary to the exactness of the use of silhouettes and templates, a critique of the "dexterous hand" can be pointed out in their respective iconographies expressed in *Due mani e una matita* (see **figure 0.13**) and La Rocca's *Appendice per una supplica*. Here, a gender perspective operates on the "Paolinian" theme of the hand and the idea of drafts(man)ship. At least in one case, the appropriation of (male) canonical art in La Rocca's practice became collaboration between women artists. In two *Riduzioni* polyptychs that had been exhibited at her posthumous exhibition at the 1978 Venice biennial, she had retraced a photograph by herself taken at the gallery Il diagramma in Milan (**figure III.82**).⁶⁷³ Inga Pin and Inga Pin (the studio) started from images of the daily life of a gallery, but the artist chose not by chance a specific occasion, that is an opening of the French artist Annette Messager. The show included multiple installations of groups of framed drawings on walls or embroideries in showcases, and Messager used to re-draw stereotypical images from magazine and other. La Rocca's eye on the exhibition (she also took a picture of herself in a mirror) echoed the re-tracing technique as appropriation, and therefore multiplied by collaboration the feminist critique.

IV *A Linea analitica of drawing?*

Hands that draw; pencils, graphite signs, dots, lines; the appropriation of drawings by other artists; titles mentioning *disegno* and *disegnare*: the prominence and recurrence in Paolini and Boetti's practice of the themes discussed in this chapter constitute a self-aware investigation on this medium itself. Paolini's analytical attitude was easily recognised by his contemporaries, although associated to an investigation on painting. In this sense, he was included in Filiberto Menna's *La linea analitica dell'arte moderna. Le figure III.e le icone*, one the most important theoretical essays of the decade by an Italian art critic, written in 1974 and published in October 1975. The "analytic lineage" of late XIX and XX century art consisted for Menna in "a critical verification of the means of expression and representation and characterised by the use of self-reflective processes". Menna then distinguished an "iconic lineage", that "undermines representation by representation itself, with a recurrent exercise of logical paradox and of intellectual sophistication" (from Magritte to the

⁶⁷² See *ibid*: 196-203, in which references to Mirella Bentivoglio, Irma Blank and Tomaso Binga are made.

⁶⁷³ See Perna 2015. The show can be identified with Annette Messager collezioneista,

Hyperrealism); and a “aniconic lineage which tries to individuate a series of elementary units, finite and constant, to attempt to systematise the language of art, in analogy with processes of formalisation operated in other disciplines, in structural linguistics, in mathematics, in symbolic logic”.⁶⁷⁴ It is interesting to notice that forms of drawing belonged to both the lineages of Menna’s book: from Francis Picabia’s *La Veuve Joyeuse* or Marcel Duchamp’s *With My Tongue in My Cheek* (both based on substitution and semantic equivalence of drawing, photography/sculptural cast and text) to Sol LeWitt’s projects that established his “logical syntax”. Nevertheless, drawing was never mentioned directly nor indicated as the object of the analytical deconstruction, in favour of painting. The reference to LeWitt was determining to Menna’s theoretical argument: the American artist’s *Wall Drawings* were considered “a system of painting”,⁶⁷⁵ in a reductionist approach that treated drawing not as an autonomous medium but as the means for the analytical deconstruction of painting. Paolini’s work figured in the same theoretical frame, and so did some international exponents of Nuova Pittura (“New Painting”), from Buren to Ryman, mentioned in *La linea analitica dell’arte moderna*. The Italian side of this trend, also known as *pittura analitica*, reached extreme visibility around 1973-74 and affirmed a new fortune for a “Minimal” painting, for monochrome and “geometrism”, but also for a great use of graphite lines and signs, and other techniques that stated a substantial equivalence between drawing and painting.

Unsurprisingly, many of the exponents of *pittura analitica* admitted their appreciation for Paolini’s work, a model of “non-painting”⁶⁷⁶ and analytical distance from their means of expression, and their resort to drawing can be read accordingly, as a deconstruction of the medium. An eloquent example of such operative dialogue can be found in the work of the Chilean artist Carmengloria Morales, who had studied in Milan and lived in Rome since the sixties. As she would recall in 1974, a turning point in her research had come with the development of diptychs, that is, the juxtaposition of a canvas full of colour and an empty one. “The diptych stems from a deep reflection on the materials of painting and the revision of the work I did up to 68-69”: according to such a Paolinian statement, she worked on the relationship between full colour and empty surface, between freedom and “consciousness”, separating them in order to verify their essential co-presence in painting. She also privileged medium-

⁶⁷⁴ MENNA 1976: [128]. This resume appeared on the 1976 second edition.

⁶⁷⁵ MENNA 1972B: 14.

⁶⁷⁶ In a 1974 interview, Griffa recalled: “in my personal history, one of the components that has been among the most important, I would say indeed decisive of my formation as a painter, was the encounter with Paolini’s early work, that is 1960, ’61, ’62. Paolini was obviously not a painter. It was not so much what he did, but just that way of his working on the elements that constitute painting” (CAT. MILAN 1974: [3]). See BELLONI 2015A: 31 (where the quote is erroneously referred to Gastini). For Claudio Verna, interviewed in 1973, “The painting has always been a matter of perception, but what is new compared to the past is that we are aware of the need to critically reexamine the tools of perception. This operation also brings us closer to Paolini’s work” (“Il quadro è sempre stato un fatto di percezione, ma quel che è nuovo rispetto al passato, è che abbiamo coscienza della necessità di riesaminare criticamente gli strumenti della percezione. Questa operazione ci avvicina anche all’opera di Paolini”, BATTAGLIA, GRIFFA, VERNA 1973: 59).

size formats: “I am interested in insisting on medium focuses, so that I can always check the perceptual and perceptible boundaries”.⁶⁷⁷ Morales’ drawings on paper that can be considered projects for diptychs express this control by representing the pair of canvases as two rectangles slightly separated in the middle of the page. The empty rectangle comes to coincide with the diagram used by Paolini to signify the painting, not an abstract monochrome but the structural depiction of “every painting” – just as the empty canvases of her diptychs correspond conceptually to the primed white canvases often inserted in Paolini’s works. The other rectangle could be filled with painting as well as with graphite pencil, as in a 1974 series of diptychs on canvas that result as indistinguishable from those on paper in an illustration in *DATA* (**figure III.83**). The equivalence between drawn and painted coloured surfaces also implied the very large spectrum of possibilities of hatching and glossiness of surface. From diagonal scribble, vigorous and executed within a mask, that leaves empty intervals between the signs; to a minute vertical hatching that might have translated the vast surfaces of Boetti’s ballpoint pen works into an analytical sense.

Introducing an exhibition of works on paper by Morales, Italo Mussa recapitulated in 1974 a group of international researches that focused on the materiality of drawing and paper: “The autonomous support, that is an absolute materiality of space – to reveal from the start or in the course of the action – can be found in Buren, Griffa, Gastini, in Rockburne. But only Rockburne uses paper. In her famous work “Drawing that makes itself”, the signs are made evident by the intention are obtained by folding the paper sheet itself. “The structure of the surface is a mental fact”, wrote [Francesco] Lo Savio. In his *Filtri*, the white, opaque paper objectifies light, space. These are precise answers to who believe today that the support is a limited extension to fill, separated from the ideational act”.⁶⁷⁸ In the following years, Mussa organized multiple shows about the paper support and its analytical function of “manualità e tautologia”.⁶⁷⁹ However, the “analytical function of drawing” missed a dedicated theoretical text in the seventies as well as a specific art movement, and it would be difficult anyway to articulate a coherent path to investigate its various mechanisms all along the decade. Then, it may help at this point to consider the historical path of a foreign gallery, the *Galerie Annemarie Verna* in Zurich, which developed a market interest and taste for drawing on one side, and on the other for Italian art, and in particular for a coherent group of artists that could be gathered around an analytical attitude, among which Paolini and Boetti figured prominently and paradigmatically.

IV.1 *The Galerie Annemarie Verna*

⁶⁷⁷ MORALES 1974: 60.

⁶⁷⁸ Italo Mussa in ROME 1974A.

⁶⁷⁹ The title of MILANO 1977. See also FOLIGNO 1978.

Run by the couple Annemarie and Gianfranco Verna, the Galerie Annemarie Verna opened in 1969, “taking over”⁶⁸⁰ the earlier Galerie Obere Zaune. The early exhibition programme appears as an average Swiss gallery, marketing “klassische Moderne” as well as contemporary artists born around 1930, generically adhering to geometric abstraction of Bauhaus tradition.⁶⁸¹ In fact, the first Italian artist to exhibit at the Galerie Verna was Antonio Calderara, a painter born in 1903 who lived on Lake Orta and had just held an important retrospective at the Kunstmuseum Luzern. A late-1970 group show including Calderara and other painters, as well as the Turinese electronic music pioneer and visual artist Enore Zaffiri, was titled “Konzeptionelle Kunst”, indicating that the recent conceptualist impulse and market trend was grafting frictionlessly onto a taste for geometric painting and graphics, often characterised by slight signs and diagrams. By 1971, the gallery welcomed a significant update on American minimalism, starting to represent Fred Sandback, and on the most recent trends of the German speaking art scene, with a show dedicated to Franz Gertsch and a group show of Richter Polke and Palermo.⁶⁸² In late 1971, a scarcely documented show paid homage to Piero Manzoni presenting his works together with the “Italianische Avantgarde”: among the advertised “Objekte, Projekte, Pläne, Konzept Kunst aus Italien”,⁶⁸³ a couple of little works by Giorgio Griffa are recognisable in a room view in the gallery archive. From this fragmentary information, however, it seems possible to make a first hypothesis about the orientation of the gallery toward Italian art. Presenting avantgarde art rooted in the sixties, the Galerie Verna developed an early interest in the “painterly” currents of conceptualism: for instance, Griffa had just participated to the fundamental show *Processi di pensiero visualizzati* in Luzern, but in respect to the other artists included, his work on unstretched, unprimed canvas and separated patches and lines of colour, was the only kind suiting the market orientation and taste of the Swiss gallery.

⁶⁸⁰ CURJEL 1969.

⁶⁸¹ The first two years of the gallery were particularly coherent in a dedication to European abstractionists. The following reconstruction is made by the calendars published monthly in the architecture journal *Das Werk*. Opened in May 1969, Galerie Annemarie Verna (Obere Zäune, 6 Zurich) presented: Horst Janssen, Hans Bellmer (May 5th – June 11th); Manfred Mohr (June 14th – July 12th); Alex Sadkowsky (September 3rd – 30th); Antonio Calderara (October, 19th – December 3rd); Ignaz Epper (December 8th – January, 20th, 1970). In 1970, the Vernas associated with Pierre Baltensperger, and hosted the following exhibitions: Lucio Fontana and Paul Wunderlich (January 30th – March 3rd); Marcello Morandini (March 6th – April 7th); 6 West Coast Artists – Roland Werro (April 10th – May 16th); Pioniere der konstruktiven Kunst (May 24th – June 30th); Theo Dannecker (July 3rd – August 31st); Ruppert Geiger (September 4th – October 9th). After the collaboration with Baltensperger, Galerie Annemarie Verna organized a group show of Antonio Calderara, Raimund Girke, Raimon Jochims, Hezin Gappmayr, Enore Zaffiri and Wezel (October 13th – November 11th) and a solo show of the Belgian Jef Verheyen (November 28th – January 19th).

⁶⁸² The 1971 calendar included: *Franz Gertsch: Vier Porträts* (January 23rd – February 26th); *Richter Polke Palermo* (March 5th – April 27th); *Antonio Calderara* (April 30th – May 31st); *Five o'clock tea: the Roaring Twenties* (June 12th – September 11th: featuring a manifesto by Fortunato Depero for the dancer Mary Wigman); *Vontobel '71 Collection* (September 14th – 21st); *Bram Bogart* (September 24th – October 26th); *Fred Sandback* (November 4th – December 8th); *Piero Manzoni. Italienische Avantgarde* (December 10th – January 19th). The Richter Polke Palermo show included some two drawings by Richter (*Meran* and *Mann mit Geweih*) that had been touring in 1970 at the important *Zeichnungen* exhibition in Leverkusen, Hamburg, Munich and Aachen, see LEVERKUSEN 1970.

⁶⁸³ See *Domus*, 506 (January 1972): 46-47. In 1971, multiple shows celebrated Manzoni in Rome (at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, with a catalogue curated by Celant), Crema and Ferrara.

In 1972, the Vernas started to give special attention to drawing, collecting works on paper by American and European artists in exhibitions that echoed earlier experiences in the German worlds. *Zeichnungen 2* (but a previous chapter of this series is not documented thus far) included works on paper by Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Bob Ryman, Fred Sandback, Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke and Palermo, and Lucio Fontana. It opened at the same time as a Carl Andre solo show, possibly occupying a parallel space or a wall of the gallery dedicated to works on paper.⁶⁸⁴ Alongside a second group show of *Zeichnungen Amerikanischer Künstler* in the summer, works on paper might have been included in a double show comparing Raimund Girke and Hanne Darboven, as well as the work of Robert Ryman, Jan Schoonhoven and Urs Knoblauch, who exhibited at the Galleria Diagramma in Milan in 1973. As a consequence of *documenta V*, Italian artists increasingly participated in the programme, which passed from a single presence in 1972 (Paolo Icaro, who lived in the United States at the time) to a sequence of shows dedicated to Griffa, Agnetti, Gastini and Paolini in 1973. From that year on, the Galerie Annemarie Verna has been the principal venue for Italian contemporary art in Switzerland.

To explain the gallery's preferences for these artists, one can refer to a specific area of the Italian debate that animated the art scenes in Milan and above all Turin, where the Vernas used to travel frequently. Their taste and the debate coagulated and found a first clear expression in an issue of *DATA*, the major art journal of the time, published in the summer of 1973. The critical orientation indicated on that occasion raised the question of the materiality of process art as a consequence of the conceptualist turn that occurred in the late 1960s. The editor and gallerist Daniela Palazzoli opened the issue with a review of a contemporary American painting show organised by Douglas Crimp and Celant in Milan,⁶⁸⁵ denying that "the phenomenon of the nuova pittura [stands] as a process that substitutes the conceptual discourse":

"In this sense, the painting constitutes the limit, but also the strength of one's confrontation with everyday doing, in the clash with the physicality of one's material which is not experienced as material to be structured but as a critical availability of the elements of the discipline to be constitutive of one's own critical issues. The dogmatic attitude of the foundation of the project is replaced by the processual one of a continuous creation of meaning that is expressed in the daily quality of acting".⁶⁸⁶

⁶⁸⁴ This (quite obvious) articulation of the shows featured in Fred Sandback's 1971 installation too, as documented by room views in the gallery archive.

⁶⁸⁵ *Arte come arte* opened in April 1973 at Centro Comunitario di Brera in Milan, and was organised in collaboration with the Bykert Gallery in New York. Artists included were Ralph Humphrey, Jo Baer, Barnett Newman, Robert Ryman, Robert Mangold, Agnes Martin, Frank Stella, Richard Tuttle, Dorothea Rockburne, Ad Reinhardt, David Novros, Ellsworth Kelly, Brice Marden.

⁶⁸⁶ PALAZZOLI 1973: 20.

In the selection of articles about Italian and international artists that follow, two contributions stand out as symptomatic of an attention to “processual” and “continuous creation of meaning”. The first extended information in Italy about Dorothea Rockburne’s *Drawing Which Make Itself* appeared thanks to the translation of Bruce Boice’s review of Rockburne’s important show at Bykert gallery in London, but her work was being exhibited at Toselli in the same months.⁶⁸⁷ Boice reshaped the discussion of drawing as a medium, following closely the spatial installation of Rockburne’s drawings and their folding, considered as “un’operazione logica informale” rather than a phenomenological form of process art. “Si dice che il tratto a matita, in un disegno tradizionale, rende attiva la carta e lo spazio pittorico della carta che, metaforicamente, attende passivamente [...] Considerando la piega come una linea, la carta è la linea ed entrambe rendono attive e vengono attivate”. Then, a long group interview to Griffa, Claudio Verna and Carlo Battaglia as exponents of *pittura analitica* was titled, *Come e perché dipingono* (“How and why they paint”) and centered on new factual qualities of painting: Griffa argued that “today the system that is becoming clearer is one in which there is preeminence to the objective connotation of work, physical and specific”.⁶⁸⁸ Trini’s already mentioned retrospective essay on Paolini’s decade-long career inevitably indicated the relationship with *pittura analitica* already referenced at the beginning of this paragraph.

The first article also gravitated around new values of “making”, pointing out a possible material reading for one of the strictest positions of conceptualism in Italy, Vincenzo Agnetti, among the few acknowledged as a “Conceptual” artist. Agnetti’s *Tempo azione* (“Time Action”) articulated seven images of a work on paper, each inscribed by a typewritten, axiomatic sentence (**figure III.84**). The artist associated a progressive number of “work-instants” to corresponding “work-duration”, all immediately illustrated by simple gestures on sheets of paper (cuts, carving, holes). “Seven images visualise the perfect coincidence between the design of the work and its outcome, between what we read and what we see determined by the action of piercing – cutting – forgetting”:⁶⁸⁹ indeed, the artist curated the photographic visualisation of the work by using a grazing light illumination and the focus on paper grain and frayed edges. Paradoxically, though, *Tempo azione* staged above all a progressive dematerialisation, culminating in the last page where the “work forgotten by heart” appeared as the blank sheet of paper. Using Boice’s words about Rockburne, it was a matter of “placing thought within the object, and [...] a continuous use of paper as a container of thought”.⁶⁹⁰

⁶⁸⁷ The Bykert show opened on January 27th, 1973 and Boice’s review appeared on *Artforum* in April.

⁶⁸⁸ “[...] oggi il sistema che si va chiarendo è quello in cui vi è la preminenza alla connotazione oggettiva del lavoro, fisico e specifico” (BATTAGLIA, GRIFFA, VERNA 1973: 58).

⁶⁸⁹ TRINI 1973B. *Tempo azione* was the title of many other works, similar to the seven included in the series but sometimes without the typewritten text, see BALDACCI, GIACON 2015: 61-62, inv. 210, 467, 520; or ZUCCA ALESSANDRELLI 2018: 305, n. 17.

⁶⁹⁰ BOICE 1973: 37.

Tempo azione was the work installed at the Galerie Annemarie Verna in June 1973 (the seventh and last element that was drawn directly on the wall as a graphite rectangle) with the title *Supposition*. Agnetti's show followed one dedicated to analytic abstraction (Griffa, Morandini, Mangold, Calderara) and passed the baton to a show by Gastini. Paolini was the next name in the calendar; a year later, Boetti's show in October 1974 followed a crucial show of Richard Tuttle's tread and drawing pieces (May-June) and a second show by Icaro that included *Esercizi della mano destra sulla mano sinistra* ("Exercises of the Right Hand onto the Left Hand", **figure III.85**). This series of objects of paper, made by twisting and folding a single sheet onto itself, shows how also a sculptor could respond to Rockburne's *Drawing Which Make Itself*.⁶⁹¹

IV.2 Paolini, Boetti, two exhibitions

Nine works figured in Paolini's first show at the Galerie Verna, opened on October 19th, 1973 (**figure III.86**). In the somewhat narrow space of the gallery, works that had once been presented with an environmental meaning appeared rather domesticated and compliant with the marketing interests of the gallery. It is the case with the oldest works exhibited: *Elegia* on a plinth in the middle of the space and *Vedo*, re-executed on the wall, in a dialogue that put the theme of vision inaugurated since 1969 at the core of the exhibition concept. The other works were mostly on paper and hung on the walls with a more traditional appearance, subtly disproved as a closer look. On a short wall on the left of *Vedo*, Paolini's *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* appeared as a lithographic edition inscribed with the definition of the word "infinity" from the homonymous encyclopedia, but challenged the concept of multiple itself by its possible endless print run indicated by the symbol ∞ . In the entrance corridor, seven framed works on paper hung in line. All were conceived as the typical Paolini's passe-partout-like structure, in which a frame and a centered image ambiguously exchange functions. The first collage on the right is almost invisible from the room views and is still unidentified. Two groups of three works follow, but only one is now archived as a proper triptych: in *Sei paesaggi* ("Six landscapes", the only work made in 1973, possibly for the show – an homage to Switzerland mountains?), six postcard-like images are coupled so that one is the frame of the other. The three remaining pieces, although to be considered as single works, mark a coherent discourse evoking the works for the Sonnabend exhibition. In this sense, they are all made on millimeter paper and titled and dated on their back as *Studies for "Disegno geometrico"*, 1971,⁶⁹² although it can be argued that

⁶⁹¹ See CONTE 2016: 207-209.

⁶⁹² GPC-0201, GPC-0202 (actually to be referred to *Appunti per la descrizione di un quadro datato 1972*, and probably also dated 1972), GPC-0205. It can be hypothesized that for the artist, *Studio per "Disegno geometrico"* was a title

one piece addressed the series after its completion (then dating to 1972), in particular as a recapitulation or repertoire of the signs he developed for the Sonnabend suite: four black and white photographs forming the frame around the central white rectangle (the reference to *Disegno geometrico*) are recognisable as details from the brushy paint in “*Elegia*” in *una scena di duello*, from the writing-like scribbling in *Appunti per la descrizione di un’opera datata 1972* and the straight squaring lines in *Teoria delle apparenze*. In the middle of the triptych, Paolini positioned a collage addressing the measuring function of millimeter paper, that was also chosen for the gallery leaflet, probably for its minimal self-evidence (**figure III.87**). A photograph of a metric ruler at the centre is printed by halving the life-size, so that centimetres now match five millimetres. To the left, a study related to *Appunti per la descrizione di un quadro datato 1972* directly dialogued to the last work included in the show, *Ennesima (Appunti per la descrizione di sette tele datate 1973)* (“Umpteenth. Notes for the description of seven canvases dated 1973”). Seven primed canvases are covered with the usual simulation of writing in graphite, and installed with a progression of a progression of increasingly dense grids, first separating segments of sentences, then words, then letters and eventually forming just an orthogonal reticulate.⁶⁹³ The internal mechanism of *Ennesima*, which was exhibited as a seven-elements version on paper at the important international exhibition *Contemporanea* a few days after the Verna show, lies in testing its three components: writing, image and time. If writing is deprived of communication, “drawing is the extreme limit of its own legitimacy, the definition of the surface of the page. Time suggests the pattern and determines, via the succession of the two elements that reveal it, the enigmatic measure of the story: it subtracts further truthfulness from both the writing and the drawing, it regulates their co-penetration in a constantly variable identity, multipliable to infinity, but unalterable by fate”.⁶⁹⁴ The most recent work in the exhibition, *Ennesima* also resumed a shift in the meaning of the graphic element of the grid, from a mere image for the tautology of the surface, as in the collages of the sixties, to the visualisation of an overarching process, extensible and dynamic albeit self-closed within the series.

In its overall layout, Paolini’s first exhibition at Galerie Verna belongs to a specific typology recurrent from early 1973. At the same time, he installed the series *Idem*, that occupied the entire gallery with a single comprehensive work; he also conceived more traditional shows, that typically collected earlier and recent works on paper. As an example of this second modality, the Verna show can be put in relation to another at Galleria Françoise Lambert in Milan, that included single collages from 1968 on and important series on paper, such as *Ennesima (appunti per la descrizione di tre disegni datati*

addressing the phase of work, study and verification around the Sonnabend show, preliminary and subsequent to the execution of the canvases.

⁶⁹³ GPO-0255.

⁶⁹⁴ Giulio Paolini in MILAN 1979: 107.

1972) (“Umpteenth. Notes for the description of three drawings dated 1973”) *Il vero* and *Les promenades d’Euclide*. The Lambert show and *Idem II* at Galleria Toselli inaugurated the same day;⁶⁹⁵ few months later, an analogous coordination took place in Rome, where *La Doublure* occupied all the rooms at the Galleria L’Attico while and the re-exhibition of *Apollo e Dafne*, together with “other graphic works”,⁶⁹⁶ took place at Galleria Sperone-Fischer. As if the artist meant to juxtapose his new conceptual “inventories” with anthological shows of actual past works, possibly as segments of the large retrospectives, he started to organise around the same period, in Milan, New York or Parma.⁶⁹⁷ Two years later, for his second show at Galerie Verna, Paolini installed *Idem IV*, the most sculptural version of the series, regularly covering the walls of the new space in Muhlengasse where the gallery moved in 1974. Two works on paper partly “interfered” with the totalising and decorative effect produced by the small metal elements in regular succession, and worked as an introduction to it in the sort of vestibule at the entrance of the gallery (**figure III.88**). As “studies” for other *Idem* works, they looked consistent with the exhibition concept, although they may have indicated (more evidently than in the spatial installation) a possible, ongoing dialogue with Boetti. The side-by-side combination of rectangles in *Study for “Idem (II)”* echoed a compositional device typical in Boetti’s practice at least from the series of *Bollini* in the late sixties,⁶⁹⁸ and such dialogue might explain better the exceptional colourful appearance of the fluorescent paint (possibly shining in the shaded vestibule) as well as of the tempera paint in the first version of *Idem*. The second work, *Study for “Idem (III)”* overtly presents a Boettian guise in the random composition of the geometrical silhouettes (mostly rectangles, but also triangles and circles – another image of his Paolini’s past works) and in the patient graphite hatching that fills the millimeter paper.

Both times he was offered an exhibition at Galerie Verna, in 1974 and 1977, Boetti sent single works that occupied all the walls of the room: the 11 elements of *I sei sensi* (**figure III.89**) only a month before an almost identical exemplar was sent to the MoMA,⁶⁹⁹ or the 58 framed elements of an untitled mail work, one of a series that juxtaposed the stamped envelopes and numerous 30 x 24 cm drawings as respective contents. Despite its dimension and complexity, the latter was sold through

⁶⁹⁵ The two shows were reviewed together on Artitudes: “L’exposition de Françoise Lambert es tune rétrospectice de quelque dessins et oeuvres graphiques créés par l’artiste depuis 1964. La plupart de ces pieces sont des travaux sur l’image elle-même, sa transformation possible et ses diverses possibilités de lecture. Ce sont donc, d’une certaine maniPre comme chez Toselli, des pièces essentiellement silencieuses et qui ne laissent pénétrer que lentement” (VENTURI 1973).

⁶⁹⁶ See the invitation card for the show.

⁶⁹⁷ See MILANO 1973; PARMA 1976 and the exhibition *Projects: Giulio Paolini*.

⁶⁹⁸ On this series dating to the late sixties, see GUZZETTI 2019: 102-106.

⁶⁹⁹ According to the Galerie Annemarie Verna Archive, and consequently to the Alighiero Boetti Archive and general catalogue, *I sei sensi* (AMMANN 2012 II: n. 577) was exhibited in 1977 as the second solo show of the artist in Zurich. Nevertheless, the undated photographs of the installation in the gallery correspond to the one published on *Kunstmagazin*, winter 1974: 105 (**figure III.91**) within a 1974 reportage on Swiss exhibitions that included Boetti’s show at Annemarie Verna. It could be a photo of an earlier hypothesis for the show, but the problem remains unsolvable. I am thankful to Arianna Mercanti (Archivio Alighiero Boetti) and Laura Mahlstein (Annemarie Verna Galerie) for their sharing of information and documents about Boetti’s exhibitions.

the gallery to the lawyer Edgar H. Brunner from Gümligen (Bern), a testimony of Boetti's fortune in Switzerland and the promotion exercise by Jean Christophe Ammann as director of the Luzern Kunsthalle.⁷⁰⁰ In this case, the sequence of envelopes and drawings is divided into four parts, differentiated by the colours of the stamps as well as the themes or techniques of the drawings. Interestingly, the Verna exhibition did not present the progressive order that is now attributed to the groups and adapted them to the plan of the gallery (**figure III.90**). All the four groups of envelopes present not the usual permutation of coloured stamps but the compositional motif called "autodispersi" ("to self-arrange"): in grids of 4, 9, 16 or 25 stamps, one stamp of a different colour occupies the position that corresponds to the envelope's own position within the largest grid of envelopes. This motif originated from earlier mail works⁷⁰¹ and was frequently repeated by Boetti, for example, in the Verna first exhibition's gallery leaflet (a grid in which each square contains a dot, the position of which corresponds to that of the containing square in respect to the entire grid, **figure III.91**) as well as in *Insicuro noncurante*. As a compositional motif, *autodispersi* has the fascinating appearance of abolishing compositional arbitrariness, staging a sort of necessary doubling effect of grid and stamps (or graph paper squares).⁷⁰²

Autodispersi also appeared as one of the four drawings of the first group, all dedicated to geometrical images of a sort of personal topology, all realised by hand with ink pen. *Pari e dispari* ("Even and odd") is a four-part analysis of the image of the centre as the meeting point of two, three or four orthogonal lines (**figure III.92**). The drawing is rooted in Boetti's approach to graph paper,⁷⁰³ and it developed in 1976 as a figurative image, *Nè testa nè coda* ("Neither head nor tail"), in which the bottom left line crossing structure is translated in a horizontal needle penetrating both its extremities through two vertical surfaces. Two other drawings of the first group relate to addiction and

⁷⁰⁰ The present title, *Lavoro postale (2x2, 3x3, 4x4, 5x5)* (see AMMANN 2012 II: 169, n. 653) was not listed when the untitled work was loaned to the Kunsthalle Basel in 1978, see BASEL 1978: n. n. p., where the work is photographed in an unidentified installation. On that occasion, Ammann wrote to Edgar H. Brunner and his wife to ask the work, saying that "the work in your collection has been firmly planned for the exhibition by Boetti and me already in December in Rome" (Jean-Christophe Ammann, January 25th, 1978, letter to Edgar Brunner, Basel, Kunsthalle Archiv). Brunner replied positively adding that "now and again my wife and I have visited and extremely appreciated your exhibitions in Luzern" (Edgar H. Brunner, January 27th, 1978, letter to Jean-Christoph Ammann, Basel, Kunsthalle Archiv). In the Basel catalogue, the work is apparently illustrated by a room view of an exhibition which is not included in its archived exhibit history.

⁷⁰¹ Its earliest form might be the so-called "quadratura del dieci" ("squaring of 10", see AMMANN 2012 II: 73-74, n. 439-440), dating to 1972, in which the tenth stamp is positioned in respect to a grid of nine stamps according to the respective four envelopes positions. In another 1973 mail work, 13 drawings contained in envelopes represent an *Autodispersi* grid (see *ibid*: 127, n. 557), which also appears on a single sheet (*ibid*: 123, n. 550). More numerous drawings titled, *Autodispersi*, date to 1974 and represent more complex images than the grid (see *ibid*: 150-152, nn. 602-614). One was also illustrated in the Luzern catalogue from 1974, see **figure III.54**.

⁷⁰² It is worth noticing that the grid principle of *Autodispersi* had already been used in Italian conceptualism and some precedents come from Turinese artists close to Boetti: for instance, the same compositional motif figures in Paolini's *Relief planétaire (IKB)* that was exhibited in Venice in 1969 (GPO-0167) or in Giuseppe Penone's *Svolgere la propria pelle della mano destra*, a monumental series consisting of grids of 146 or 238 photographs (one exemplar is now held in the collection of Magazzino Italian Art).

⁷⁰³ An exemplar of a two-elements *Pari e dispari* on graph paper is illustrated in Munich 1975: 10-11.

subtraction, as indicated by a self-explaining title, *La metà e il doppio e l'unità mancante* (“The half, the double and their missing unity”) and might help in interpreting the third, untitled drawing of the group as the image of a full shape containing an empty one. The second group of nine drawings carried a comprehensive title, *nove muratti ambascador multifilter b.muratti sons & c° London New York*, that refers to a popular brand of cigarettes, of which the package box was 9 cm long and was retraced on each sheet as a rectangle filled with the *Pack* motif, the randomly organised simulation of cracking that Boetti had conceived since 1967.⁷⁰⁴ Another principle of variation in a constant scheme appears to be the principle of the third group of drawings too, dedicated to the *Sistema decimale* series. On 16 sheets, a graphed grid is stamped and 24 little squares are filled with graphite pencil. The freedom of the disposition animates the vast sequence, and it is actually underlined by a typewritten title that is freely associated to each drawing. Only a few titles touch on themes from Boetti’s work, like *Afghanistan*, *Francobollo* (“Postage stamp”), *Gemellaggio* (“Twinning”) or *Gesticolare* (“To gesticulate”), and sometimes the assignation seems to follow a formal assonance with the compositions of the squares in the grid.⁷⁰⁵

The last group is a quite monumental *accrochage* of 25 sheets that might have appeared blank at first sight (see **figure III.90**). With a closer look, each paper reveals one image, evidently retraced from newspapers, probably obtained by pressing the pencil point through the paper source (like in a carbon paper process) obtaining extremely light grooves instead of lines. Half of the images are taken from *Il Corriere della Sera* and from a time span from December 21st, 1973 to February 19th, 1974, probably corresponding to the execution period. Boetti, probably helped by collaborators in browsing vast printed materials, returned to newspaper iconographies for the first time after his selection of maps for *Territori occupati*. This time, the artist seems to passively welcome the thematic heterogeneity of the visual contents of daily information, but also its standards, such as the subject range (crime news, sports and politics) and above all the constant human presence:⁷⁰⁶ in fact, the 25 sheets form a portrait gallery, in which singularity and iconic recognisability (from popular athletes like the skier Gustavo Thoeni, to international feminist activists and current Italian and international

⁷⁰⁴ See note 125.

⁷⁰⁵ For instance, *Gemellaggio* corresponds to two parallel lines.

⁷⁰⁶ The 12 images that can be identified are illustrations of the following people in the dates indicated: Haile Selassie I, last Emperor of Ethiopia, between Mariano Rumor and Giovanni Leone, respectively Italian Prime Minister and President (December 23rd, 1973); the so-called “three Marias” from Lisbon, namely Maria Isable Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta and Maria Velho da Costa, leaders of the Portuguese Feminist movement, who in 1973 were famously processed for the publication of *Nuovas Cartas Portuguesas* (February 7th, 1974); a murderer and his 18 year-old girlfriend from Treviso (December 21st, 1973); the taxists’ strike in Rome (February 18th, 1974); the footballer Gigi Riva (December 24th, 1973); Torcuato Fernández-Miranda Hevia, acting Prime Minister of Spain after the murder of Luis Carrero Blanco, who was killed by the Basque separatist group ETA (December 21st, 1973); the boxer Ugo di Pietro (December 23rd, 1973); Angelo Mangano, policeman and quaestor who investigated many mafia gangsters and suffered an attack in 1973 (February 14th, 1974); the skier Gustavo Thoeni (February 6th, 1974); the boxer Jack Dempsey and his friend, former boxer and judge John Sirica, who was famous for his determining role in the Watergate scandal (February 4th, 1974); a minor boy exploited in artichoke cultivation in Apulia (February 11th, 1974).

politicians, **figures 93-96**) merge with the ephemeral visibility of victims and criminals, impossible to identify through the almost impalpable graphic reduction.

In the 1974 work, Boetti seemed to be interested in the cynical randomness of the endless visual repertoire of newspaper illustration as a system, an attitude of detachment paralleled by the presentation of the drawings as contents of mail enveloped meant to circulate as a form of information. Three years later, in the same months of his second show at Verna's, Boetti presented a work, *Gary Gilmore*, where he narrowed his selection to manipulate the thematic presence of violent death in daily information (**figure III.97**). Gilmore, convicted for multiple murder, got major publicity in late 1976, when he volunteered for the death penalty after its reintroduction due to the 1976 Gregg v. Georgia decision, being the first American after a decade to be executed by firing squad. Boetti, who was the same age as Gilmore,⁷⁰⁷ was fascinated by the representation of the criminal through the media, and responded to the most voyeuristic, almost morbid, articles such as the report publishing the photographs taken by journalist Lawrence Schiller and his last telephone interview, appeared on the weekly journal *Oggi*.⁷⁰⁸ Boetti's drawing is made of two large elements. On the first sheet, he transcribed with his left hand the entire interview, including Schiller's questions, followed by the description of the execution by some witnesses. Repeating the layout of the publication (**figure III.98**), he juxtaposed the retracings of Gilmore's informal last portraits alongside the vast body of text. In the second element, folded into 18 parts, he retraced 18 figures of one or more dead bodies taken from chronicles of terrorist attacks or murders. The time consumption that was observed by Corinna Ferrari in the process of retracing here is highlighted by the long, exhausting transcription with left hand ("a gesture of mechanical self-wear") of the interview, that is rich in paradoxical observations about spectacle and death. The images of dead bodies, from the Piazza della Loggia bombing in Brescia in 1974 to Pier Paolo Pasolini's assassination in 1975, emerged dramatically from the stream of news both by multiplication and visual immobility. One of most recent sources, a picture of the two policemen killed on order of the famous bandit Renato Vallanzasca on February 6th, 1977, reveals that drawing in *Gary Gilmore* could recall the function of another tracing, the chalk outline in crime scenes, in that it fixated in linear images the dishevelled poses of the corpses (**figure III.98**).

Gary Gilmore was at the centre of one of the most lucid texts about drawing of the late seventies, published by Mario Diacono in the leaflet of a 1978 Boetti's show in his own new gallery in Bologna.

⁷⁰⁷ In other works, Boetti wrote (with the left hand) observations about the few days between their respective births, see AMMANN 2012 II: 314, n. 1028.

⁷⁰⁸ Titled *L'intervista con la morte*, the article translated the interview by Lawrence Schiller and Barry Farrell and was published on February 19th 1977. The date of the article (Boetti's source) disproves the presence of Gary Gilmore in the artist's show at Marlborough Gallery, that inaugurated on February 16th, 1977, as registered in Archivio Alighiero Boetti.

Diacono went back to Sol LeWitt's *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art* in order to trace the consequence of the separation between idea and execution within Boetti's practice of delegation, that included his resort to the left hand. "To Sol LeWitt's sentence «the idea becomes a machine that makes the art», Boetti adds and corrects «Writing with the left hand is drawing». The whole sentence according to Boetti should then be (and it is in his work practice): "Making by the left hand is the machine that from the idea makes the art".⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰⁹ DIACONO 1978.

III Plates

Chapter 4 *Drawing as Transparency: exhibitions and practices*

0 “*Psicanalese*”

A turning point in the history of drawing of the seventies occurred at the half point of the decade, when major international exhibitions took place and relaunched this medium as a critical subject in the Western art system. Economic macrophenomena, like the ongoing energy crisis or the first recession in Italy since the Second World War, in 1975, caused a certain stasis and a general cautiousness in the art market, resulting in moderate investments which privileged less experimental, non-expensive and durable artworks. Drawings and above all graphics were already occupying a specific area of commercial circulation, alluring a range of buyers interested in the big names but without the greatest capital; in part, they were materially privileged, not least because their simple, often free transportation allowed easier trade and travel to early international fairs such as Art Basel. A substrate and diffused context of market and minor exhibitions in private galleries prepared this trend and created the conditions for drawing to emerge once again as an outstanding problem in the debate on contemporary art. The Italian context is no exception, as the early 1976 exhibition *Drawing/Transparence* stands out among a series of other initiatives in private galleries. At the same time, also because it was the only one accompanied by a proper catalogue, introduced by Achille Bonito Oliva, it overshadowed some parallel episodes, less ambitious but as eloquent in respect to the modalities, the market conditions and critical discourse of such renovated interest. In this chapter, two other shows that took place in Milan in 1976 will be analysed as terms of comparison: *Revisione I* at Galleria dell’Ariete provides another example of a large international group show where the youngest artists and the local interest negotiate room within the already established American canon; a more selective exhibition, *La cosa disegmata* at Studio Marconi, was accompanied by an important critical text by Tommaso Trini.

As will be exemplified by Bonito Oliva’s and Trini’s 1976 texts on drawing, the critical background of the mid-seventies was characterised by a pervasive diffusion of psychoanalytic discourses, vocabulary, concepts more or less distorted and adapted to art criticism – a sort of “psicanalese”, to quote a journalistic term invented in those years.⁷¹⁰ A comprehensive study on the relationships between the spreading of psychoanalysis and coeval art criticism is still missing and even its rapid sketch would require far more space than this introduction. However, the historical development of this trend was resumed in a drawing by the Milanese painter and cartoonist Tullio Pericoli (**figure IV.1**). As his contribution to an anniversary volume of the Studio Marconi, meant to outline the

⁷¹⁰ MEDAIL 1978.

cultural context at large in Italy from 1965 to 1976, it illustrates a timeline starting from “Freud’s expanding shadow” and marked by various stages: first, the fundamental Italian editions of Melanie Klein (*Contributo allo studio degli stati maniaco-depressivi*), Carl Gustav Jung (*L’uomo e I suoi simboli*), Wilhelm Reich (*Teoria dell’orgasmo e altri scritti*, 1961), Jacques Lacan (*Écrits*, 1974), Ronald D. Laing (*The Divided Self*, 1969). Then, various sociological episodes of diffusion and exchange, like the “anticongresso di psicanalisi” organised in Rome in 1969, the “arrival of Lacan among Italian literates and professors”, or the so-called “kleiniani pendolari” who went to London weekly to import Kleinian analysis; but also the foundation of the FUORI, the first Italia homosexual movement. Above all, an impressive list of new journals: *Il corpo* (1965-68), *L’erba voglio* (1971-), *Sic* (1974-), *Vel*, *Piccolo Hans*, *Aut Aut*, *Utopia* (1971-73), *A/traverso*. The expression “macchine desideranti” from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s *L’Anti-Oedipe* (translated in Italian in 1975) concludes the path – little behind a quick note about the “cultural industry”: “la psicanalisi tira come il marxismo” (“Psychoanalysis goes as strong as Marxism”).

Many of these initiatives directly involved art historians and critics, typically within conferences and volumes dedicated to “art and psychoanalysis”.⁷¹¹ A common approach to this issue was the critical use of psychoanalytic categories and terms in order to respond, largely, to the new contents of performance art and body art, framing the public emotional reaction as sense of guilt, unconscious impulses, “defense against depressive anxieties”⁷¹² etc. In other cases, the psychoanalytic discourse directly entered the materials of the youngest generation of artists, becoming a notable feature of Italian conceptualism. Above all, what the art “psicanalese” allowed artists was a new freedom in the manipulation of the works’ meaning and the beholder’s hermeneutic possibilities. Two contemporary and opposite examples might resume the question. Marco Bagnoli’s first exhibition to be hosted by a private gallery was presented as a complex single event involving two venues, the Galleria Tucci Russo in Turin and the Galleria Lucrezia De Domizio in Pescara; it was titled, *Dormiveglia, Agosto 75, due particolari contemporanei in due luoghi* (“Drowsiness, August 75, two details at the same time in two places”). Bagnoli, a former student in chemistry who was engaged in disparate theoretical interests,⁷¹³ attached to the entrance door in Turin a typed text that reported the description of a dream. It was drawn from Jung’s *A study in the process of individuation*:⁷¹⁴ deprived of any caption, the dream description had an effect of estrangement, introducing colourful and fantastic elements (an

⁷¹¹ See, for instance, the conference titled, *Dell’arte... I bordi*, organised by the journal *Spirali* in November 1978 and published the year later.

⁷¹² MANCIA 1976: 52.

⁷¹³ For a full profile of Bagnoli and his readings, see CELANT 2018: 46-52. For instance, the reference to the drowsiness was drawn “from the texts of the science philosopher Gaston Bachelard, who speaks of reverie experimented in drowsiness, the intermediate between sleep and wakefulness” (ibid: 54).

⁷¹⁴ See JUNG 1991 [1967]: 54.

animal with many horns eating other animals, a blue fog, four good gods) in an environment left intentionally mostly empty, disseminated of other unexplained and small presences (two drawings and a chessboard of 64 diapasons) lying on the floor. Obviously, the beholder was not thought as informed about Jung's interpretation of the dream, and the reference remained entangled in the overall intentional "non sense". In the artist's words, published in an inedited press release of the show, "it is a renunciation of need for a consciousness of language. It has no structure or procedure: it resonates in a metamorphic transition of state in which any point can be that of inversion where the proceeding becomes an inverted path".⁷¹⁵ Jung's publications were rich in illustrations, such as the famous mandalas, and direct visual source alimending the "psicanalese" of the art of the seventies too. Numerous studies on the psychological development of the child stressed this aspect of the practice of drawing, as well as for mental hospital patients. The most famous of such publications, Hans Prinzhorn's *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* was translated in English in 1972 and provided artists of the time with extensive possibilities for figurative drawing, fascinating for their decorative insistence, minute execution, systematic non-sense associations and spatial incongruities as indicators of mental disorders (**figure IV.4**). When this images became more or less direct visual sources for artist (like in the case of the "evil animals" in Mimmo Paladino's early figurative drawings of the Borgesian cycle *Il giardino dei sentieri che si biforcano*, "The garden of the forking paths", 1976-1977, **figure IV.5**),⁷¹⁶ it was not only about unexpected iconographies and childish style: a fascination with the

⁷¹⁵ Here is a complete transcription of the text: "The union of two points does not give the direction of the line. The points cannot be ordered: just as the union may appear to be affection of one for the other, so after the realization of the line, the origin appears as a point of view. Without privileging conditioned experience (ideology while awake and the personal in sleep) their interaction occurs in the induced field along the trajectory of nonsense. It is a renunciation of the necessity of language consciousness. It has no structure or procedure: it resonates in a metamorphic transition of state in which any one point can be the point of reversal where the proceeding becomes an inverted path. The organization of several points in a line does not ground a set of functional relations except in its logo of representation: its path taken as a reference. Outside this place, the progressive construction of the line continually modifies the coordinates of each previous origin; especially if the point is not taken as an isolated particle on which the gravitation of the system is established. Each external reference cancels, each point gravitates on the other, and the line is but the detection of the manifold curvature of the field. Depth can threaten the surface when you release the material property that the point has of negating uniformity" ("L'unione di due punti non dà il verso della linea. I punti non possono essere ordinati: come l'unione può apparire affezione dell'uno per l'altro, così dopo la realizzazione del tratto, l'origine appare come punto di vista. Senza privilegiare l'esperienza condizionata (l'ideologia da svegli e il personale nel sonno) la loro interazione avviene nel campo indotto lungo la traiettoria del non senso. È una rinuncia alla necessità di una coscienza del linguaggio. Non ha struttura né procedimento: risuona in un metamorfico passaggio di stato in cui un punto qualsiasi può essere quello di inversione dove il procedere diviene percorso rovesciato. L'organizzazione di più punti in una linea non ne fonda un insieme di rapporti funzionali se non nel suo logo di rappresentazione: il suo tracciato preso come riferimento. Fuori da questo luogo la progressiva costruzione del tratto modifica continuamente le coordinate di ogni precedente origine; soprattutto se il punto non è preso come una particella isolata sulla quale si stabilisce la gravitazione del sistema. Ogni riferimento esterno si annulla, ogni punto gravita sull'altro e la linea non è che la rilevazione della curvatura molteplice del campo. La profondità può minacciare la superficie quando si liberi la proprietà materiale che ha il punto di negare l'uniformità", Marco Bagnoli, "Dormiveglia, Agosto 75 – due particolari in due luoghi. La traversata marittima notturna – 13 dicembre, Paolo Marinucci & Tucci Russo, Torino", December 11th, 1975, exhibition text, Dossier Marco Bagnoli, BDP 186, Fonds Biennale de Paris, Archives de la Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Paris).

⁷¹⁶ See CELANT 2017: 22.

fragmentation of the self, schizophrenia, irrationality was the impulse to “perform” obscurity, mental disorders and so on.

This ambiguous function of psychoanalysis as a channel for obscurity and/or meaning was subtly addressed by Luciano Fabro in a “genial exhibition” held in Rome in March 1976. In the small room of the Galleria Il Cortile (4 squared meters), he hung large paper sheets at the four corners, folding them at the half. The sheets presented four Rorschach spots, each made with a different ink and carrying a smaller page of typed text (**figure IV.3**). One of the texts explained the choice of the device of the psychologic test:

“I was always repelled by seeing the reader not able to respond with the same means to the provocations made by artists [...]. But when the artist’s work is dictated by a convention, a common taste, a fashion that coincides with the reader, the answer is no longer yielding but rather a consequence. Double face is the author’s attempt, if certainly not original, to place at least two successful situations at the limit of his distraction”.⁷¹⁷

The Rorschach inkblots are indeed a convention for free attribution of meaning, paradoxically chosen by Fabro in order to democratically equate the information between the artist and the beholder – “Art is not a trick”, as the artist commented, also sounded like a response to operations of intentional obscurity so common in the new generations.

I *Two drawing exhibitions in Milan: Revisione 1 and La cosa disegnata*

As the first stage of an exhibition series titled as a recapitulation of the two-decades long activity of the Milanese Galleria dell’Ariete,⁷¹⁸ *Revisione 1 Lavori su carta* (“Revision 1 Works on paper”) collected 56 artists, each represented by one or more drawings. The most numerous group show for the gallerist Beatrice Monti insofar, she had planned it at least from the spring of 1975, in a moment of recovery from a harsh economic stall since 1974; and profited of her friendly collaboration with Leo Castelli and Paula Cooper, alimented also on the occasion of Art Basel that year.⁷¹⁹ Moreover,

⁷¹⁷ FABRO 1978: 118. Other inkblots were illustrated with the title, *Double face* ibid: 119-127, and in BERGAMO 2013: 112-119.

⁷¹⁸ *Revisione 2 Dipinti* (March 26th – April 8th, 1976) included Artschwager, Burri, Castellani, Dorazio, Fontana, Francis, Manzoni, Marden, Olitski, Reinhardt, Ryman, Smith, Parmeggiani, Tapies, Tobey, Twombly. *Revisione 3 Sculpture* (June 10th – 24th, 1976) presented works by Cascella, Consagra, Pomodoro, Melotti, Fontana.

⁷¹⁹ “Business, very much stuck for months, now shows some signs of recovery. As you say, we of old Europe, 'on en a vu des verts' [et des pas mûres, that is ‘to have seen shocking things’] and we do not lose heart” (Beatrice Monti, letter to Leo Castelli, February 1st, 1975, Galleria dell’Ariete Records, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles). On the occasion of Art Basel, in May 1975, Beatrice Monti represented Alan Shield (who already exhibited at Paula Cooper’s) and “sold a few aquarels [sic] to... Italians” (Beatrice Monti to Paula Cooper, June 28th, 1975, Galleria dell’Ariete Records, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles). Monti also travelled to New York to collect drawings from Leo Castelli and others were

in late January 1975, Galleria dell’Ariete had hosted a show of “lavori con carta” (“works with paper”) by Dorothea Rockburne, Richard J. Francisco (both absent in *Revisione I*) and Joel Fisher, an artist who had been first introduced to the Italian public by Germano Celant on *Domus*.⁷²⁰

According to the leaflet, *Revisione I* inaugurated on November 12th, 1975, but from early December it was probably rearranged to share the space with two other exhibitions through February 1976.⁷²¹ This might explain why the photographic documentation of the show attests at least two different displays of the same drawings in the gallery rooms. Such room views support the analysis of the exhibition, although only a small part of the artworks is documented and a complete checklist of the show is still missing.

Overall, the retrospective time span 1955-1975 explains the rather disparate range of international artists, from the Abstract Expressionists to the conceptual artists. However, the display did not follow a chronological sequence and largely depended on the formats of the drawings and their possible formal analogies and comparisons. A distinct starting point, though, is recognisable in the first two works the public would have met entering in the gallery, that is, Jasper Johns’ *Ale Cans II*⁷²² and Robert Rauschenberg’s *Untitled* from 1975 (**figure IV.6**).⁷²³ Such an already classic duo could evoke

sent directly from Basel. Consignment memo from Castelli documents the sending of the works by Johns, Rauschenberg, Oldenburg (*Trays of Cookies*, 1973, pastel and crayon) Chamberlain (*Untitled*, 1973, two sheets) Artschwager, Morris, Dibbets, Judd, Warhol, Flavin (*Untitled (To Barnett Newmann)*, three, 1971), Ruscha (the pastels *Thinking the Same* and *Ruining Everything*, 1974), Darboven and Stella (*Fez II*, 1963). By July 1975, “the drawings show will be end of October” and Beatrice Monti thanked Paula Cooper “for whatever you will bring” to Lindo, Greece, where the two friends used to spend the summer holidays in August (Beatrice Monti, letter to Paula Cooper, July 23rd, 1975, Galleria dell’Ariete Records, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles).

⁷²⁰ The show opened on January 29th, 1975, and has no catalogue, but the invitation card is listed in the archival records of Galleria La Tartaruga Archive. Of the three artists, only Rockburne had exhibited at Ariete’s before: a solo show of her works on paper is documented by some photographs and took probably place in late 1973 (as the exhibition is numbered 180 on the back of the same photograph, now in Galleria dell’Ariete Records, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles). An anonymous and undated photograph documents one work by Richard J. Francisco (1942), possibly included in the early 1975 show. Like Rockburne, Joel Fisher had participated to some drawing shows at Paula Cooper Gallery in New York: the gallery sent to Milan five works, titled *Six Doubles* (a set of individual pieces made as couples of handmade paper sheets), and a sixth work titled, *Layer Link*, composed by three elements. The *Six Doubles* arrived with indications about the installation (“They should be exhibited attached directly to the wall with two small nails at the tops of the sheets [...]. This is one entire set of works, but needn’t all be exhibited at once, especially if there is insufficient space to display them adequately. The artist asks you not to crowd the installation, but allow the works to create the atmosphere of the area in which they are hung”, Katrina Martin, letter to Beatrice Monti, January 29th, 1975, Galleria dell’Ariete Records, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles). At least two elements from Fisher’s *Six Doubles* were sold, one to Italian collector Ennio Brion, Milan.

⁷²¹ The catalogue of *Revisione I* informs about the opening in November, while the finissage must have dated accordingly to the next show (*Fotografia degli anni 20 e 30*, opened on December 11th, 1975). Nevertheless, a calendar entry published on *Corriere della Sera*, February 9th, 1976 indicates that two drawing exhibitions were currently on, namely *Revisione I* and a solo show of drawings by Ignazio Moncada di Paternò.

⁷²² See JASPER JOHNS 2018: 218, n. D239, where the Italian show is not included in the exhibition history. Beatrice Monti wrote in early 1975 to Castelli saying that she was “happy that Jasper had executed the drawing and that you remember my exhibition. I will come by the end of February to collect everything” (Beatrice Monti, letter to Leo Castelli, February 1st, 1975, Galleria dell’Ariete records, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles). *Ale Can II* was loaned with the date 1974 by the Leo Castelli Gallery (and then “brought back” to New York by Giuliana Soprani in 1977, see Leo Castelli, letter to Beatrice Monti, April 8th, 1977, Galleria dell’Ariete records, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles).

⁷²³ Robert Rauschenberg’s *Untitled (Computer Watch)*, 1975, fabric, collage, solvent transfer, silkscreen. I am thankful to Gina G. Guy and the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation for their help in the research about this work.

Beatrice Monti della Corte's pride to have held Rauschenberg's first Italian show, and her special business relation with Castelli, who had recently hosted drawing shows of James Rosenquist and Richard Artschwager.⁷²⁴ In a variant of the arrangement, the Rauschenberg was substituted by a 1951 *Concetto spaziale* by Lucio Fontana, an ink patch on absorbing paper.⁷²⁵

On a short wall on the left of the entrance, large, painterly drawings by two Abstract Expressionists, Robert Motherwell and Barnett Newman,⁷²⁶ were hung alongside a 1959-1960 *Linea* by Piero Manzoni⁷²⁷ (instead of the more predictable juxtaposition with the late-fifties, Italian abstractionists Piero Dorazio or Tancredi Parmeggiani, displayed elsewhere). Then, the sequence followed a disparate *accrochage* of post-minimalist artists: two exemplars from Sol LeWitt's *Incomplete Open Cube* series (probably meant to respond to a small, gridded *Achrome* on creased paper by Manzoni⁷²⁸ hanging on an opposite pillar), a large work by Hanne Darboven from 1972-73⁷²⁹ and Giovanni Anselmo's *Teoria dell'ombra*, a drawing derived from the work *La Mia Ombra Verso L'Infinito Della Cima Dello Stromboli Durante L'Alba Del 16 Agosto 1965* (**figure IV.7**). In a variant of the same wall, Pop and post-minimalism cohabited nonchalantly: Mario Merz's large spiral drawing in charcoal and putty and a snail glued at the center echoed one of two Robert Morris' projects, a *Double Spiral* from 1970⁷³⁰; Andy Warhol's 1973 *Mao*, also a graphite-only artwork, rhymed with the comic style of *A proposal for a Giant Balloon in the Form of Mickey Mouse – in Relation to an Ice Bag* by

⁷²⁴ On Rauschenberg's 1962 show, see MOTISI 2022. Jasper Johns was included in two group shows in 1963 and 1964. In the 1975 show, a large acrylic and watercolour drawing by James Rosenquist hung in the room introduced by Rauschenberg and Johns. Measuring 92 x 190 cm, it belongs to a vast series that was presented at Castelli's in New York just one month earlier. The exhibition *New Drawings by James Rosenquist* opened on September 27th, 1975 and gathered a group of same-format, strongly horizontal drawings, all divided into three elements (square, circle and triangle). In 1974, Rosenquist had used this scheme for the New York Telephone advertising campaign (to be found on the telephone book cover with the title "Hello, hello, hello"). The three shapes' source is a famous image of the universe by Buddhist Japanese monk Sengai from early XIX century. "Mr. Rosenquist's new work at the Castelli Gallery shows him drawing with undiminished zest on themes built up primarily from objects in daily use—the ladder, the nail, the paper clip. The images are for the most part disposed laterally three to each sheet, and Mr. Rosenquist now allows himself a freer, more brushy and less impersonal form of expression than was the case 10 years ago. These are not "drawings" in the Beaux Arts sense. There are passages of striped painting in which the colour sings out like trumpets at nightfall. There are sheets with disks of crumpled paper collaged on to them; another incorporates a child's view of a house, and a third looks back to cubist papier cone with a great slashing tornout piece of The Wall Street Journal stuck down the middle of it. In "Sun Clips", the coiled bands of colour to right and left recall Robert Delaunay, and the clips themselves are realised with a fat, slow-moving quality that once again has nothing to do with Pop art. The new work stands for an art in which the painter's hand is everywhere present" (RUSSELL 1975). In a consignment memo dated September 5th, 1975 (Leo Castelli to Beatrice Monti, Galleria dell'Ariete Records, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles), the Rosenquist's drawing is listed together with drawings by Richard Artschwager, whose show of drawings of domestic furniture had opened on March 15th, 1975 at Castelli's.

⁷²⁵ BARBERO 2013: 571 (II), n. 51 DSP 49, table LI.

⁷²⁶ Barnett Newman, *Untitled*, 1946, ink on paper, 60,3 x 44,8 cm, from the Marcia and Stanley Gumberg collection.

⁷²⁷ CELANT 2004, II: 481, n. 591, in which the exhibition history does not include this show.

⁷²⁸ See *ibid*: 435, n. 276.

⁷²⁹ Darboven's *Untitled* (1972-73, pencil on paper, 89.8 x 147 cm, private collection), made of 21 sheets framed in a single work, was included through Castelli and sold on that occasion.

⁷³⁰ Morris's *Double Spiral* (1970, graphite on paper, 56 x 78 cm, private collection. Leo Castelli loaned the two Ottawa Projects (see consignment memo, September 9th, 1975) as well as the 12 elements *Invitation Card Piece II* by Jan Dibbets, dated to 1973, which is not visible in the room views of the show.

Claes Oldenburg (**figure IV.6**).⁷³¹ Among five frames on the short wall formerly dedicated to the Abstract Expressionists, only Giuseppe Penone's *Impronte rilevate sulla matita durante l'esecuzione* ("Fingerprints Taken on the Pencil During Execution" – a further stress on the use of graphite?) is recognisable. A view of the internal room of the gallery shows 19 frames displayed in line, mostly dedicated to plans for sculptures (**figure IV.8**): the drawings by Donald Judd (bought by Giuseppe Panza di Biumo on that occasion),⁷³² Dan Flavin, Stephen Antonakos and Richard Smith (but also Luigi Parzini) established a certain homogeneity based not only on linear diagrams but also on richness of colours, which might explain the juxtaposition with an abstract gouache by Piero Dorazio. Overall, the status of drawing emerging from *Revisione I* depended on the market strategies that motivated the show: in many cases, works on paper constituted a minor equivalent to more expensive paintings, sculptures or installations that could not fit the economical context of the Italian gallery. Although there were some interesting exceptions to an interpretation of the medium as collateral and gregarious to the main production of the artists (Manzoni, Darboven, Penone or Anselmo, Rockburne or Fisher), the exclusion of some main protagonists of the medium at that time, for instance Paolini, who had exhibited at the Galleria dell'Ariete twice in 1966 and 1971, and Boetti, who was offered a show in 1977, seems to invalidate the hypothesis of an investigation on the actual function of the medium in more recent practices. Instead, an anthological take prevailed in Beatrice Monti's show, meant to offer the respective "work on paper" of sculptors and painters that had already exhibited in the gallery, and largely depended on her partners Paula Cooper and Leo Castelli's contributions: not only for the lent works, but also for the strategical example of the gallery programme: in fact, both galleries periodically organised "Group Drawing Shows" (not by coincidence around Christmas time, the end of the fiscal year in the US) with evident selling aims and repurposing the artists of the gallery. After all, it is natural for an exhibition of drawings by a private gallery to reflect partial predilections and field choices, which in some cases produced particularly solid interpretive lines too. Such is the case with the Studio Giorgio Marconi, who in 1976 celebrated a decade of lively activity in Milan and a distinct, coherent lineage of artists and interests.⁷³³ At the end of the same year, Marconi curated a drawing show titled *La cosa disegnata* ("The drawn thing") the catalogue of which was published as an issue of the gallery journal. The selection privileged artists that were already represented by Giorgio Marconi, whose commercial strategies had always valued works on paper to be bought in

⁷³¹ Warhol's drawing remained unsold and was given back to Castelli (as the indication "reso" indicates on the already mentioned consignment memo). Already in 1973, Liza Sherman, owner of the Croquis Gallery in New York, proposed to Beatrice Monti the purchase of the 1969, 30 x 25 cm large, "very lovely drawing" by Oldenburg, which came from Sidney Janis, together with two drawings by Tom Wesselmann (a "charcoal drawing of lips" and *Large Still Life Drawing*, 1968), see Liza Sherman, letter to Beatrice Monti, August 10th, 1973.

⁷³² Judd's *Untitled*, 1974, ink on paper, 58 x 74 cm, was given by Castelli.

⁷³³ On the activity of Studio Marconi see MILAN 2004 and STUDIO MARCONI 1976.

numerous groups and kept in the gallery storage, as he referred to the cases of Mario Schifano and Giulio Paolini in the sixties.⁷³⁴ More originally, the exhibition included sectors like illustration and architecture drawing, which were not usually exhibited together and alongside art at the time. Illustrators Saul Steinberg, Jean-Michel Folon, Tullio Pericoli, and architects like Massimo Scolari, Marcello Pietrantoni and Erich Demetz, shared a common vein of fantastic drawing, utopistic invention and irony, also distinguished by a specific range of techniques such as ink pen and watercolour. Other artists included documented the gallery's best represented tendencies, all dating to the sixties and sharing a Surrealism-related research, from Gianfranco Baruchello to Gastone Novelli and Valerio Adami, but also Christo and Gérard Titus-Carmel. According to the press, they were "all authors who engage exclusively in drawing, or who find in drawing the bearing structure of their work".⁷³⁵ Among the illustrations in the catalogue, an overt stress on self-referentiality of drawing itself (sometime expressed in playful terms) confirms the effort to construct an exhibition "about" drawing beyond a mere collection of works on paper. The journal cover illustrates Steinberg's *Calligraphie IV*, where a darting line seamlessly transforms into figures (a desk and a draftsman, **figure IV.9**) and flat abstract shapes; then, in the youngest painter invited, Piero Manai's *Matite*, enormous, Hyperrealist images of colourful sets of crayons play on the coincidence of the medium and the subject. The coincidence of writing and drawing was exemplified along the entire chronological span of the show, from Novelli to Baruchello, from Pericoli to Paolini and Steinberg himself, and perhaps even in the unedited comparison, based on heavy material quality (evident charcoal fingerprints or paper crumpling), between Beuys and Tapies. Christo (whose "package projects [...] are more beautiful than the real packages")⁷³⁶ and Titus-Carmel were already acknowledged for their exceptional technical skills (**figure IV.10**), while Adami had been celebrated as a draftsman in a show a year earlier at Marconi's. In fact, the November 1975 bulletin hosted essays by Hubert Damisch, Jacques Derrida and Pierre Gaudibert, who had met Adami in Paris; observations on the "newness" of drawing or the most general definitions were all meant to fit on Adami's essentially "Pop" technique and to address the relationship between colour and lines in his painting.⁷³⁷

Above all, the catalogue contains a long text by Tommaso Trini about the show. Composed in late 1976, Trini's essay inevitably responded to this critical context, although the idea and the title of the

⁷³⁴ Giorgio Marconi remembered "to purchase from Sonnabend, through Sperone, a stock of 25 large canvases and 50 works on paper by Schifano from the early sixties" (MILAN 2004: xviii); and as for Paolini, "in 1963, when Attilio Codognato left the Galleria Il Leone in Venice, I purchased from him about 20 sheets by Giulio Paolini and some painting of those years (ibid.: xx).

⁷³⁵ PERAZZI 1976.

⁷³⁶ Ibid.

⁷³⁷ Marconi also co-edited with the Galerie Maeght in Zurich the catalogue in which the original texts were published together. Adami's drawing for *La cosa disegnata* is preparatory for a painting exhibited in Zurich (*Narciso si fa tatuare*).

exhibition had been decided by Marconi himself, as the critic reports. The title quoted a recent show of another artist from the gallery, Emilio Tadini,⁷³⁸ but more importantly was a quote from Jacques Lacan's *La cosa freudiana* ("La chose freudienne") that was published in the first Italian anthology of the psychoanalyst in 1972. Trini adapted the Lacanian programme of "return to the discourse of truth"⁷³⁹ to an investigation of drawing through "its analysis and its truth", which directly attached to his own writings on Paolini; at the same time, though, the term *cosa* "also refers to the obscure, the formless, the unmentionable", addressing the sphere of psychoanalytic sexuality.

I.2 "*The necessity to learn and not to represent*": Trini on drawing

Appointed by Giorgio Marconi as a long-time contributor to the gallery, Tommaso Trini had rarely addressed drawing as a critical theme in those years. A relevant exception is his long essay introducing an exhibition catalogue on Titus-Carmel, edited by the Galleria Schwarz in 1973. On that occasion, Trini was supporting a drawing practice based not only on very traditional techniques (such as white crayon on coloured paper), but also on figuration. Titus-Carmel's drawings, etchings and multiples had already reached great notoriety in Italy through some solo shows and his participation in the French pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1972, where his work could not help rising accusations of academicism.⁷⁴⁰ Therefore, Trini set his observations under the idea of a "figurazione decodificata":

"[...] This figural approach practised in drawings requires a conceptual approach that the artist restricts to the exploration of the relations within the model and the copy, the true and the false, nature and culture. [...] Instead, one can in the drawing, a place absolutely inhomogeneous from the real, explore precisely the whole dialectic of the relationship between reality and imitation, in the sign of a *decoded figuration*, as it is at the same time verification of the functioning of the drawing itself, of the tool as well as of the forms".⁷⁴¹

In this sense, Titus-Carmel's "revolutionary drawing practice" should not have been misunderstood as merely mimetic, nor associated with Hyperrealism, but read in a deeply conceptualist key suggested by the artist's own words and statements: "drawing is thinking". Trini intentionally avoided any stylistic juxtaposition with other artists, even when a formula like "decoded representation"

⁷³⁸ See MILAN 1976A.

⁷³⁹ LACAN 1972: 185. See also Trini's thematization of "truth" in the analysis of recent works by Giulio Paolini in TRINI 1976A.

⁷⁴⁰ On that occasion, Cesare Vivaldi, who was a determining critic for the Pop season of the early sixties, defined the French artist as "a mediocre maker of projects more or less "poor" and "conceptual" translated into an academic drawing" (VIVALDI 1972: 146). "Ce Jim Dine de salon" was the epithet given by Pierre Restany (RESTANY 1970A: 90).

⁷⁴¹ TRINI 1973E: 10.

would have fit various drawing strategies poised between objectivity and conceptual analysis. For instance, subtle similarities could be observed between Titus-Carmel's *10 variations sur l'idée de deterioration* ("Ten variations on the idea of deterioration", exhibited at Galleria La Salita in 1971, **figure IV.11**) and Giovanni Anselmo's lithographic translations of his 1968 *Untitled (Struttura che mangia)* ("Structure that eats", **figure IV.12**) executed for the Galleria Multipli in 1971 and 1972: the strategical contrast in purely geometrical figures with detailed chiaroscuro.⁷⁴²

Trini's text about Titus-Carmel also introduced some of the themes reformulated three years later in *La cosa disegnata*, and many of the already common philosophical references (Deleuze, Lacan). In particular, the title *Détérioration* echoed a consumption of the blank surface ("the hyper-uranic space of the sheet of paper") by the drawing, a gesture of "mutilation of the support". Trini exalted the artist's statements reported in the catalogue: "Drawing is first and foremost an operation carried out on a twofold loss: the loss of white (loss of consciousness), and the loss of materiality (deviation)".⁷⁴³ The essay giving the title to *La cosa disegnata*, only mentions some of the artists invited and does not discuss any of the artworks illustrated, while it articulates a general but quite complex definition of drawing as a specific medium. Two general theses aliment the critic's discourse: on one hand, the great actuality of drawing was sociologically documented, by the mass culture and the spreading of industrial design, comics and even graffitis (all consequences of "the system of line"); on the other hand, Trini draws on a broad apparatus of anthropological and psychoanalytical readings to support a non-strictly artistic, universal definition of drawing.

"What is it if not, to begin with, a line that sets out from a sheet of paper in order to include in it all the possible (and impossible) ways of expressing itself and of communicating to all conscious and unconscious levels? This is the field we are concerned with, which extends from the dot to the schema of children's expression, to the scribble, the pensum and the soprapensum, to the dictation of utopia, and, further up, to the configuration of symbols. And finally, to the labyrinth that draws the drawing".⁷⁴⁴

The figure of the labyrinth functions as a correlative of drawing ("the labyrinth is the total structure of drawing, and the function of drawing is labyrinthine"), as a device able to "do and undo" itself ("line and surface are armed with this principle of retroaction and destruction"). Drawing is both the obscure labyrinth of the Minotaur (an image of repressed sexual desire) and Ariadne's thread, that cancels it by retracing its line. Saul Steinberg, whose artist book *Labyrinth* was published in 1960, exemplified this conception (**figure IV.9**):

⁷⁴² See NICE 1996: 10. Four original and different drawings from the same series of the silkscreen are illustrated in BONITO OLIVA 1991: 24-25.

⁷⁴³ TITUS-CARMEL 1973.

⁷⁴⁴ TRINI 1976B: 3.

“One should look at the continuous line in the work of Saul Steinberg, that pure draughtsman, to understand in what way drawing is plastic; not in the “taking away and adding” of sculpture, or in the “taking away” only, of engraving, but in its faculty to deny what it receives, to receive all the draughtsman’s movements – from the psyche to the mind by hand – and then to disown them in the collision with the “attedrissante blancheur du papier” which Matisse was so fond of; in the tender love of the page”.⁷⁴⁵

This example and description might explain one of the key expressions in Trini’s text which is about interpreting a drawing: “The analysis of its process – and in general of the creative process – will always be lost with error in its meanderings. Hence the warning: in every maze, look for the [A]riadne. The drawing is what makes and what breaks”.⁷⁴⁶ In other words, a drawing does not consist in the mere addition of its lines but in a resulting synthesis.

Discussing the common opinion that the primacy of drawing was challenged by that of colour in 20th century avantgarde, Trini argues that with the turning point of minimalism “the passage from line to structure does not so much eliminate the drawing, as separate it from colour in painting and from material in sculpture; and with the same distance between application and notion, or between the hand and the mind [...] ‘To structure’ is not to relate”. On the contrary, “drawing pronounces its every mark so that it will be related to every other mark in the fabric as a whole. And thus, with this centripetal instability, it also sets itself up as the nearest representation procedure to the enjoyment of reality and at the same time to suffering the lack of reality”.⁷⁴⁷ Then, Trini’s definition of drawing appears to be anti-structuralist and coherent with the exclusion of kinds of diagrammatic drawing from the exhibit selection: even proper projects by Christo, Scolari and the other architects have such a richness in description and materiality, as well as a narrative quality, that are rather readable in psychoanalytical terms.

According to Trini, the stratagem of drawing, as it is its image of the solution of the labyrinth, consists in a cut, a separation, “between representation and what it refers to”, and a castration.

“What relation, therefore, has drawing to photography? Or with architecture? Here is the answer. I mean that the lack of reality out of which language and its art certainly create a problem, is not directed at their exterior, at the other’s penis, but rather harasses art in its interior and specific ambit, and concerns its errors and enigmas. [...] Since the function of representing and depicting is better served today with the mechanical means of which we are spectators and very few of us the authors, the activity of drawing proceeds along a path of learning through trial and error, deletion and stratagem – and in this labyrinthine purpose it renews itself”.⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid.: 10.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid.: 11.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid.: 12.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid.: 14.

Here, Trini gets to his central thesis, expressed since the first lines of the essay: “if there’s a return to drawing, this is due again to the necessity to learn and not to represent”. As in the case of Titus-Carmel, in *La cosa disegnata* too, drawing might have been looked at as conservative and compromised with figuration. Therefore, in both his texts on drawing, Trini needs to avert a mere figurative reading by insisting on the medium’s propulsive, explorative function.

If drawing achieved new value for the “necessity to learn”, then “more than painting, it is close to writing”, and Trini concludes by addressing the theme of drawing as “graphism”. In quite a short paragraph, he associates this specific trend to women artists, that is, as a phenomenon of “the recovery of the woman’s identity” taking place in those years. In particular, the critic mentions the term “magma” as “the forms of female creativity”, that was used as the title of a travelling 1975-76 exhibition collecting Italian and international women artists, that had been reviewed not only in Trini’s journal, *DATA*, but also in the “Italian issue” of *Studio International* in January 1976 (**figure IV.13**). In the intention of the curator, the feminist Romana Loda, the volcanic term stood rather for “the woman’s issue [...] the energy of which explodes every time some cracks open in the general immobilism”, and she denied “the attempt to affirm the value of a particular and autonomous female creativity, tied to biological structure and sociological experience of woman”.⁷⁴⁹ *Magma* effectively included some artists engaging with forms of asemantic writing, such as Betty Danon and Ketty La Rocca, or forms of graphism, like Hanne Darboven and Berty Skuber, but this feature was not a selection parameter.⁷⁵⁰ However, Trini probably hinted to Mirella Bentivoglio’s ongoing critical focus on visual poetry and artistic forms of writing which stressed a “feminine perspective” in respect to numerous studies and exhibitions on “nuova scrittura” organised by Renato Barilli or Filiberto Menna.⁷⁵¹ For Bentivoglio, “the new forms of writing show the re-occupation of the deprived body of the language whose legalisation [the woman] had been forced to agree to”.⁷⁵² If the first exhibitions about such themes were made since 1973, the most important occasion was the section *The materialization of language*, within the 1978 Venice Biennial, where 72 artists and 154 works and performances were collected.

However, women were excluded from the exhibition at the Studio Marconi and Trini did not expand further on the theme. He rather turned to the argument of graphism and Eastern calligraphy: in particular, the critic dismissed a direct and obvious connection between handwriting and psychology

⁷⁴⁹ Romana Loda in BRESCIA 1975: [2].

⁷⁵⁰ Which instead followed “the assumption of presenting the most qualifying points of current aesthetic research, the selection criteria were very strict and yet non-sectarian with regard to the trends and ‘media’ used” (ibid).

⁷⁵¹ See, for instance, BARILLI 1975 (where the phenomenon of Nuova Scrittura was described between “the pure aesthetic values (the informale segnic)” and “the purely noematic conceptual”) and MENNA 1975.

⁷⁵² BENTIVOGLIO 1978.

in the arts, denying unconscious meaning to be channeled by graphism “When [the artist] does his graphism and simulates the information system, he is astute enough to make them incomprehensible by disguising them as Leonardo did when he reversed his handwriting by dictating it to the mirror”.⁷⁵³

II *Drawing/Transparence*

Set up between *Revisione I* and *La cosa disegnata*, the drawing show at the Studio d’arte Cannaviello in Rome was divided into two separate exhibitions, respectively dedicated to *Drawing in USA* and *Disegno in Italia*, both reunited in the volume (of which the original title included the American - Italian translation) *Drawing/Transparence. Disegno/Trasparenza*. Opened respectively on January 26th, 1976 and March 3rd, 1976, the exhibitions were “surprisingly” interesting according to the majority of reviewers: “one breathes a somewhat museum-like air in the gallery rooms: both because of the quality of the sheets on display and the items represented, and because the drawing, in itself, seems to introduce one to a more carefully conducted meditation”.⁷⁵⁴ The resonance of the show appears to have extended mostly in the Roman context. The opening of the second show, on a rainy early March evening, was described as busy, celebrative and rich in debate, attended by Roman personalities and artists like Graziella Lonardi Buontempo, Claudio Briganti, Fabio Mauri, Elisabetta Catalano, Filiberto Menna and Achille Bonito Oliva. There were 57 exhibiting artists per show, and 15 other galleries involved, as well as many private collectors: an evident effort at exhaustiveness in this survey (also, more ambitiously, on the American panorama) which earned the gallery a certain primacy in attention to drawing. As one reviewer inferred from the success of the vernissage, “Cannaviello è per il drawing una «chiesa ufficiale»” (“Cannaviello is for drawing as an ‘official church’”).⁷⁵⁵

In fact, *Drawing/Transparence* can be read as an attempt to systematise Enzo Cannaviello’s interest in drawing, that he developed as a gallerist throughout the first half of the decade. In 1970, he moved to Rome after heading a gallery in Caserta for two years, where he had met Bonito Oliva and Menna, and joined the seven-associates Galleria Seconda Scala in 1972. There, in a programme dedicated to established and young Roman artists, as well as a remarkable international openness, graphics exhibits regularly took place: from the second stage of the international graphic exhibition curated by Italo Mussa, *Ricognizione 73*, to an international group show of Hyperrealist graphics,⁷⁵⁶ but also

⁷⁵³ TRINI 1976B: 16.

⁷⁵⁴ ORIENTI [?] 1976.

⁷⁵⁵ ANONYMOUS 1976.

⁷⁵⁶ The show *Grafica iperrealista* took place in late January 1974. “The Seconda Scala Gallery presents a comprehensive review of international Hyperrealist graphics. If graphics (especially silk-screen printing) are not congenial to

personal exhibitions by Ketty La Rocca, Carlo Maria Mariani, Carmengloria Morales and Elisa Montessori. In particular, the collaboration with Filiberto Menna was determining to the predilection of a lineage of “analytic drawing”,⁷⁵⁷ alongside conceptualist researches where writing and drawing merged (from Agnetti to the couple Arcelli & Comini). When the gallerist opened his own Studio Cannaviello in late 1974, it then marked by the Italian launch of Narrative art, strategically alimented by the publication of two extensive publications by Bonito Oliva and Menna, the editorial precedents for the *Drawing/Transparence* catalogue.⁷⁵⁸ After the show, and even when he moved his gallery to Milan,⁷⁵⁹ Cannaviello continued to deal drawing with analogous pace and range of artists, and later introduced not only artists debuting within this medium, like Antonio Faggiano, Pietro Fortuna or Aldo Spoldi, but also German, Austrian and Swiss artists like Martin Diesler or Rolf Winnewisser. Albeit broad and unprecedentedly ambitious for the gallerist, the selection of artists for *Drawing/Transparence* can be first explained within this frame of predilections and market strategies. Among the Americans, an evident prominence was assigned to the Narrative art group (Bill Beckley, Robert Cumming, Peter Hutchinson, Roger Welch, William Wegman), which significantly oriented the show to a conception of drawing as most permeable to text and photography. Also, the young artist Georgia Marsh, known as Marcia Gilully, had already exhibited at the Studio Cannaviello in December 1975, where Mario Bertolini bought some of her drawings.⁷⁶⁰ Among the older generation of Italians, Vincenzo Agnetti and Fabio Mauri already had a stable relationship with the gallery.⁷⁶¹ The choice of many young Italian artists was inevitably criticised as partial: above all, Carlo Maria Mariani was probably considered a gallery artist, while other very young painters (Angelo Bozzolla, Paolo Cotani, Teodosio Magnoni and Marcello Camorani, who just debuted in late 1974) were supported by Menna.

Hyperrealism, to the extent that even the works of the most representative artists of this tendency once printed lose their ambiguous charm, becoming entirely similar to the primitive photographic model, pencil drawing can instead yield very suggestive results. Proof of this can be seen here in the few sheets by Claudio Cintoli and Carlo Mariani. It should be noted, however, that these two artists like to apply the Hyperrealist technique to unusual, extravagant subjects. As a result, the typical Hyperrealist interplay between the seen and the unseen becomes even more pronounced in terms of content to the point of an alienating, dreamlike if not downright surreal ambivalence, as in the case of Claudio Cintoli's large pear, so Magrittian” (TRUCCHI 1974).

⁷⁵⁷ Introducing Elisa Montessori's exhibition in 1975, Menna pointed out her “reflection on making art from drawing, or rather from the sign: and the latter [...] in its primary condition brings to mind the classical example of the sheet of paper of which the signifier and the signified occupy the opposite sides” (Filiberto Menna in ROME 1975).

⁷⁵⁸ See ROME 1974B and ROME 1975B.

⁷⁵⁹ The move to Milan occurred between 1977 and 1978 as an intermediate passage. Cannaviello also opened a temporary Roman venue in via Luciano Manara (where a show of Georg Chaimowitz was held in March 1978), waiting for the new gallery in Piazza Beccaria in Milan. I am thankful to Enzo Cannaviello and Dario Falzone for sharing some information about the history of the gallery.

⁷⁶⁰ See BALDACCI, GIACON 2015: 126, inv. 527-528.

⁷⁶¹ Agnetti's shows were held at Galleria Seconda Scala (Vincenzo Agnetti 1968-1970, January 28th – February 13th, 1974) and at Studio Cannaviello (February – March and November 1975, with the title, *Gli eventi precipitano*); Fabio Mauri's action titled, *Oscuramento* (“Obscurement”), took place on April 8th, 1975, in three venues: the Studio Cannaviello (where the section titled *Intellettuale* included the projection of Miklos Jancsó's *Salmo rosso* onto the director himself), the Museo delle Cere and Elisabetta Catalano's studio.

Other names that now appear far from any current canon of those years might be explained by the extensive network of Italian and international galleries put in place by Cannaviello himself, who was the proper curator of the exhibition. If the John Gibson Gallery had a role in promoting the Narrative art group, Edda Renouf was represented by Françoise Lambert in Milan, where Robert Grosvenor also had a solo show. Drawings by Richard Nonas, Brenda Miller, Richard Tuttle and Marcia Hafif might have been lent from Galleria D'Alessandro Ferranti in Rome, while Joel Fisher was represented by Sonnabend Gallery and exhibited at Marilena Bonomo's gallery in Bari in 1972, like the New York-based Japanese artist Kazuko Miyamoto. Lastly, two young artists like Mary Miss and Connie Zehr both exhibited Salvatore Ala in Milan.

The format of the two contiguous exhibitions inevitably produced, albeit not overtly articulated (neither in the catalogue), a comparison between US and Italian artists, which met a specific, recent trend started by Bonito Oliva himself. Starting from his essay for the catalogue of *Contemporanea*, the important show investigating the international scene between 1955 and 1973, Bonito Oliva set up a "watershed"⁷⁶² that was rooted in the difference of the respective art markets of Europe and the United States, and involved further themes of art production. Developing his analysis on the art market journal *Bolaffi Arte*, the critic had analysed the current power positions between European and American art, constructing a paradigmatic contraposition: USA was assigned a pragmatist character while Europe an ideological one. The two were resumed by a key figure, namely Joseph Beuys and Andy Warhol. Such theory, as fascinating as generic, generated a "sudden trend" throughout 1976, echoed not only in *Drawing/Transparence* but also in the Bolognese exhibition *Europa/America. L'astrazione determinata 1960/1976* and in Bonito Oliva's first volume to be published in English (*Europe/America. The different avant-gardes*).⁷⁶³

However, no rigorous theoretical parameters guided Cannaviello's selection of drawings, and no pragmatist reading is expressed in the catalogue essay nor effectively readable in the show. On the contrary, against the expectations of American art to be tautologic, "pragmatic" and deprived of traditional references,

"the most advanced tip of the current American artistic experience reveals in the practice of drawing a discreet and convinced dedication, a planning or even expressive necessity that is fully conscious and even, in some cases and perhaps in those most unsuspected because they are considered more unprejudiced, a patience of the sign, a reflection on the modes and inflections of the stroke that could lead to a deeper re-examination, to a possible evidence of comparison, of the realisations that behind and at the roots hold the thread of the drawing experience".⁷⁶⁴

⁷⁶² Bonito Oliva in ROME 1973: 29.

⁷⁶³ See BONITO OLIVA 1976.

⁷⁶⁴ ORIENTI [?] 1976.

However, the historical outline of *Disegni USA* was determined by some curatorial choices, that can be pointed out on the basis of the artworks illustrated in the catalogue, as well as by comparisons with *Revisione I* as a coeval international drawing exhibition. Johns' *Grey Target* was actually a 1960 painting on canvas and might not correspond to the work in the gallery, while a 1962 drawing by Cy Twombly was the only artwork that could be convincingly associated with Abstract Expressionism.⁷⁶⁵ Therefore, the main starting point had to be individuated in the Pop drawing tradition, abundantly represented by recent works (a 1970 Rosenquist; a 1971 Lichtenstein; a 1973 Ruscha – all quite aniconic and monochromatic; and a 1975 graphite drawing from Warhol's series, *Ladies and Gentlemen*, loaned by the gallerist Luciano Anselmino) and fewer early pieces, such as a 1964 Tom Wesselmann (not one of the many colourful nude studies, but a *Linear* radio that was noticed for its "rigorous clarity") and the Claes Oldenburg's 1969 *Symbolic Self-Portrait with Equals* (more likely a lithograph), possibly chosen for its playful evidence of the graph paper and the diagrammatic outlook. Such predilection for somehow austere and linear economy of drawing directly introduced to the most numerous minimal and conceptual projects. The drawings by Flavin, Judd, Morris, Sandback, LeWitt (curiously, a 1974 drawing from the same *Incomplete Open Cube* series also exhibited at *Revisione I*) were actual axonometries, only dramatised by a freer execution in the cases of Nauman and Heizer, as well as in a Christo's *Store Front* project. The already mentioned prominence of Narrative art appears coherent with a conspicuous group of conceptual drawings based on text: a rare study for Kosuth's 1965 *Discussion about a lawn*,⁷⁶⁶ a 1968 Bochner's measurement drawing, a 1969 printed page by Huebler, and a typewritten 1969 proposal by Serra. A graph paper project by Carl Andre might have echoes in Jud Fine handmade geometric constructions, just like Marcia Gilluly's permutational drawing inevitably dialogued with Sol LeWitt. A 1968 *Tic* drawing by Weiner could resonate with a "nuova scrittura" piece such as Brenda Miller's *Horizontal Alphabet*, while process drawing brought together a rare piece by Dennis Oppenheim (based on the exhaustion of the pencil) and Marcia Hafif's hatched surfaces. Among the draftsmen "unsuspected as considered the most unscrupulous", Vito Acconci and Edward Kienholz both showed great sensibility to the medium and irony: in Acconci's triptych titled, *Line drawing*, his collaged photograph was "drawn off/drawn out" and "set here/written in" by a charcoal line (**figure IV.14**); *For 270.00 \$*, from Kienholz's dollar series (each with a different value), mixed Pop, stamp-like coldness and the fine softness of the watercolour.⁷⁶⁷

⁷⁶⁵ The drawing is not included in DEL ROSCIO 2010-2017.

⁷⁶⁶ The drawing is related to the 1965 installation work, that was owned by Sperone and later purchased by Alfonso Artiaco.

⁷⁶⁷ The first show of Kienholz in Italy was a watercolours exhibition at Galerie Françoise Lambert in Milan in 1970.

Also isolated was the Rauschenberg's cartoon collage, evidently⁷⁶⁸ related rather to his 1975 show in Venice than to his historical role alongside Johns; nevertheless, it might have helped reading the particular function of constructive geometry in a number of the most interesting artworks of the younger generation. This was the case with Gordon Matta-Clark, Joel Shapiro and Mary Miss, who all reduced their plans to compact clusters of forms; as well as with Tuttle and Nonas' works, both examples of graphic constructions relying on the material quality of the signs (respectively, coloured crayon and charcoal). Two generations of artists appeared together as involved in painting, like Mangold, Ryman, Marden and the younger James Bishop, Robert Grosvenor and Robert Petersen. Possibly the most interesting and new trend in drawing included in the show was a focus of the surface quality of the sheet stimulated by delicate signs, and it was rooted in Agnes Martin's geometry (her important 1960 untitled ink drawing, now at the Whitney Museum,⁷⁶⁹ was the oldest drawing in the show, **figure IV.15**) as well as in Dorothea Rockburne's subtle lift of the paper. Possible examples of this inedited trend were Edda Renouf's *Inscriptions Miniatures* and Joel Fisher's 1972-73 *Superfluous drawings*, made on small handmade paper fragments;⁷⁷⁰ but also, Kazuko Miyamoto's bleu crayon reticulates (that she translated into thread works on wall surfaces and room corners) and Connie Zehr's light vermicular traces with which she studied her sand floor installations such as *Solar circumstance* (see **figures IV.16-17**)

Some characteristics of the US show can be pointed out in *Disegno (in Italia)* too: a net start from the date 1960, an essential prevalence of conceptualism and abundancy in young artists not established yet. In this sense, Cannaviello's exhibition is all the more different from *Revisione I*, a distance that was summed up in the exclusion of Lucio Fontana and a stronger discontinuity with Abstract Expressionism and *informale*. Instead, Piero Manzoni was included as the forefather of Italian draftsmanship of the seventies, by troubling the medium's limits from the very start with his fingerprints. Like in *Disegno (in USA)*, Pop drawing functioned as a first stage of the narrative by a selection of rather aniconic works, which excluded any gregariousness in respect to painting and

⁷⁶⁸ “[...] the sheets by certain artists who look like the classical of the American contemporaneity will be fully accessible to the eye and the intelligence of every visitor: Rauschenberg's one for instance, to be referred to the climate of the works exhibited in the autumn show at the Venetian Ca' Pesaro” (ORIENTI [?] 1976).

⁷⁶⁹ See <https://whitney.org/collection/works/2125>.

⁷⁷⁰ “The material used are lighe and soft and always imply the subjective participation of the artist. The sheets of paper are obtained by mulching down his old used clothes and the cords that develop into meanders are made by plaining his hair. The arrangements and the meanders are extremely simple, and we never find ourselves in front of «results» of the combinations of various materials. And thus, until 1972, the works are all monochrome and their color depends only upon the nature of the paper pulp. Obviously enough, what's interesting is the provenance of the work and the manual process of elaboration, both of which imply the person of Fisher himself. The works tend to emphasize their singularity as materials and they are tied together by the fact of the «absent» presence of the artisan. Since 1973, Fisher also works with combinations that allows juxtapositions of pieces that are chromatically and materially different and thus there is the beginning of a dialog concerning permutations and minimal quantities of subjective entities” (CELANT 1973: 48).

colour. With Pop drawing, the Roman scene constituted the core of the show,⁷⁷¹ with a selection that valued the vitality of the early sixties and the activity of Plinio De Martiis' gallery La Tartaruga: among others, Kounellis' large format alphabet drawing from 1960, Pino Pascali's famous *Bachi da setola*, an almost abstract Schifano from 1964, and more recent works by Tano Festa and Giosetta Fioroni (an almost invisible silver paint Venetian landscape).⁷⁷² Pistoletto was put in dialogue with this Roman group through one of his very fine silhouette drawings that were made parallelly to his earliest mirror paintings. A group of works accounted for various conceptualist trends in the forms of non-traditional forms of drawings, including proposals, notes, sketches, partitures for performances (a retouched music score by Giuseppe Chiari, or graphic sketches for performative or photographic installations by Cioni Carpi, Michele Zaza, Enrico Job). Enrico Castellani's project for *Il muro del tempo* ("The time wall") evoked the seminal 1968 exhibition at La Tartaruga *Il teatro delle mostre*, an incunabulum of Italian performance art; while Fabio Mauri, one of Cannaviello's closest artists, was represented by a drawing for a prop of his performative piece *Vomitare sulla Grecia* ("To vomit on Greece"). Other conceptualist artworks presented unusual materials on paper, like combined frames (Patella), reworked printed images (Fabro), numeric series (Grisi, Alfano), but also a usage of the paper surface, like in Agnetti's carved paper or Mochetti's self-referential project.

A second lineage opposed this Manzonian, centrifugal perspective of the practice on paper, one that descended from Francesco Lo Savio's projects, which were famously relaunched at Galleria La Salita and were included in *Contemporanea*. This kind of technical planning on paper was echoed by Carrino's diagrams for sculpture on graph paper and Giuseppe Uncini's highly finished watercolours; but also by the numerous projects related to the *pittura analitica* area (Battaglia, Verna, Gastini, Griffa and Morales), which included the precedent of the oldest artist invited, Mario Nigro, as well as a younger generation supported by Cannaviello (Camorani, Cotani, Magnoni and Bozzolla).

For the first time in *Drawing/Transparence*, the draftsmanship of the arte povera group was fully acknowledged: Marisa and Mario Merz and Pier Paolo Calzolari demonstrated delicacy and a great sensibility to materials, while Mattiacci and Boetti's works reminded of Pop dexterity. Curiously, the selection effected a compelling comparison of different representations of the self which highlighted a bodily presence. Possibly on the track of a recent exhibition about contemporary self-portraits and the general interest in body art, four artists provided examples of such a theme: Giulio Paolini was represented by a 1963 project in two parts (the only artworks occupying two pages of the catalogue) for a spatial installation that included a collaged anatomical illustration of the muscular system to

⁷⁷¹ On 57 invited artists, only 10 lived in Milan and 11 lived in Turin at the time; most of the others were based in Rome, with few exceptions.

⁷⁷² Claudio Cintoli was curiously represented by a 1966 work instead of his recent Hyperrealist draftsmanship demonstrated in 1974 at Galleria Seconda Scala.

represent the observer;⁷⁷³ Anselmo's *Lato destro* (see **figure I.41**) was the drawn version of the photographic work centered on a close-up of his face; a self-portrait as Blessing Christ by Salvo was one of the most figurative and stylistically charged works of the show; finally, Giuseppe Penone might have been included with two exemplars of a 1973 series, *Cambiare l'immagine* (see **figure V.15**) in which his own presence was disquietingly evident both from his biting and chewing acts on the paper and a self-portrait drawn in sanguine modeled after Leonardo's anatomical studies.⁷⁷⁴ Zorio's drawing of a javelin star could join this group for the membranous, skin-like quality of its vellum support.

The most daring choices in the selection apparently concerned the youngest artists invited –not only an artist close to Cannaviello such as Mariani, whose personal show followed *Drawing/Transparence* in the gallery calendar, but also the Roman based Luigi Ontani, Francesco Clemente and Sandro Chia as well as the Milan-based, Tuscan Remo Salvadori and Marco Bagnoli. Their presence might be explained with the collaboration with Lucrezia De Domizio, whose house as much as her gallery in Pescara gathered these artists around 1975.

Without any photographic documentation, it is impossible to reconstruct the exhibition's arrangement, and this rapid panorama of *Drawing/Transparence* is based on an historical sequence that might not have been followed by Cannaviello. He remembers that some artists were probably included with more than one artwork and that he sold "almost nothing".⁷⁷⁵ Although this failure perhaps prompted Cannaviello not to repeat similar formats and somehow the exhibition remained muted in the national press and especially in the subsequent literature, *Drawing in USA* and *Disegno in Italia* turned out to be an indispensable milestone in the history of Italian drawing in the 1970s. It was especially so for the volume edited by Achille Bonito Oliva, published by La Nuova Foglio publishing house in Macerata, directed by Magdalo Mussio and prolific in those years, which probably came out after the opening of the American exhibition, in early March. It was a deliberately refined publication, in which were included photographs of one work for each of the 114 artists involved taken by photographer Sergio Pucci likely in the Roman gallery; and even embellished with eight tissue paper inserts that materially referred to the title of the volume, conceived by Bonito Oliva, *Drawing/Transparence*.

⁷⁷³ *Orizzontale* (GPO-0050) is known as a project edited in some heliographic exemplars. Paolini's brother Cesare probably executed the axonometries, that were then transferred to heliographs on vellum ("lucido"), on sheets characterized by constant height (42 x 55 or 42 x 60 cm); the artist manipulated a photographic reproduction of an anatomical illustration of the muscular system that was inserted as the human figure. An analogous axonometric scheme was used for the projects of *Lo spazio* (GPO-0120).

⁷⁷⁴ See BOSCO 2018.

⁷⁷⁵ Enzo Cannaviello, email exchange with the author, March 8th, 2023.

II.2 *Drawing, desire, Duchamp*

Bonito Oliva's first text to be dedicated to a proper medium, his essay set a simple, double structure, interlacing a historical perspective (that is, a quite traditional sequence of the modern art-isms) and a theoretical definition of drawing. A preliminary distinction from Medieval and Early Modern drawing lets slip a conceptualist bias: in the past, drawing coincides with the "moment of arrangement of the picture, the private moment of rage of the artist who exercises about his own fantastic nucleus, trying to extract the indistinct idea which runs through his whole body to its terminal, the hand". Instead,

"In contemporary art, the drawing becomes directly the self-sufficient moment of the idea which becomes form, of the sign which is satisfied with its own lightness, renouncing the visual and tactile emphasis of pictorial and sculptural material".⁷⁷⁶

Confirming quite generic, 'textbookish' attributes of the canonical movements in modern art, Bonito Oliva shortly describes the function of drawing within Impressionism, Expressionism, Symbolism, "historical vanguards", Informal and Action painting, Neo-Dada and Pop art, Minimal art, Conceptual art, Processual art, Behavioural art. This sequence is interrupted by a long, strongly theoretical discourse on drawing positioned after the turning point of the historical vanguards. From that moment, "all hierarchical order between drawing and work, between project and object" has been overturned.

"In this sense drawing, in its dematerialisation, fosters a shortening of the distance between project and object. The diaphragm of material is passed over in favour of an image which, without deviation or disguise, corresponds directly to the naked project of the imagination.

Besides, drawing, in its programmatic inconsistency, always tends to show itself as a sign or trace, as a visual hint of a broader and more concrete image, of an image which chooses to remain in an intentional state of uncertainty. [...] Drawing seems to always bare the artist's attack on the immaculate space of the sheet of paper, seems to always take advantage of the moment before the deflagration of the sign".⁷⁷⁷

At this point, the formulation turns into a sort of psychoanalytic, or rather Deleuzian, analysis. Drawing "records the image on the sheet of paper as the overturning and spilling out of the internal image"; the internal image is then defined as the Lacanian "imaginary" and associated with an expanding and extrovert desire drive. Quoting from *The Anti-Oedipus*, Bonito Oliva defines drawing

⁷⁷⁶ Achille Bonito Oliva in ROME 1976: [6].

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid: [7].

as “the machination which tends to give orders to the single dimensions within which desire moves: space and time”. The difference from sculpture and painting is now expressed in terms of sublimation, as their heavy, stratified material language absorbs desire and consumes it as an erotic contact.

“With drawing instead, it is as though the drive remains frozen in its own tension, as though the eros was driven back into the space, not of the other, but of auto-erotism. The sign only meets the dematerialised matter of its own subtly visual evidence, asserts itself, furious or geometrical, in the circumscribed place of a sheet of paper which is not the metaphor for anything, if not for a welcoming, two-dimensional texture. [...] Drawing [...] does not help desire in its disguise, it keeps it displayed in its rarefaction, without it being able to take on the festive and consistent attire of material. [...] Drawing makes the movement of desire reversible, suspends it in a place which is not of the struggle, but of the armistice, understood as the place of projection and reversibility. Here desire is not made heavier, but held suspended by a thread which is that of transparency, of the correspondence of desire with itself, therefore of tautology. In this place the idea, the desiring project, runs continually through its own skeleton, moves within the literally drawn grille of a language which is still not omnivorous, but as potential and sublimation”.⁷⁷⁸

However complicated may appear the translation into psychoanalytic terms of drawing (as a desiring machine), Bonito Oliva’s fundamental thesis remained conceptual in its essence. The “armistice” or “stall position” allows the idea, the conceptual contents to occupy the dimension of drawing. Such medium results in no “work”, that is, it does not produce anything, but develops in a labyrinth, the figure that Trini used too. The labyrinth excludes a distinction between start and end, and substitutes them with a reversible, descending and ascending movement. Here we are at the definition of “drawing as transparency”:

“To be transparent, that which gives transparency, means to appear through, to give the image through movement and the direct movement of the image. Thus the drawing is never the object, is never the dead centre of the imaginary, but always a verb, in the sense that it is, and stands for, its emerging, its coming to the surface”.⁷⁷⁹

The core of Bonito Oliva’s essay is then the definition of “drawing” as “transparence”, stated from the slash between the two words in the title. A lexicographic analysis of this term points out its persistence in the critic’s writings, since he began to flank conceptualist and “behavioural” art in the late sixties. For instance, in a report from his trip to the United States in the summer of 1969, the critic identified the American “Antiform artists” (from Kosuth to Morris, from Serra to Sonnier) as those overcoming the duality between life and art, maintaining a distance from the social system and living “in a state of transparence of their own making and thinking”: “The territory in which the new

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid: [8].

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid: [11].

experience develops is a magical territory, that realises a complete transparency between internal world and external world”.⁷⁸⁰ A few months later, in his review of *Gennaio 70*, transparency was associated to the earliest forms of Italian conceptualism, and even merged with the definition of arte povera: “the necessary poverty consists in the absolute transparency of the artwork, that tends to mean a persistency of the mental process upstream of the artwork”.⁷⁸¹ In these and other texts of the early seventies, then, transparency oscillates between the immediate contact with the world and the immediate communication of the mind; in both cases, the term already stands against language and media. In *Il territorio magico*, his main text of the early seventies published in 1971, Bonito Oliva defines as “the tactic of abstraction and transparency” the passage from happening and performance art, still attached to the phenomenic structure of the body, to a more strictly conceptual attitude:

“[The artist] reduces the external and gestural exercise of their body in favour of a maximum concentration on their own fantastic metabolism. Then he discovers his own internal apparatus which, as a field of permanent possibility, produces and develops a more comprehensive notion of fantasy, that of imagination. Imagination [...] as the functioning of all existential levels, intact and untouched by the outside. Thus, the abstraction and internalisation of the formative procedure entails an immediate correspondence and total transparency with one's own ideation”.⁷⁸²

In 1972, in a conversation between Bonito Oliva and Joseph Kosuth, the term transparency found confirmation from within the practice of one of the most exemplar conceptual artists: Kosuth hinted to his early interest in water “because water is transparent, has no shape but that taken from the container, and it is not coloured; that is, it's something dematerialised”. Going back to this passage, Filiberto Menna later described the passage from minimal art, which “demands a reading in transparency precisely insofar as it shifts attention from its own objecthood to the mental processes that constituted and define it”, to properly conceptual, dematerialised art, or “pure conceptualisation, which in a sense is transparency of transparency”.⁷⁸³ Other art practices and material observations might have corroborated Bonito Oliva's focus on transparency toward his essay on drawing, in the frame of the same conceptualist criticism. In the late sixties, Giulio Paolini had developed both visually and theoretically a discourse on “etymological transparency”: his use of plexiglass as a tautological device (for instance, in the work *Qui*: three transparent letters to be read superimposed one onto another) manifested the same theoretical position of his appropriation of art history that privileged artworks which Paolini defined as “pure images”, beyond any stylistic determination.⁷⁸⁴

⁷⁸⁰ BONITO OLIVA 1969.

⁷⁸¹ BONITO OLIVA 1970: 70.

⁷⁸² BONITO OLIVA 1971: 49.

⁷⁸³ MENNA 1976: 7.

⁷⁸⁴ For a discussion on Paolini's expression, see FERGONZI 2016.

Another transparent, or rather translucent material like parchment paper could also exemplify the “pure conceptualisation” as an attitude to art. In a multiple by Antonio Dias, titled, *A pencil is only a tool*, the act of drawing appears “frozen”, blocked in its primary elements (**figure IV.18**), a device that openly dialogued with Giulio Paolini’s 1964 series of *Disegni*. Mario Merz’s drawing on glass that was selected for *Disegno in Italia* gave another example of how transparency was literally used by artists.

Nevertheless, the conception of drawing as transparency cannot be fully understood without considering a work by an artist who was not included in the 1976 show, but it was crucial in the critical debate of the time: Marcel Duchamp’s *Large Glass*. In fact, Bonito Oliva’s essay must be put alongside another one, published at the end of 1976, in *La vita di Marcel Duchamp*, a book that collects the critic’s essays on the French artist in order to introduce a rich series of photographs of his life. One of them, titled, *Uno e ubiquo* (“One and everywhere”), had been written in January 1976, as noted at the end of it,⁷⁸⁵ about the same time he was working on *Drawing/Transparence*. Such modality of writing is very much typical of Bonito Oliva, who from his early career used to “copy and paste” his texts multiple times, collecting them in new unities or slightly modifying their parts to adapt to new destinations. This is what happened to a massive section of text that from *Uno e ubiquo*, passed directly into *Drawing/Transparence*. If we compare the central, theoretical section of the latter to the first part of the former, we are put in front of a disarming equivalence: “drawing” simply substitutes “the Large Glass”, “glass” or even “the Duchampian work”. Then, transparency is first and foremost the visual and conceptual status of Duchamp’s masterpiece that received enormous attention from multiple parts and probably the most paradigmatic artwork for the psychoanalysis-based art criticism of the mid-seventies. The entire argument on desire and its labyrinthine, moving capture by drawing is far more comprehensible when reported to *The Large Glass*, as are the references to autoerotism, to transparency as a threshold of language, as interstice confounding the inside and the outside, the straight and reverse of the image. Such metaphorical statements about drawing were born as literal observations of Duchamp’s work: in particular, the photographs of Duchamp had a determining importance for Oliva, especially those in which he interacted with the glass work installed in Philadelphia (**figure IV.19**).

The instrumental origin of the essay inevitably downplays its scope and intention; nevertheless, it was acknowledged as a “reading tool”⁷⁸⁶ for the Cannaviello exhibition and the catalogue remained for some years the main critical text about contemporary drawing in Italy. In which ways could this Duchampian reading concern Italian drawing from 1960 to 1975? Bonito Oliva inserted his definition

⁷⁸⁵ BONITO OLIVA 1976: 23-29.

⁷⁸⁶ QUINTAVALLE 1976.

of “*The Large Glass*/drawing” at the turning point of the “historical vanguards” (evidently, Dadaism and Surrealism). The last text columns resume the sequence of post-war artistic movements: after informal art, action paintings and their “expressive urgency” (“a non-deviated transfer in the place of the image”), drawing in Neo-Dada and Pop art was said to “describe the outlines of the everyday [...] as a shadow of a possible object”. Then, Minimal art planning is characterised by its “spatial tautology” and its support, like graph paper, as “the ordered field which established relationships and proportions”.

“The rarefaction of the geometrical project finds in the drawing its ideal site, the possibility of a fleshless representation which really operates on subtraction and affirms the reduction of the project to Platonic unity”.⁷⁸⁷

Bonito Oliva used a strict definition of conceptual art (as “investing on the language of art itself”,⁷⁸⁸ to be distinguished from a generic conceptualism), in which drawing is but “an interchangeable means of information of the conceptual analysis” and serves “to underline the dematerialising effect of the conceptual investigation”.⁷⁸⁹ In respect to arte povera, the critic shrewdly avoided Germano Celant’s label and spoke of “Processual art”. Curiously, in front of the numerous examples of such an area, he admitted a drawing’s “partially gregarious function to the artwork”, obviously referring to Merz, Penone, Anselmo and Zorio’s large, spatial installations.

The last artistic area, the most inclusive and actual according to Bonito Oliva, was Behavioural art, in which he included Kounellis, Pisani or De Dominicis and the youngest generation. Here, drawing not only informs but also “expresses”, it goes back to universally “anthropological” signs and “overcomes the present partiality, in favour of a drawing, taken as a model, which would like to drive the future back into the here and now of the image”.⁷⁹⁰

Two works illustrated in the catalogue resonate most eloquently with Bonito Oliva’s essay, pointing out the critic’s attunement with the most recent research of artists who were emerging on the Italian scene. Remo Salvadori’s untitled drawing is of small format and trifling material (a felt tip pen on a common extra strong), but shows a curiously indecipherable scribble of great delicacy (**figure IV.20**); above all, it displays the literal transparency of the sheet, not as a material condition of the support but as an intentional device: a tiny segment of the scribble appears blurred on the back of the sheet. Francesco Clemente was the only artist represented not by drawing but photography, and the one illustrated in the catalogue was probably difficult to read (**figure IV.21**): a very bizarre drawing, a

⁷⁸⁷ ROME 1976: [12].

⁷⁸⁸ “In Italy, though, the only existing conceptual artists are: Emilio Prini and Vincenzo Agnetti” (BONITO OLIVA 1973: 25).

⁷⁸⁹ ROME 1976: [12].

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid: [13].

naked warrior armed with a scimitar, drawn in ink in a fluid, overtly oriental style. The artist's hands are visible on the drawing, posing in an undefined act of "manipulation". Some careful observers might have recognised the image's model, that is, Alighiero Boetti's *Due mani e una matita*: but what kind of manipulation without pencil was demonstrated in Clemente's image?

Both these drawings were objects of an important article by Corinna Ferrari.⁷⁹¹ She was columnist of *Casabella* and later of *Domus*, and at the time collaborated with the editor Franco Maria Ricci and above all Bonito Oliva.⁷⁹² She shared the critic's new interest in psychoanalytic Duchamp 1976 marzo and closely followed a community of a young artists, mostly based in Milan. In her text published in October 1976 with a curiously anonymous title, *Paragrafi*,⁷⁹³ Ferrari gathered Salvadori and Clemente, together with Sandro Chia and Marco Bagnoli, discussing their recent exhibitions in light of multiple common threads knotted by her wide resort to Lacanian theory. Both exponents of the generation following the arte povera movement and directly debuted with conceptualism in the early seventies, Salvadori and Clemente have rarely been studied together after that article. In the next two chapters, their practices will be analysed in a diptych, as extremely complex and determining components of the drawing debate of the mid-decade.

III *Transparent drawing. Remo Salvadori around 1975*

When Achille Bonito Oliva invited Remo Salvadori to the Italian section of the VIII Paris Biennale in 1973, the artist had a typical conceptualist profile: his work developed as polymorphous and cryptic, untied from a particular technique and rather centered toward certain concepts or figures. For example, the name, figure and concept of Janus, the two-faced Roman god of thresholds, dominated his practice between 1972 and 1973, when he settled in Milan from Florence, in various forms: texts, performance (when he positioned two people chosen from his community) and photographs. The substantial absence of forms of drawing from his public work can be read as a strategical zeroing of the academic training he attained in the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence, where he studied from

⁷⁹¹ See FERRARI 1976B.

⁷⁹² On *Casabella*, she curated the column about art exhibitions from December 1974 to April 1976 (included an important review on Duchamp's show at Framart studio, see FERRARI 1976A). She also published some interviews and articles on *Domus* (on Chris Burden, August 1975; on Wolfgang Laib, April 1978). She edited Bonito Oliva's *Europe/America: the different avant-gardes*.

⁷⁹³ It is possible that behind such an apparently plain title, and the orchestrating of the different positions of the four artists, lays a reference to an important book, *Marxismo e filosofia del linguaggio* ("Marxism and philosophy of language") by the Russian linguist Valentin Volonišov: "If we were to probe deeper into the linguistic nature of paragraphs, we would certainly discover that in certain crucial respects paragraphs are analogous to exchanges in dialogue. The paragraph is something akin to a fictitious dialogue introduced into the body of a monological expression" (VOLONIŠOV 1976: 196).

1968 to 1971 under the magister of the Abstract painter Afro Basaldella in the late sixties. A deskilling that seems especially meaningful in respect to Salvadori's successful participation to the drawing competition Premio Nazionale Diomira in Milan in 1966.

As another manifestation of such deskilling, the artist's private practice of sketching and taking notes continued instead on paper, and drawing, as evidenced by a number of neatly bound, handmade notebooks of rather small formats preserved in Salvadori's archive, of which the earliest is dated to December 1971. The contents of this notebook are randomly sequenced through the pages and comprise texts as well as sketches: fragmentary quotes from his daily encounters and notes about monuments or exhibitions visited in Florence;⁷⁹⁴ theoretical quotes (from the encyclopedia)⁷⁹⁵ or statements,⁷⁹⁶ sometimes sounding like proposals; ideas and graphic schemes for works;⁷⁹⁷ a self-aware registration of the condition of the sketching itself: for instance, the caption "sto disegnando" ("I am drawing", **figure IV.22**), or the transcription of the pencil lead ("Grigio Fila 205 2B = 2") or the temporal or relational conditions of his action ("You're giving me your time, your attention"; "the time to turn the pages"; "drawing on the phone"). Drawing a few attempts to use the pages and the drawings as self-standing "works": for instance, folding the paper page; or throwing a spinning top on a page and then going over the random, flickering pattern in pencil; "to fold a page in four parts and then unfold the page"; or two dots on two contiguous pages drawn as to "coincide" (the artist added: "I must move it to the right"). Rather than the quoted references and possible visual models, that do not exceed a typical generational horizon, two original features characterise Salvadori's private practice of drawing from its earliest documented traces: a certain clarity of the *mise en page*,

⁷⁹⁴ For instance, artist friends of his Florentine years are mentioned, like Renato Ranaldi and Sandro Chia; or public monuments, like "the Tacca fountains" in Piazza Annunziata; or the visit to the anniversary exhibition of Albrecht Dürer at the Uffizi (December 1971-March 1972), where prints and drawings from the collection were exhibited. Elsewhere, a Swiss package of toothpicks is portrayed with details and captioned: "Io amo gli stuzzicadenti" ("I love toothpicks").

⁷⁹⁵ A long quote is transcribed from the traditional *Enciclopedia italiana di scienze lettere e arti* (a publication began in 1929): "Universal awareness of all sensible experience. It is thus understood how it must become the supernal cognitive organ for that, starting from an empiricist conception, and thus from the reduction of all knowledge to the source of sensibility". Elsewhere, the term "clotoide" ("clothoid", a geometrical curve whose curvature at any point is proportional to distances along it) is written down, probably from a topological textbook or conference.

⁷⁹⁶ See following observations on the current condition of painting: "The only possible treatise on contemporary painting is to set yourself up to paint / the only possible treatise on colour is to dye with black enamel a white support and do the opposite and so on until ∞ / I can talk to [infinity] about techniques and technologies and I assure you that to every word and every gesture and visible a halo of politicking / If this gymnastics allows you to climb 20 times the stairs without an elevator or see a sunset among skyscrapers and grow flowers in the living room not even kiss all the people on the street and well, propitious is perseverance is healthy".

⁷⁹⁷ Some ideas concern: "Per un'autoritratto disegnato" ("for a drawn self-portrait"); "Cucire 4 quaderni 6-12-36 fogli" ("to bind four notebooks, 6-12-36 pages"); "Copiare la firma di Gabriele d'Annunzio" ("To copy [the poet] Gabriele d'Annunzio's signature"); "idea bozzetto per uno stemma" ("sketch-idea for a coat of arms"). A longer proposal states: "Cut an olive tree trunk - make it a board of the inner door of a thickness of 5 cm width 30.5 length 35.5. Inside, place as set a book from the white parchment cover with imprinted on the title page my first name - last name - date of birth and a second date (31-12-1970) - time of absence - presence". Another proposed: "Launch a spinning top on a glass, under the thickness of which a reproduction of Giovanni Bellini's St. Sebastian is visible".

that isolates the delicate, tiny signs leaving a dimension of autonomy; not the dogged pursuit of an idea or concept and an overt effort to focus on the condition of work itself.

Quite soon in his career, however, Salvadori explored the paper medium, addressing its materiality and the theme of transparency. In January 1973, he arranged a solo show at Franco Toselli by presenting groups of serial versions of *Janus*, in which the starting photograph was translated on slate, metal and paper. 26 sheets of paper (each individuated by a letter of the alphabet) hung on the wall apparently blank, but looking closely the *Janus* photograph appeared as a central watermark: Salvadori commissioned the sophisticated, handmade engraving made by Luigi Filomena, a renowned papermaker in Fabriano. As the watermark is only visible against light, the pages were pinned on the upper side only and invited the observer to lift them (**figure IV.23**).⁷⁹⁸

III.1 A “*cradle for drawing*”

More than a thousand sheets, executed from late 1974 to 1978-79, were bound in 23 binders shortly after execution and remained in Salvadori’s studio, who moved from via Bernardino Corio to via Pace in late 1974.⁷⁹⁹ Only a small part of this vast material emerged in the debate on drawing in the crucial months of 1975 and 1976 that for the artist coincided with the time span between two solo exhibitions, at Galerie December in Munster (Rhineland) in January 1975 and at Galleria Tucci Marinucci in Turin, in February 1976, determining the new relevance of drawing in the artist’s practice.

In Munster, Salvadori brought from Milan two works from the previous year, while installing a rope that ran above the entrance as a sort of site-specific sealing of the space. On a long wall, dozens of sheets multiplied a lozenge motif in continuous variations, like a lively repertoire of *à la Mondrian* geometries, but were reduced to austere black and white (**figure IV.24**). Later called *Disegni di luce* (“Light drawings”), they were in fact made with a photocopier: the translucent and pinkish copy paper had itself been folded into triangular flaps, which in the printed image resulted in subtle gradations of tone (or rather toner), from full transparency to the opaqueness black (**figure IV.25**). The execution process as a full experience interested the artist, who had procured the machine in the art high school where he was teaching: activated by a button and rather noisily, the portable models of the 3M (the *Dry Photocopier 051* or *151*) would light up for a time frame indicated by a rotating timer, a process

⁷⁹⁸ The watermark included a sentence: “The mark remains in the flesh of this very clear mask that is the face” (“Il segno rimane nella carne di questa maschera chiarissima che è il volto”). In the catalogue of the Italian section of the Paris Biennale, Salvadori illustrated a photographic exemplar of *Janus* as well as a text: “The paper automatically collects an accommodation that is given by its use in private and generalized experience” (“La carta raccoglie automaticamente una sistemazione che è data dall’uso che se ne fa nell’esperienza privata e generalizzata”).

⁷⁹⁹ Some of Salvadori’s drawings have been first published and commented in PRATO 1997: 39-40.

that emphasised the temporal-luminous identification of the work.⁸⁰⁰ Developed parallelly to another device of transparency like the *Janus* watermarks, *Disegni di luce* resulted in a largely more autographical work, though also partly indirect, that focused on the fine variations and slightest smudging of the printed tone. Although there were examples for the printing effect of light from close companions like Sandro Chia,⁸⁰¹ the stress on the formal outcome of the folding technique set a rather curious dialogue with Dorothea Rockburne's *Drawings Which Make Themselves*, that were exhibited multiple times in Italy between 1973 and 1974.⁸⁰² The second work in the exhibition also took the form of an *accrochage* of hanging frames, the arrangement of which, however, unlike *Disegni di luce*, was strictly tied to the meaning of the work: five horizontal sequences visualised the metamorphosis of some signs, which in the last sheet were assembled into a figure. The title of the German exhibition, *Ogni gesto annulla e sostituisce il precedente* ("Each gesture undoes and replaces the previous one"), seemed to refer to this progressive semiotic principle: two lips, for example, were composed of a horizontal line, plus a downward crescent, plus a small wave upward. Another drawing was the sum of a descending wave line, an upward spiral, a new straight descent, and a final diagonal rise. This gestural drawing was arranged in 1974, as documented by some photographs of studio experiments with spray paint on a large sheet unfolded on the wall. One photograph was included in an illustration published in *DATA* that juxtaposed an exemplar of *Janus*, a close-up of a symmetric paper roll and the drawing, collected under the overtly semiotic title, *a - a' - a'' direzionalità differita* ("Deferred Directionality", which may refer to the descending or ascending direction of the gesture, **figure IV.26**).

One of the ring binders contains some drawings very similar to those exhibited in Munster, so it should be considered one of oldest collections. The effect of progressive assemblage of signs produced by leafing through the binder envelopes makes it clear how the work exhibited in Germany re-enacted a process born on the stack of sheets, which the public and paratactic wall-mounting partly distorted. A major difference and turning point from the 1971 notebook was the preference of ink techniques (markers and rapidograph pens) over graphite. Two binders, also dated to the first half of 1975, constitute two unitary series and demonstrate the artist's attention to the material evidence of the ink marking. Salvadori himself described his "recipe": "Given the random sign that presents itself as the first page, the amount of red that seeps into the page that follows will be taken up in an

⁸⁰⁰ See CELANT, SALVADORI 1991: [4].

⁸⁰¹ In a folder letterheaded to Galleria La Salita, four photographic paper sheets present light impression from objects left close to the window of Chia's studio, onto which the artist typewrote respective captions, like, "Carta sensibile esposta dall'otto marzo sul tavolo vicino la finestra di Sandro Chia. 3.V.71" ("light-sensitive paper exposed from March 8th, on the deskboard close to Sandro Chia's window. May 3rd, 1971").

⁸⁰² Rockburne had a solo show at Toselli in May 1973 and May 1974, at the Galleria dell'Ariete in late 1974 and at the Galleria Schema in Florence in 1973. Rockburne herself remembered the artist Alberto Moretti, owner of Schema, as "my gallerist" (CELANT 2019: 342).

unspecified number of variants that will end by the disappearance of the smallest trace” (**figure IV.27**).

It was a bluntly material principle then – the filtration of ink from a purple marker through thin paper – but it adhered to the conceptual limit function of the operation. The resulting drawings proceed like small constellations in which, from point to point, the straight or curved line moves digressing, in small spirals, broken angles, interrupted segments. At the 1973 Paris Biennale, Salvadori might have met Joel Fisher and his appreciated “fresh exercises” on the texture handmade paper (**figure IV.28**), on which he “lays ink dots on a sheet of paper, whereupon he pulls them out and enlarges them, inviting us to marvel at their wondrous as well as fortuitous silhouettes”.⁸⁰³ However, instead of focusing on the surface materiality, the Italian artist explored the possibilities of the depth of the ream of sheets, inevitably setting a temporal sequence behind the transmission of ink. Although formal similarities can be pointed out with other coeval examples of tiny, vermicular or geometrically essential graphic outcomes (the closest of which may be Richard Tuttle’s ink and watercolour drawings), Salvadori’s attitude toward drawing involved time in the development of the signs, which explains the need for timely binding and preserve the sequence of execution. More eloquent than formal comparison is the example of Boetti, a close friend of Salvadori’s since the two met in Milan through Lisa Ponti, in a milieu shared with Bagnoli and Clemente as well.⁸⁰⁴ Salvadori recalls that Boetti traced *Collo rotto e braccia lunghe* for the first time under his own eyes in his studio in via Pace (**figure IV.29**),⁸⁰⁵ a memory that points out the impression on the younger artist of his older colleague’s spontaneous, informal and strongly conceptual drawing practice. A comparison can even be made between the two artists’ studios, reciprocally frequented: Salvadori could have known first-hand the conspicuous activity of attempts and variants on the paper sheets on the desk in Boetti’s studio in Trastevere, the concrete trace of the already mentioned “pratica del simbolo”, based on drawings of few lines, the constant presence of words alongside sketches and the aim at “right”, all-meaningful images.

Similar elements can also be found by leafing through Salvadori’s ring binders made in 1975. A number of the sheets bear the date, the time and, above all, some simple circumstantial data (for example, “Speaking with...” and the name of a friend), fixed on the sheet as an integral part of the drawing. After all, the artist proceeded with actual sessions, identified not only by the presence of people or the place, the artist’s studio, but also by the material unity of the ream. 500 sheets of 21 x 29.9 cm each: a standard (the artist jotted down the quip of a friend, Mabi Tosi: “the UNI [Ente

⁸⁰³ BARILLI 1973: 27.

⁸⁰⁴ Numerous photographs (mostly taken by Giorgio Colombo) document the group’s friendship, see, for example, in CELANT 2018: 52, n. 19.

⁸⁰⁵ The artist in a conversation with the author, Milan, July 29th, 2021.

Nazionale per l'Unificazione dell'Industria] format is the most used multiple in the West") that adhered to the immersive, almost hallucinatory, yet time-bounded dimension sought by the artist. Boetti's example also suggested establishing the "rules of the game", which on the one hand make the exercise of drawing systematic and on the other allow for a lowering of control. "10-10-75 talking to Giovanni and drawing with two pens at once": this title opens a collection of symmetrical images, from simple cruciform patterns to large animal heads made of intricate curvilinear patterns (**figure IV.30**). Positioned between Boetti's "two hands and a pencil" and the Rorschach blots staged by Luciano Fabro, both in 1975, Salvadori's two-handed drawings allow him to observe the image arise from the psychomotor symmetry of the body, partially evading the control of the eye and thought. The search for automatisms intrinsic to drawing-as-a-verb (such as the repetition of a tic of the hand, or a multiplication of parallels from a single line, or the progressive, almost crystallographic, filling of an enclosed area) aims at a suspension of all anticipation in drawing and a consequent, a posteriori "discovery" as it comes into being on the sheet (**figure IV.31**). A quick sketch of an installation in which to place some sheets on a "drawing cradle", might be read in this sense: as if the drawing remains a "newborn", and the ring binders act as a cradle to preserve its delicate immediacy. Even when the drawn imagery appears more complex, especially from 1976 onward, anthropomorphic figures, portraits, animals or plants never coincide with stereotypical or recognisable images, but appear first and foremost as agglomerates of lines. From the earliest sheets, in any case, Salvadori stresses the importance of following "the direction of the drawing" or an "order of execution", to focus on the procedural moment of the pointing on the page, in which the drawing appears "constituted in the forms of a path" (these are all expressions noted on the sheets, almost as reminders). Each drawing occupies a short time, almost that of a breath, punctuated also by the other gesture of turning the page and continuing deep into the ream.

III.2 *A book of drawings*: Il tiro strabico dell'attenzione

Sometimes, the moment of drawing is followed by an analytical moment: after tracing a drawing, the artist numbers the segments and points to mentally go over the order of execution. The analysis of the completed drawing already alludes to a different dimension, that of the "order of reading", which may also be opposite to the order of execution. The tension between the two orders is the theme of the volume, *Il tiro strabico dell'attenzione* ("The crossed-eyes shot of attention"), which translates into book-form Salvadori's recent studio practice: the indication "October-December 1975" printed as a subtitle in some drafts alluded in fact to a kind of restitution or documentation of the private activity of those months in Pace Street.

“[...] this book, evidently, is not a book, or at least it is not, or is no longer, an artist's book”, Germano Celant argued in 1981: the operative and conceptual unity that ensured the tightness of a conceptualist artist book could not be found, intentionally evaded, in Salvadori's work. This is well shown by a comparison with another volume published a few months earlier, Giovanni Anselmo's *116 particolari visibili e misurabili di infinito* (“Visible and Measurable Details of ‘Infinito’”), that also presented an equivalence between each page and a single autonomous drawing.⁸⁰⁶ But the book format served for Anselmo as a unifying device according to a single operating principle, the particular of the word “infinity”, which could not be contradicted even in its infinite variations. Salvadori's strategy of book form instead starts right from the binding, which does not seem to modify the ream sheets in any way. The effect is less of an accomplished book based on a conceptual principle, than of a free collection of drawings.

There is no title page or colophon; just six sections provide a loose structure to *Il tiro strabico dell'attenzione*, each introduced by one triangular fragment from a disassembled yellow rectangle, the volume's only principle of unified re-composition.⁸⁰⁷ The maquette that was sent to the printer shows how the triangles originated from a division of the page itself and were reported proportionally in the rectangle, an image of the actual support (**figure IV.32**). The original drawings bound together were also made on different kinds of paper, from extra-strong to a delicate tracing paper, for each section. The visual themes of each section are difficult to describe; some are only vaguely associable to a proper figure, while most are completely abstract. Possible titles could be, in this order: variations on the image of a house; variations on a landscape twisted onto itself in a circle; the formation of a pile of layers; the formation of a curly and geometrical scribble; the interruption of a vertical line by multiple segments; photocopies of various drawings.

Among the 73 drawings, some directly repropose themes already tested in the ring binders: for example, the geometric pattern of a house traced “without removing [the pencil]” and then numbered in no less than 52 segments (**figure IV.33**).⁸⁰⁸ Two progressive sequences of drawings meet in the middle of the second section via a sort of hinge-page, printed both sides, where two yellow and blue circles match the last two circles of the series. The original study in the maquette reveals that the two circles were originally blue and yellow colour patches that were superimposed to obtain a green intersection (**figure IV.34**). However, the circles recall an idea from the 1971 notebook, where a

⁸⁰⁶ See GUZZETTI 2022: 277-78. It is rather important to notice that the conceptual operation by Anselmo also implied the drawings were not reproduced from originals, but immaterially conceived and visualized through the uniformity and standard tone of the printing process.

⁸⁰⁷ In two notes in the binders, Salvadori reflects on the function of the yellow figure of the whole: “a mirror surface composed of six parts, needs each of these to give back the copy of the whole”; “The whole: as arbitrariness, it needs a seventh part that has neither place nor time since each time it needs different place and time”.

⁸⁰⁸ Remembering the 52 progressive positions would be an extraordinary mnemonic effort: but the fact that it is not a verifiable data says a lot about the new non-objectivity of the book by Salvadori, a sort of “unreliable draftsman”.

stone was literally put on the page by its circular, irregular contour (and captioned *Mettiamoci una pietra sopra*, the Italian idiom for “let’s put a pin in it”).

The main feature of the work is transparency, which highlights its continuity after *Disegni di luce* and the ink filtration. It is first and foremost a material principle: the volume was printed on extra-strong sheets of paper (used for mail or mimeographs, and unusual in publishing), which are translucent enough so that each drawing appears together with the next, slightly faded but clearly visible. The expedient allows Salvadori to work on a sign literally crossing the pages: a free gesture like a curled frill is segmented across seven sheets, then appears complete, with an almost cinematic effect that almost contrasts the speed of execution by dilating it in fragments. In the last section, the only one with a title, *Ordine d’esecuzione* (“Order of execution”), the sheets are replaced by photocopies that fix the two drawings in an opaque image, weighed down by toner soot (**figure IV.35**). The figures here have organic semblances, vegetal and animal but indistinguishable shapes. Such imagery, and above all the status of a seamless flow of notes and figures, might reveal the interest in a contemporary and influential model of staged intimacy, that is, Joseph Beuys’ first extensive collection of works on paper in the 1974 exhibition catalogue, *The secret block for a secret person in Ireland*. Beuys’ drawings from the forties were disquieting insights into an earlier and complex body of work, that was typically considered as unique and parallel to the artist’s well-known performance and conceptual art. Salvadori’s interest in that kind of material dated back to 1969 when he visited Basel and bought the Kunstmuseum catalogue, *Joseph Beuys – Zeichnungen - Kleine Objekte* (**figure IV.36**).

Il tiro strabico dell’attenzione was printed in Chieri near Turin in time to be distributed at the opening of Salvadori’s show at the gallery of Paolo Marinucci and Antonio Tucci Russo, on February 24th, 1976. Their studio had opened a few months earlier with a show of Pier Paolo Calzolari’s early works, which set a programme that brought together older artists from the arte povera group of Gian Enzo Sperone, with whom Tucci Russo had been a collaborator since 1969, like Calzolari, Kounellis and Merz, and some emerging artists, like Bagnoli, Salvadori and Chia, who the gallerists met in Milan through Calzolari.⁸⁰⁹ At the opening of Salvadori’s show, as documented in many photographs taken by Giorgio Colombo, one could see Bagnoli, Chia, Francesco Clemente, Lucrezia De Domizio and Corinna Ferrari, all handling copies of *Il tiro strabico dell’attenzione* and leafing through it. The volume was “organically incorporated within the exhibition”,⁸¹⁰ and was echoed by other installed works: its external layout (a simple, black hardcover) returned in *Libri d’angolo* (“Corner Books”), a black box resting on the ground, against a corner in the gallery, from which seven books partially

⁸⁰⁹ Antonio Tucci Russo interviewed by the author, Torre Pellice, March 8th, 2023.

⁸¹⁰ CELANT 1981: 503.

emerged but remained blocked by the wall visitors run into.⁸¹¹ Not far away, a sheet of glass hung on the wall “at eye level, blocking the multiple arrangement [of the drawings in the artist’s book] in an uncontrollable order”, that is in superimposition one onto another, resulting in an indistinguishable tangle (**figure IV.37**).⁸¹²

If the show opened in the same days during which the volume of *Drawing/Transparence* started to circulate, some months later Corinna Ferrari’s review took Salvadori’s show as a point of departure for a definition of drawing that directly continued Bonito Oliva’s assumptions. She illustrated her article with the most eloquent device of transparency present in *Il tiro strabico dell’attenzione*, that is, a line that passes through the page, carefully restaged by the editors of *DATA* (**figure IV.38**).

“In the exercise of drawing, and of all that can be understood as drawing, the temporal experience is given, in its immediacy, in the oblique cut of the reading gaze. “The crossed-eye shot of attention”, according to Salvadori’s definition. Tract of time that extends in a spatial sense on each side, that is, on the obverse and reverse of the sheets, normal extra-strong sheets, which exhibit the transparency inherent to their weight and which allow themselves to be read in a literal sense, allowing themselves to be leafed through. It can be seen that each sign in the series collected in notebooks, waits for its continuation, by stops, which mark the continuity of the movement, the sliding from one sheet to the next, until the signs are deposited, by superimposition on the surface of the photocopy. [...] “Glance” and “fixed gaze”, the two tactics of seeing, in presence and memory, resolved on the level of instantaneousness. A modulation of time that brings to mind the three moments of evidence, isolated by Lacan in the movement of sophistry, which he presents in “Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty”.⁸¹³ There, it is shown that, through the three moments of the instant of looking, the time to understand and the moment to conclude, instantaneousness is the structure that underlies temporal tension, and the condition by which the subjective assertion can be the form of a collective logic”.⁸¹⁴

Ferrari then discussed the most evident model for Salvadori’s draftsmanship, that is, Surrealist automatic drawing, but pointed out the main difference between the unconscious of free associations and additions of the Surrealists, and the young artist’s “dimenticanza” (“forgetfulness”), deskilling, mind emptiness, which achieved an inedited fluidity – an expression of the unconscious as “logical to the highest degree, it is the ‘pure’ logic of language”:

“And it is also curious that certain Surrealist artists, all caught up in the commitment of the automatic transcription of the suggestions of the unconscious, forgot to forget at least the most complex and binding

⁸¹¹ See CELANT, SALVADORI 1991: [5].

⁸¹² The drawing on glass was made by retracing many previous drawings altogether. The resulting illegible tangle appeared on one of the loose architecture sheets included in Salvadori’s next exhibition held at Galleria Lucrezia De Domizio in Pescara. A year later, the artist was commissioned a portrait by the gallerist and artist Achille Guglielmo Cavellini and reused the same technique: on a single sheet, he retraced a number of single portraits (probably photographs), resulting in an illegible sum of faces. I am thankful to Remo Salvadori for sharing this information.

⁸¹³ Published in Italian in 1974.

⁸¹⁴ FERRARI 1976B: 56.

catechisms of pictorial technique [...]. And yet forgetfulness, the sweet *oubli*, dear to some French *literati*, is one of the most effective devices arranged by the unconscious, to defend itself from the instance of death and preserve the capacity for desire. A deep depth of forgetfulness can be found in Remo Salvadori's drawings, if the images that surface seem to come from afar, from a buried memory, from a common and forgotten culture. Common, if the associations that result from the figures, the cross-references that make the signs flow, immediately appear natural and necessary, as if belonging to a stringent logic that does not require justification".⁸¹⁵

III.3 "Thinking is on vacation"

Leafing through the ring binders of Salvadori's drawing offers a rare sample, among the conceptualist area of Italian artists, of the components of the artistic invention, its references and sources, its rhythm and diversions. Of course, not everything ends up in this practice on paper, and specifically not the technical issues of installations. Yet even a completed work can return to the drawn elaboration, varying and being reabsorbed into a new sequence of images and concepts.

In this sense, it is striking to find Ferrari's expression "sguardo fisso colpo d'occhio" ("Glance and fixed gaze") among the artist's handwritten notes, together with isolated sentences or quotes from readings. Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Daniel Paul Schreber's *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*,⁸¹⁶ Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, Rodolfo J. Wilcock's *The Two Happy Indians* are among the books mentioned within the binders, around 1976. Other references can be tracked to texts that helped the artist to develop his thoughts or reconsider his earlier ideas. For instance, some notes seemed to be taken after a text (or a conference) about topology, as quite specific subjects are listed, like Henri Poincarè, the Gauss curve, the Moebius strip (but also a Kandinskian note such as: "punto linea superficie / corpo campo tempo" that is, "point line surface / body field time"). Among unsurprising readings like Freud (**figure IV.39**) or *Ching. Book of Changes*, a (slightly changed) quote from Giacomo Leopardi's *Zibaldone*,⁸¹⁷ "il pensiero non cessa mai di pensare" ("Thinking never stops thinking") generated the important title "Il pensiero è in vacanza" ("Thinking is on vacation"), cryptic once its genesis is ignored.

On May 3rd, 1977, *Il pensiero è in vacanza* was associated to a drawing, a jumping little goat, for Salvadori's intervention in a particular group show including Mario Merz, Giulio Paolini and Bagnoli. The show took place at Gobetti Theater in Turin and lasted only two hours, as a side event

⁸¹⁵ Ibid.

⁸¹⁶ A note sets the proportion "Schreber : Swift = le memorie di un malato di nervi : viaggi di Gulliver".

⁸¹⁷ The original quote is: "the soul does not stop desiring pleasure itself, just as it does not stop thinking, because thought and the desire for pleasure are two equally continuous operations that are inseparable from our existence" (LEOPARDI 2013: 139).

from an exhibition of photography curated by Mirella Bandini.⁸¹⁸ The collaboration, although each work was conceived separately, was a *tour de force* of interlacing references from literature and psychoanalysis. Accompanied in his visit by Merz, the critic and poet Bruno Corà provided keys in his review on *Domus*. Bagnoli paraphrased Lacan's famous "perfect solution" (from *Le temps logique et l'assertion de certitude anticipée* already mentioned by Ferrari in 1976) in a typed text near the entrance; Merz quoted Edgar Allan Poe's novel *The Golden Scarab* in a little drawing of the insect on parchment paper, on which a ruby laser pointed crossing the room. At the opposite end, the laser "grazed the throat of Salvadori's installed sculpture, a box-tree dog placed on the stage. "His sentence 'il pensiero è in vacanza' multiplied analogies and reflections which couldn't be verified without risk. One could momentarily lose oneself and recognise the contours of the vegetable animal, the unfinished continually outlined by the pruning of the hedges, like in the Italian garden. One could remember the name of the pirate Kidd ("kid" ["capretto", that is Salvadori's drawn little goat]) in Poe's *Scarab*". On the folding poster and catalogue, each artist was illustrated by a single graphic intervention (**figure IV.40**). Merz's scarab and Salvadori's kid appeared, while Paolini, who placed 12 sheets with all the possible combinations of the participants' list on the seats of the theatre, elaborated a superimposition of their names merged into an unreadable scribble.

Corà elaborated further his hermeneutic experience in a later short text titled, *Chiaroscuro*. Obscurity in writing and visual arts was the subject, defining it as intrinsic to the "nature of image" and the history of art (for instance in Renaissance allegory or the way details are inserted in portraits or other highly symbolic iconographies). Above all, obscurity was acknowledged as a specific trend of the youngest generation of artists, a strategy and a device to manipulate on the interpretation process of the beholder.

"Not a few contemporary artists supplement the instinctive dimension of their creativity with the philological aspect of citing philosophical, esoteric and psychoanalytical sites to verify and support those intuitions. From Kandinsky to Klee, Duchamp to Beuys, Burri to Klein to Paolini, to the young. And it is precisely in the latter that the inclination to push further forward the degrees of an image conception that requires instruments of decipherment that are more often than not extra-artistic appears very much alive. A dense series of linguistic parameters, rapidly superimposed, creates language and images, which nevertheless appear, as images always do, in a single plane of flagrancy, sometimes difficult to understand but not without meaning".⁸¹⁹

⁸¹⁸ See TURIN 1977, that included Salvadori's *Janus* work for which his friend, the artist Dorothee von Windheim and her sister Petra posed.

⁸¹⁹ CORÀ 1977. The article was illustrated with a full-page illustration of Sandro Chia's performance *Questo gioco è di prestigio*, that took place in 1972 at the Incontri internazionali d'arte organised by Corà himself, which resonated with Franco Fortini's quotes about obscurity in writing ("Una ragione sta nel gioco di prestigio").

Corà's observations, which were followed by a three-page presentation of another, definitely obscure artist like Clemente, resonate with a modality of presentation of drawings, as autonomous images impossible to decipher at first sight. Salvadori published two drawings of this kind on *Domus*, in collaboration with the editor Lisa Licitra Ponti, as hermetic reminds to his exhibitions (**figures IV.41-42**). For the one titled, *Pensieri lunghi, pensieri corti* ("Long thoughts, short thoughts") Salvadori intervened onto the diagram of the harmonic growth of a tree published on a rare German treatise on harmonic, Hans Kayser's *Der Hörende Mensch*, adding a crown of dots. These drawings differed sensibly from the one in the binders, as they interrupt any execution sequence and rather show many mechanical devices. In order to understand Salvadori's reflection on the symbols, that would be alimanted by his readings by Rudolph Steiner in the late seventies, it can be interesting to report a quote that is written down on a 1976 page, where the artist returned to the earlier idea of Janus. It is from a quite difficult and rare essay on Gaston Bachelard that was published in 1972 by Giuseppe Sertoli. Salvadori extracted a passage that might have corresponded to his use of the myth, but also of the symbolic images like the jumping goat or the harmonic diagram: they are meant as figural approximations or metaphors for "the authentic" and "the inexpressible".

"[the artist] does not mistake myth for a fact, does not consider it a past reality on which to commensurate with present reality, but rather is aware - lucidly, painfully aware - that it is only a figural approximation, an inauthentic metaphor of the authentic - and yet it is also the only way of expressing the inexpressible. Utopia is not positively definable precisely because myth is not a positive definition, but is only the partial and deficient metaphorical image of something".⁸²⁰

Among the latest sheets inserted in the binders, a strange drawing reveals as a palimpsest of two hands. It is infact the trace of a collaboration between Salvadori and Clemente which was not carried through, that can be dated to the spring of 1978. Their project would have involved the very important collection of Attilio Codognato in Venice, which included works of Warhol, Rauschenberg, Bochner, Kosuth, Morris, Duchamp, Picabia, and so on. From the sketch, a title is understandable: *coll. privata!. Venezia*, and few other elements, like the planning of a leaflet and some of the typical themes of Clemente's production at the time, like the series of *Emblemi*. Salvadori, who captioned one side of the sheet, "1978 parlando con Francesco Clemente", drew in ink a scribbling fire and the rain falling, onto the umbrella, surrounded by capital-letter words, drawn in graphite by Clemente (**figure IV.43**).

⁸²⁰ SERTOLI 1972: 262.

IV Opaqueness and photographic mediation. Francesco Clemente exhibiting drawings (1971-1977)

Francesco Clemente debuted at the end of 1971, at 19 years old, shortly after he had enrolled in the faculty of Architecture at the University La Sapienza and moved from Naples to Rome. Such a premature show would have been easily forgotten; Filiberto Menna would have not reviewed it on the Neapolitan newspaper *Il mattino* (which documents an already solid net of contacts around the *enfant prodige*).⁸²¹ Menna even spoke of a “primo bilancio di sè, della propria storia esistenziale”:

“Hence the heterogeneous character of the exhibition divided between the autobiographical drawings-collages and the monochrome works of informal derivation. I would leave the latter aside, and draw the visitor's attention mainly to the collage-drawings formed by juxtaposing fragments of old family photographs (little Francesco walking alone on a beach, Francesco, a little grown-up, together with his mother, etc.) and thin, sharp signs that create tangles and labyrinths evoking a fantastic universe”.⁸²²

Although it is not possible to identify with certainty the collages-drawing of this “sorta di diario”,⁸²³ Clemente’s research appears oriented since its very start toward two media: photography and above all drawing, that will characterise his early production throughout seventies. Moreover, some fundamental themes extrapolated by Menna (memory, narration, “pure subjectivity of dreaming” and the tension between photographic objectivity and a certain pathetism of drawing)⁸²⁴ announced the artist’s originality in the current season of mature conceptualism.

Such themes might even resonate with the second, much more impactful debut or christening of Clemente as an artist of the Trans-avanguardia, which occurred in late 1979 by the hand of Achille Bonito Oliva. From that moment on, Clemente’s drawings from 1971 to 1979 had been strategic to the construction of the new movement. They were first rediscovered in the 1980 group show *Die Enthauptete Hand* in Bonn, where 25 drawings dated from 1971⁸²⁵ to 1979 were selected to be compared to Sandro Chia, Enzo Cucchi and Mimmo Paladino’s respective graphic works from the

⁸²¹ Clemente’s mother obtained the publication of a collection of poems by the twelve-year-old boy with the title, *Castelli di sabbia* (“Sand castles”), see CLEMENTE 1964.

⁸²² MENNA 1972A.

⁸²³ In an interview with the author, New York, December 10th, 2021, the artist confirmed that the date 1971 attributed to an ink drawing on tracing paper (see NEW YORK 2007: 1) implies that it is the only one known from his first show.

⁸²⁴ “The central theme is memory that retraces lost time along two lines: the first relies on the voluntary choice of memory-photographs and is situated on a more objective level, where the denotation of the image is nonetheless strongly corroded by the fabulatory connotation process; the second, which is entirely consigned to handwriting, relies instead on the pure subjectivity of the dream. From the juxtaposition of these two dimensions, of the real and the imaginary, Clemente derives a tale that is cold and cruel and at the same time pathetic and poignant” (MENNA 1972A).

⁸²⁵ Although the pastel *Paesaggio psichico* (“Psychic Landscape”) was dated to 1971, in his editorial colophon Paul Maenz indicated that Clemente’s drawings “stammen aus den Jahren 1973-1979”. The gallerist gave important information about the way Clemente dated the drawings and admitted possible imprecisions.

previous decade. Then, in 1982, 71 drawings were the object of an important show at Galerie Paul Maenz in Cologne and a publication, *Il viaggiatore napoletano*. This material gained international attention exceptionally quickly: in 1984, a retrospective exhibition of pastels was organised by Rainer Crone⁸²⁶ at the Nationalgalerie in Berlin, and travelled to Essen and Amsterdam; a general catalogue was published, while in the same year Maenz donated all the drawings from *Il viaggiatore napoletano* to the Kunstmuseum Basel.

Maenz was indeed the main actor for the fortune of Clemente's drawings. In an editor's remark published in the 1982 volume, he mentions that he "first came across the drawings of F. C. in 1979: numerous piled haphazardly on the floor of his studio at 59 Via dei Riari in Rome's Trastevere. F.C. dismissed with a wave my spontaneous desire to delve into this apparently neglected material – which after all, represented his entire graphic production since the beginning of the '70s". He also recalled that these drawings did not carry marks until the artist "signed, dated and titled them on the ice cream bin of a small café" in Milan, where he met the gallerist for the delivery to Bonn. Maenz also demonstrated awareness of the uncertain chronology and material status of such materials:

"While looking at these works, one should bear in mind the circumstances of their creation: they are the sometimes desultory, sometimes purposive «pictorial notes» of a nomadic artist who not only constantly changes his geographic perspective, but also moves between disparate cultural poles. It is precisely these conditions which unmistakably determine the seemingly transitory character – both of forms and content – of these sketches".⁸²⁷

The artist explained to Maenz some material information about the "approximately 700 such works": they were all executed before 1979, on "highly irregular page formats"; some "were used in exhibitions, other were transformed through photographic enlargement by F.C. into new works", or served as preliminary sketches for collaborators;⁸²⁸ the gallerist also mentioned three sketchbooks from India and "a block of ca. 200 pages done in one night on LSD; Rome 1972".⁸²⁹

However, in the literature about the artist, the Transavanguardist interpretation prevailed and the moment when Clemente's drawings started to be exhibited (together with new larger paintings) was explained as an emancipation from conceptualist constraints. Clemente's early public work was in fact mainly photographic, and the cold mediation of reproduction suggested a move away from the

⁸²⁶ Before Clemente, Rainer Crone had studied drawing within his doctoral and post-doctoral research Jacques Louis David (1969-1971) and Andy Warhol's early career (1974-1976).

⁸²⁷ Paul Maenz in COLOGNE 1982: 94.

⁸²⁸ Maenz mentioned the "professional Indian miniaturist" who translated Clemente's drawings into traditional Indian styled gouaches but also the mosaicist who translated an ink drawing into a large floor for the exhibition *Le stanze* in Genazzano, see GENAZZANO 1979.

⁸²⁹ Paul Maenz in COLOGNE 1982: 94.

material fragrance of drawing. In what follows, instead, attention will be paid to the forms of photographic mediation of drawing. Conceptual and expressive possibilities were increased by such mediation, and the opaqueness of photography resulted less in objectivity and coldness than a stratification of meaning, that from image and signs developed to reach a spatial dimension.

IV.1 *Figuration options*

The rare traces of Clemente's earliest introduction in the Roman scene suggest his affiliation to GAP Studio d'arte contemporanea, a gallery animated by Tullio Catalano and Maurizio Benveduti who expanded their activity to numerous and informal experiences. His GAP works appear convoluted, markedly theoretical and still coherent with the technique of the self-educated artist, namely drawing, writing and photocollage. Clemente's work sent to the large group show *Art around '70 Italy two*, organised by Filiberto Menna at the Civic Center in Philadelphia in late 1973,⁸³⁰ is structured as a scheme including an image of two Tibetan monks and a diagram captioned by estranging title: "Gauguin and Van Gogh standing between two mirrors talk about continuity of biological memory" (**figure IV.44**). If the original meaning is insofar unrecoverable, some themes (the double and the symmetry of left and right, further heritage from Boetti,⁸³¹ the stratification of mental and physical levels of experience, through a concept such as "biological memory") and the note-like layout denounce his early ascription to the strictest forms of conceptualism. Already in 1973, GAP also produced the first artist book by Clemente, *Pierre Menard*. The reference to Borges's famous short story about the paradoxical *Pierre Menard, author of the Don Quixote* was declared in the title and specified in an introductory footnote.⁸³² The Argentinian author imagined that Pierre Menard wanted to re-write Cervantes' *Don Quixote* by a "total identification" with the work (in fact, a quote from the

⁸³⁰ See PHILADELPHIA 1973. The show was organised by the Università di Salerno and involved a committee of local personalities: beside Menna, the main curator of the show, the professors Albetro Boatto and Furio Colombo, the gallerist Enzo Cannaviello, the architect Costantino Dardi, who designed the show; the critics Giovanna Dalla Chiesa and Italo Mussa, and the artists Fabio Mauri and Diego Esposito.

⁸³¹ Clemente even quoted Boetti's famous photograph and multiple *Gemelli* ("Twins") in October 1973, when he contributed to in his contribution to the GAP project *S.p.a.*, a collection of mailed artworks started in 1972 and ended in 1975 (when it was edited as a volume by Bianco/nero editions). He inscribed an anonymous, seemingly-XIX century photograph of two male twins with the sentence, "Ogni dimenticanza è uno smembramento" ("Any forgetfulness is a dismemberment") and his time and date of birth, 23:50 March 23rd, 1952. In a further collaboration with GAP, titled *Tabellone* as it was a 3-metres large cartoon publicly installed on via Monserrato 120, Clemente staged a complex scheme also based on a dual process echoing Boetti's split persona, onto a striking picture of the police arresting a boy, possibly a reportage from some student protests (the Faculty of Architecture at La Sapienza had just been the core of occupations and students protests in the late sixties and early seventies). However, the cryptically analytical, handmade schemes brought the large, impactful image to a totally mental level: the picture plane was divided in the middle by a horizontal line captioned, "I punti di questa linea non hanno un fine" ("the points of this line have no end"); on the two halves, differentiated by two verbs evidently hinting to drugs ("ingoiato / iniettato", that is swallowed or injected), some other lines indicate positions where "qui è l'io di A, qui è l'io di B" ("Here's the self of A, here's the self of B").

⁸³² "Don Chisciotte, parte I, capitolo IX, Nimes (1939)" (CLEMENTE 1973: [1]). See BORGES 1944: 54.

1602 volume was then identically repeated and now commented as Menard's own creation dating to 1939). Clemente seemed to apply the same "total identification" principle to the history of modern architecture, the subject he was studying at the university: his volume is a collection of Modernist buildings and projects from 1914 to 1968, from Frank Lloyd Wright's Midway Gardens to James Stirling's History Faculty in the University of Cambridge, but all are captioned without the authors, as the genial *oeuvre* of a single author (Clemente himself). Considering the reference to Borges, the evident use of a school textbook⁸³³ and their canonical "truth" (a critical position against what was taught at the university, which Clemente had just abandoned) and the form of conceptual sequence, one recognises the example of Giulio Paolini, whose strategies in displaying and manipulating photograph and graphic tools (like those staged in *Apollo e Dafne*) can help when reading another work which went forgotten although it was publicly executed and reproduced (**figure IV.45**). As the artist recalls, the illustration documented his participation to the 3rd Aprilski Susret ("April Meeting") at the Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade in April 1974. He was included in a group of emerging artists using "expanded media",⁸³⁴ together with Braco Dimitrijevic, Marina Abramovic, Ijja Šoškič, Tom Marioni, Tim Jones, and the Italians Lamberto Calzolari and Luigi Ontani. His untitled performance lasted one hour and took place on April 21st, the same day when Calzolari performed an action, Marioni held a "drawing exhibition"⁸³⁵ and Luigi Ontani installed a photographic and video show of his *Simulacri* ("Simulacra"). Clemente closed the room assigned to him, attaching from inside on the glass door a sequence of paper sheets. Some months later, the work was slightly modified to adapt to the publication on *Flash Art* in November. In the sequence, 12 cards are juxtaposed in six couples; the cards on the left all carry a typewritten text, a statement:

"Reduce the number of one's actions and perceptions. / Constantly pursue the same actions. / Constantly focus attention on the same objects of perception. / Intensify the practice of the chosen actions and perceptions. / Imagine that in them, possible actions, emotions and perceptions will be extinguished in the future".

Each element from the second to the sixth presented one more verse, a "further arbitrary prescription" in some way describing the "actions" made on the cards on the right, or rather clipped to it. The first was a polaroid photograph of the artist's head from above. The second element, dedicated to "condurre e trattenere percezioni ed immaginazione in un luogo non immaginario" ("to conduct and retain perceptions and imagination in a non-imaginary place"), individuated the actual presence of the entire work: on a torn piece of paper, the temporal, typewritten indication "L'azione ha la durata

⁸³³ For instance, Clemente might have found almost all the images that he rephotographed in BENEVOLO 1970.

⁸³⁴ A conversation about this subject took place on April 20th, and included: Joseph Beuys, Barbara Reise, Marlis Grüterich, Achille Bonito Oliva, Giancarlo Politi, Peter Godfrey and others.

⁸³⁵ Tom Marioni (born 1937) used to perform disparate drawing processes at the time, such as drawing with a violin.

di questa pagina” (“The action lasts like this page”) is superimposed with a handwritten spatial indication “In questo luogo” (“in this place”). Nothing appears on the third element, captioned as an exercise that echoes meditation practices: “/Scrivere/pensare visualizzare/un solo segno concentrare l’attenzione sulle difference minime tra un segno/disegno/e l’altro” (“To write, to think, to visualise just one sign, to focus the attention on the minimum differences between one sign / drawing and the other”). The fourth element applies the instruction (“Percorrere le pagine di un libro cercando di percorrere una linea retta”, “to go through the pages of a book trying to trace a straight line”) onto a page torn from Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice*, crossed by a vertical, segmented line that passes through the blank space between words. Another empty page illustrates the legend “Concentrare costantemente la memoria su un evento non accaduto” (“To constantly focus memory on a non-happened event”); while on the last element a postcard illustrates the fresco in the House of the Vettii in Pompei with the myth of the punishment of Dirce by her sons, Amphion and Zethus, while the instruction refers: “Concentrare costantemente l’immaginazione su un nome arbitrariamente scelto” (“To constantly focus imagination on an arbitrarily chosen name”).

Possible references to conceptualist Italian peers are abundant, from Paolini (transparency of texts, clipped art history reproduction) to Agnetti (paradoxical exercises involving memory and absence), and the register of the texts and the course of the sequence may as well point to Clemente’s contacts with the various cultures of spiritual exercises from Indian gurus such as R. P. Kaushik.⁸³⁶ However, the predilection for the book form (clearly recognisable in the device of the two cards sequence) appears essential for the conditions of focusing and the conceptual process of his work. By the end of 1974, a second book was published, *6 fotografie. Mesečna Knjiga*, edited by Massimo Minini, who owned the gallery Banco in Brescia. Minini recalled the project: “The story of the mistake appealed at the time. In our first book in ’74 (*Mesečna Knjiga*),⁸³⁷ Clemente also did five colour drawings, but the title stated six and two blank pages, so that it was not clear whether the error was accidental or intentional”.⁸³⁸ The reference to “photographs” in the title inaugurated the thematisation of the ambiguity between drawing and photography, and for the first time the Roman photographer Augusto Forcella was credited as a collaborator.⁸³⁹ In this case, his intervention limits itself to the enlarging

⁸³⁶ Clemente’s first trip to Old Delhi in late 1973 had been recalled as a mission of delivering to the Indian guru R. P. Kaushik the Italian translation of his first writings, *Toward a New Consciousness*, made by Giordano Falzoni, an artist and intellectual, see AMMAN 2007: 249-250. Some passages of Kaushik’s philosophy, not at all exoteric and dedicated to captivating themes for a Western young generation, such as mental experiences, faith and meditation, but also love, sex and drugs, may have oriented Clemente’s theoretical constructs. For instances, sections addressing *The completely empty mind* or *The art of observing*, individuated a “first stage, antecedent to acknowledgement and naming, [...] a state of non-verbal perception exempt from thinking (nirvikalpa jnana or pure perception)” (KAUSHIK 1999: 55).

⁸³⁷ In Slovenian, “the book of the month”.

⁸³⁸ MININI 2010.

⁸³⁹ Augusto Forcella is remembered by the artist as a curious figure: a former priest and aviator, he was involved in GAP and collaborated as a technician with Benveduti and Catalano in the 1979 videotape *L’immaginazione, il potere*; in the eighties he appears credited as a photographer in many publications about Roman religious heritage and architecture.

of the original drawings, interestingly dating before 1973 (**figure IV.46**).⁸⁴⁰ Although the non-captioned images maintain an intentional obscurity, they can be described as compressed spatial visions: in squared frames, corners are seen from above, inhabited by organisms, plants or feathered snakes; in one case, a ribbon is superimposed the spatial corner (hypothetically they can be identified with the “garden according to the Egyptian perspective”⁸⁴¹ mentioned in a coeval review by the young critic and friend Luca Maria Venturi). Later coloured with blended shades of purple and ochre, the drawings are made of ink and present a specific technique of chiaroscuro by dotting to represent depth. Beside a probable altered state of consciousness, this technique might be related to a specific trait of architecture drawing of the early 20th century, widely used, for instance, in the China ink drawings by Le Corbusier, one of the few graphic systems in which Clemente had been trained. Introduced in such a psychedelic vein, figurative drawing must be considered a specific trait that was not erased from Clemente’s public work and relegated into his private practice. After all, figuration belonged to some of the most progressive art field that might have interested a young artist in the first half of the seventies. Figuration as a theme has eluded most international surveys on conceptualism. Here, some references will be listed to summarize such vast and overlooked field, all which might have entered Clemente’s early interests. The first and quite obvious reference is Duchamp and his drawings and graphics, which were dedicated a retrospective in Ferrara in 1971. The critic Renato Barilli developed the following careful analysis:

“Duchamp’s dominant trait appears in them, of a psychological-existential nature rather than artistic-cultural. In other words, one could speak of a Duchamp ‘sick with absence’ from these early works: intent on mechanically repeating figurative formulas that he evidently no longer believes in; Duchamp is simply ‘elsewhere’, characterised by an abysmal distancing from the subject. [...] Even more indicative are the drawings of 1904-5 [...], where a severe reductive-entropic process seems to be taking place; but it is not the simplification, a common commodity in those years, of those who move toward geometric ‘synthesis’: it is rather the desire to return to an embryonic condition, to return to a sort of zero point, to annul and silence the scandal of existence. Beyond the obvious segmentation of the silhouettes, in fact, there is a lightening of the sign, which becomes progressively weaker; and those diaphanous grey backgrounds appear (often obtained with the technique of aquatint) that will

⁸⁴⁰ A photographed drawing from the same series (interestingly not yet watercoloured, so that the colour intervention might have been done within the mechanical reproduction process for *6 fotografie*) is included in a large collage on paper, made in Milan on December 13th, 1973, and recently reappeared on the market. The title *La polvere bianca viene per ultima* (“The white powder comes last”) reported on a typewritten stripe pasted in the middle of the sheet, comes from Lin Yutang’s *Chinese Theory of Painting*, edited in 1967 in Italy. The “earliest literary reference to painting” anthologised in this volume comes *Analects* (475-221 BCE) and a conversation between Confucius and his disciple Tse-Hsia, where the female make-up is described as a form of social conduct and visible trace of moral order. The quote might have been charged with “conceptualist” meaning (the white powder, that is the aesthetic value, comes last and after a mental and moral disposition, a sort of primacy of the concept onto the appearance), but the referenceto drugs such as heroin and cocaine is more immediate and likely. The artist had remembered that minute and repetitive techniques like the “dotting drawing” featuring in *6 fotografie*, corresponded to drug assumption from LSD to heroine, see RICARD 2007: 248-9.

⁸⁴¹ VENTURI 1975: 8.

later be the hallmark of the Large Glass. [...] in Duchamp there is no explicit intent of caricature, it would be too banal: the reduction seems to take place almost in spite of himself, as if it were inevitable that his gaze, wherever it turns, produces a lowering of the level, with a consequent deployment of energy: what life loses in manifest eloquence, it regains in potential energy, invisible but subtly weighing itself down on the atmosphere”.⁸⁴²

Deskilling, deadpan detachment from any contents, conceptual meaning as the “potential energy” activated by ironical treatment of the images, all featured in the drawing practice of Clemente. He might have directly quoted Duchamp’s “reduced figuration” in some private drawings dated to 1971, disquieting montages of retraced body fragments, that can be compared to the series of *Morceaux choisis d’après* or *Le Bec Auer* (see **figures 47-48**).

In 1972, the editor Mazzotta published Maurice Henry’s *Antologia grafica del Surrealismo*, a thick volume that gathered 89 artists associated with Surrealism from the teens to the seventies, from Picabia to Hervé Téliémaque, presenting their graphic art. The selection, as it explained in the introduction, “wanted to avoid at all costs the hierarchy of age and talent, both of which are confused and practised by art history scholars and absolutely contrary to the spirit proper to Surrealism”.⁸⁴³ In addition to endless figurative possibilities, the volume relaunched the technique of ink drawing, which best served the fluidity of automatism, the nervous trail or childish handling of imaginary figures, as well as the minute detailing typical of Ernst, Magritte or De Chirico. A drawing by André Masson appears particularly eloquent in relation to some later compositions by Clemente, not only for the subject but also for the nervous, subtle lines (**figure IV.49**).

A third stimulus for figurative conceptualism came from contemporary artists too, from quite established artists like the Californian William Wegman (see **figure IV.50**)⁸⁴⁴ to the younger scene of the German-speaking Europe. For instance, a quite forgotten show in Milan organised in 1972 by the art critic Gualtiero Schönenberg with the assistance of Ammann, presented a lively profile of the contemporary art scene in Switzerland. Among the main trends in the work of artists such as Dieter Rot, Markus Raetz, Heiner Kienholz, Claude Sandoz and many others, “the rediscovered exercise of drawing” was essential for a “fantastic transformation or lability, or semantic multiplicity of the most usual things” mentioned earlier becomes”.⁸⁴⁵ With his watercolours on tiny sketchbook sheets (**figure IV.51**), Rolf Winnewisser represented at best this kind of “introspective drawing” and he gained important visibility when he was invited to the Paris Biennale in 1973 (**figure IV.52**). Like

⁸⁴² BARILLI 1971A: 8.

⁸⁴³ HENRY 1972: 10.

⁸⁴⁴ Wegman’s “fey, Thurberesque pencil cartoons on typing paper, displaying, for instance, “two attempts to tie a show” (scribbled lines), or with curlicues “advantages and disadvantages of an adjustable ring” (PLAGENS 1973), circulated together the artist’s more known video and photographic works. Wegman was supported by Sonnabend and likely quite well known in Italy by the mid-seventies.

⁸⁴⁵ Gualtiero Schönenberg in MILAN 1972:12.

Clemente's *Diagrammi* (see **figure III.59**), Winnewisser's groups of tiny drawings (each one representing an object, an anecdotal motif, a word pun) also demonstrated an attitude of ironical detachment, paradoxical meticulousness and rigor, all in a dexterous balance between conceptual components and figurative images.

IV.2 Staging "déjà-vu": exhibitions of photographs 1975-1976

Clemente's proper debut on the national scene occurred only in 1975, when he rapidly passed from independent and radical milieu to more established galleries and a national visibility, so that he was included in the Italian section of the Bienal de São Paulo. With such exhibiting impulse, in 1975 and 1976 he developed a displaying strategy based on ephemeral arrangements of numerous framed photographs, many of which recurred in different shows and contributed to a personal but constant imagery, producing a "déjà vu" effect, as Corinna Ferrari pointed out in her 1976 commentary. The spatial arrangement of the framed photographs also changed from linear or gridded sequences on walls to more articulated and labyrinthine occupation of the gallery spaces.

Clemente's show at Banco in late 1974, on the occasion of which *6 fotografie* was published, is recalled by Massimo Minini as comprising two large photographic works, that have been later published⁸⁴⁶ (although no room view of the show was found). Both are accrochages of many photographs framed in plexiglass (respectively, 13 and 22 elements). One of the two, titled, *In sequenza* ("In sequence", **figure IV.53**) was illustrated in the December 1974 issue of *DATA* by isolating some of the elements. The original piece was made of three sequences of six "drawings" each, and on the left, four horizontal framed elements with "motifs", that is, photographs of coloured surfaces and patterns.⁸⁴⁷ The crows pattern (rotated in vertical in the illustration) was said to have been taken from "the cloth of a girl's shirt",⁸⁴⁸ while the other drawings are a manipulation of the catalogues of pattern paper published by popular women's journals, such as *Burda Moden*, together with the large plates where the patterns were all reported one onto another and in life size. A generative use of the same visual source had been shown in a Luciano Fabro show in Milan in April 1973, where one of such apparently confusing plates hung as further proof of the artist's interest in clothing (**figure IV.54**).⁸⁴⁹ Fabro probably considered such material as drawing (an exemplar of

⁸⁴⁶ The two works are hypothetically recognised in the untitled work published in MININI 2013: 124 (although the work is captioned "Art & Project, Amsterdam" with no further indication); and in the one illustrated in NEW YORK 1999: 53.

⁸⁴⁷ The work is illustrated (as *Untitled*) in VENICE 1997: 53 and measures about 1.50 m in width.

⁸⁴⁸ RADICE 1978: 68.

⁸⁴⁹ In **figure IV.52**, a room view of Fabro's show at Galleria Borgogna in Milan in April 1973, an exemplar of *Burda* hung alongside the leaflet from Fabro's participation to Munich Aktionsraum, illustrating his action *Bekleidung* ("Clothing") in which he had designed and cut paper clothes on the public, see VADUZ 2019: 367-368.

Burda was exhibited at *Drawing/Transparence*) because of their precision, non-aesthetic but formally functional purpose, and for the gendered, social “graphic exercise” they trigger in daily life (as women were supposed to retrace on paper the patterned shapes to be transferred on fabrics). This fascination might operate on Clemente as well, but his work explored rather the impossibility of attributing meaning to these patterns and numbers if they are presented out of their context, as well as the mystery of the sequential transformation of pure forms.

The crows pattern returned in a large work, presented in a show at the Galleria Toselli in Milan that got the artist a first notable visibility (**figure IV.55**). 132 framed photographs of the same motif, measuring 30 x 30 cm, occupied the long wall and faced a smaller sequence of five elements: from the left, a superimposition of the same image of the bird upside down, another detail from the patterned fabrics, and the photographic reproductions of three drawings (representing a feathered snake, a buffalo and what looks like a spined reptile). This work is described in an inedited text with 11 photographs enclosed that Clemente sent for his application to the Paris Biennale and probably compiled between March and April 1977, although no date is registered in the Paris Biennale Archive. This document is particularly useful and rare, because it was compiled not so long after the realisation of the four pieces presented, and demonstrates their relevance in the early career of the artist. Furthermore, in order to be accepted, Clemente used plain, technical language, much clearer than the cryptic posture that had already appeared in the statements accompanying his works at the time. For instance, referring to the work arranged at Toselli’s, he documented its title and date, *Motivo decorativo* (“Decorative motif”), 1974, and the fact that “it was presented for the first time in Galleria Toselli in Milan” (which contradicts its attestations at a former show at Galleria Area in Florence).⁸⁵⁰ Above all, he informed about a principle otherwise impossible to deduce: “the large spread of photos is made out of a chess scheme of 16 different images and 16 different sizes that become larger or smaller according to a pattern that the artist has deduced from his drawings”.⁸⁵¹ The indication adds important references to the work, above all a fascination for Duchamp in the use of the chess. Nevertheless, it maintains the reason behind the irregular gridded accrochage of 132 frames unexplained, as the unknown chess game scheme was arbitrary; moreover, the reviewers of the show also struggled with the meaning, or rather acknowledged the original quality of the operation. For Corinna Ferrari, for instance, the five elements, also documented as *Chiavi di lettura* (“Reading keys”),⁸⁵² constituted “the artwork project, the hermetic key of decipherment: the indication of development from the single element, to the double, to the square, the dynamics of movement from

⁸⁵⁰ On Clemente’s show at Galleria Area, Firenze in 1974, see GILIBERTI 2003: 40-41.

⁸⁵¹ Francesco Clemente, presentation text, March 1977, Dossier Francesco Clemente, BDP 199, Fonds Biennale de Paris, Archives de la Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Paris. English in the original.

⁸⁵² See GILIBERTI 2003: 40.

linear to circular, from the chessboard to the spiral, three drawings of strange serpents, drakes, fantastic animals, imaginary archetypes, automatic graffiti from the pre-categorical unconscious. [...] Contrary to the usual works of conceptual art, the project does not follow a reductive logic of geometric, rationalistic order, although preserving its structure; prefers recourse to the complexity of the formula to the rigidity of the scheme, admits chance as deviation from the norm and number as the system of the possible, according to logical procedures more akin to alchemy than to positive science”.⁸⁵³

Motivo decorativo had been not only a recent title used by Paolini (*Indice delle opere inscritto in un motivo decorativo*) but had overt resonances with Deleuze’s *Ripetizione e differenza*, that Clemente had early known through Anne Marie Seauzau Boetti.⁸⁵⁴ This passage from the 1971 Italian edition resonates with the artist’s deviation from exact patterning obtained with the photographic manipulation by Forcella:

“Our problem concerns the essence of repetition. It is to know why repetition cannot be explained by the form of identity in concept or representation, in what sense it demands a “positive”, higher principle. This search must address the whole of the concepts of nature and freedom. Consider, at the limit of the two cases, the repetition of a decorative motif: a figure is found reproduced under an absolutely identical concept... But, in reality, the artist does not proceed in this way, for he does not juxtapose specimens of the figure, but combines each time an element from one specimen with another element from a later specimen. He introduces into the dynamic process of construction an imbalance, an instability, a dissymmetry, a kind of openness that will not be averted except in the total effect”.⁸⁵⁵

Approaching the theme of decoration in late 1974, Clemente anticipated by few months the return of interest for the autonomy of decorative drawing and patterning in the American debate, especially in respect to computer art and in the movement later known as Pattern and Decoration.⁸⁵⁶ The impressive extension of the installation at Toselli’s was quite unique in the Italian context and might suggest a

⁸⁵³ FERRARI 1975: 14.

⁸⁵⁴ See RICARD 2007: 249.

⁸⁵⁵ DELEUZE 1971: 42.

⁸⁵⁶ See, for instance, an eight-page survey on the theme in *Casabella* curated by the Centro Design Montefibre in April 1976. For the American context, see GOLDIN 1975, which pointed out the common features of patterning and conceptual art and expanded on the modification of perception (“Scanning is a much more specialised, anxious kind of looking [than ordinary vision]. It contains an element of search, and unsatisfied search at that, since it implies a restless refusal to focus and an attempt to grasp the nature of the whole. The characteristic response to patterns and grids is rapid scanning”), the essential characteristic of patterning (“The crucial determinant of pattern is the constancy of the interval between motifs, a fact easily demonstrated by anyone with access to a typewriter. If you preserve the spacing between sequences of letters it doesn’t matter what letters or marks you use, a pattern will appear”) as well as various references to Buddhist or Islamic decorative art, that might interest Clemente’s omnivorous culture (“Islamic artisans traditionally put «mistakes» in their patterns as a religious renunciation of perfection, which belongs only to God. Their mistakes disturb nothing. A demonstration of the irrelevance of perfect form”). On the early chronology of Pattern and Decoration, unlikely to be known by Clemente at the time, see SWARTZ 2007: 113. On the critical (also Italian) fortune of the movement in the eighties, see FAMELI 2019.

dialogue with recent shows of international conceptualist art. On one hand, the young artist might have visited the first show by the French artist Annette Messager in Milan, at Diagramma, in February 1974, where her “collections” hung in groups of up to about one hundred elements (and were photographed by Ketty La Rocca, see **figure III.82**).⁸⁵⁷ Messager’s albums and “dessins secrets” also staged intimacy and private practices of accumulation and collecting that might have echoed Clemente’s own relationship with his corpus on paper. Staging intimacy is what animates some other 1975 photographic works, titled *Disegni*, in which a number of his early ink drawings appear distorted or overlapped with interferences: not in a cold and objective detachment, but with increasingly autobiographical contents (**figure IV.56**).⁸⁵⁸

Images of the artist himself, more or less out of focus, together with elements of furniture and shadows, in many cases hardly readable, declared a further model, Gilbert and George’s sophisticated repertoire for the self-construction of the author as a dandy. Their series of *New Decorative Works*, was exhibited at Gian Enzo Sperone gallery in Turin in July 1973 (**figure IV.57**),⁸⁵⁹ and when Clemente was given his own show in June 1975, at the gallery venue in Rome, he selected groups of photographic works analogously displaced on many walls.⁸⁶⁰ The composition – an untitled work, made of framed photographs of heaps of tea on a plane – was compared to writing and to Zen painting by the critic Bruno Corà, after a conversation with the artist.⁸⁶¹ In the 1977 text for Paris, the artist expanded again on the meaning of this work, that was also sent to the Bienal de São Paulo in the summer of 1975 probably showing an eloquent dialogue with Boetti’s *Storia naturale della moltiplicazione* (**figure IV.58**): “the pictures reproducing the work with 4 dots are photos of little quantities of tea so disposed on a table. The layout of the tea and of the frames has been obtained according to a very rigid scheme (kind of alphabet) that the artist established beforehand. The working practice somehow changed that order and subverted it so that the final result is due to coincidence. In a way it constitutes a tentative to programme interference of chance”.⁸⁶²

⁸⁵⁷ See also CALVINO 1974.

⁸⁵⁸ See BALDACCI, GIACON 2015: 100, inv. 419. The seven elements carry the label of Galleria lp220, owned by Franz Paludetto in Turin, where Clemente had a show titled, *5 Disegni di Francesco Clemente* (January 31st – February 25th, 1975), advertised in *DATA*, 5, 16-17th, June 1975: 19.

⁸⁵⁹ See also Gilbert & George’s *London Fog*, 1974, a ten metre-long installation of framed photographs that was presented at Galleria Lia Rumma in Naples in November 1974.

⁸⁶⁰ The whole show was dedicated “To R. P. Kaushik”, the already mentioned Indu guru.

⁸⁶¹ “They are artworks that miss a centre, some in a geometric sense, others in a mind dimension. They are organisms, more similar to a letter of an imaginary writing, than to a painting. Then, they demonstrate to be born from an internal idea which progressively shapes them until it gives them a complete and complex image. A centre therefore preexists the finished works, but it no longer appears possible or correct, if one wants to find it again. [...] «Form and formless shape are the same thing when one is superior to every diversity and antithesis. Each differentiation is overcome in absolute identity» (Heinz Brasch – *Introduzione alla pittura Zen*, Zurigo 1959)” (CORÀ 1975). The reference is to Brasch’s essay translated in the catalog of ROME 1959.

⁸⁶² Francesco Clemente, presentation text, March 1977, Dossier Francesco Clemente, BDP 199, Fonds Biennale de Paris, Archives de la Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Paris.

In the spring of 1976, the photographed drawings were involved in more complex occupation of space, that appeared indebted to performance installations and contemporary sculpture. “Clemente calls his works «furnishings» or «interiors», in the sense that sometimes he arranges «things» in a place, things that «unify the earth to the wall, the floor to the ceiling» [...], they are light, wooden structures or frames, empty or not, of various measures and forms. [...] Clemente adds that they are «antieconomic» and «against production», as the results, in respect to the efforts and times of production, appear unconvincing and unexemplary”.⁸⁶³ Photographed drawings are involved in this spatial displacement and the observer’s approach and perception shifts greatly, from the frontal and intimate to upside down, unreachable and unstable positions. Such multiplicity of points of view was explained in the 1977 text, when Clemente described the work *Machina sopora*, probably exhibited on a wall of the Roman venue of Sperone Gallery in a group show with Mario Merz and Vettor Pisani, in April 1976 (**figure IV.59**).⁸⁶⁴ Among the series of photographs of objects and spatial rooms, three elements include drawing. At the skirting board level, a photograph of a miniature table in front of a woman’s feet (probably Alba Primiceri, the performer he met in 1974, who would soon leave with him for India). In a descendant exercise of scale as well as vision focus, it was possible to see a round piece of paper lying on the table (“the drawing [...] shows Earth and Moon attached through a mountain”).⁸⁶⁵ On the right, at mid height, a dazibao-like photographic print was rising from the wall waving, showing a multitude of ink signs divided into three groups: “top: portraits of spirits. Middle: the drawings are obtained making a series of signs always in one direction and then making a sign which goes in the direction opposite. Below: the stones in the wood. Each stone is drawn on the shadow of the preceding one”.⁸⁶⁶ In particular, a detail from the “portraits of spirits” was reproduced full page within Ferrari’s *Paragrafi* (**figure IV.60**) – certainly one of the most unexpected images at the time, overtly figurative, between Chinese calligraphic painting (also as an exercise of drawing that has its respective “receipt”) and comic-like imagery like that could echo Pop artists like Sigmar Polke.⁸⁶⁷ Lastly, a diptych of framed photographs arranged flush with the ceiling, at a distance that made it difficult to decipher the little dots of various dimensions appearing on the blank background. They “represent an imaginary sky in which constellations are like dies [sic] faces. Each of the six possibilities (the six sides of a die [sic]) appears 5 times because the observer is always supposed to

⁸⁶³ RADICE 1978: 69.

⁸⁶⁴ The hypothesis is based on the particular point of view of the photograph documenting the installation in a corner of the gallery, which suggests that the rest of the space was occupied by artworks by others.

⁸⁶⁵ Francesco Clemente, presentation text, March 1977, Dossier Francesco Clemente, BDP 199, Fonds Biennale de Paris, Archives de la Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Paris.

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁷ One of the “portraits of spirits” is illustrated in MONTRÉAL 1977: 67.

observe the sky staying alternatively on one of the spots”.⁸⁶⁸ Now the drawing’s meaning interacts not only with the photographic mediation but also with the position from which it is observed. Furthermore, the title of *Machina sopora*, of which some elements were reiterated in following installations, may have been drawn from a quite rare reference to the homeostat, a machine built by William Ross Ashby in 1948 that became a classic of cybernetics theory.⁸⁶⁹ The so-called “sleeping machine” introduced the exploration of behaviour, habits and isomorphisms in cybernetics, later becoming a sort of “design for a brain”, to quote Ashby in his most influential 1960 book about his invention. Although it is uncertain where Clemente could find such a reference, *Machina sopora* suggests a balanced and detached system within his installations too, as they provide no univocal narrative or reading key.

In two other spring exhibitions in Turin and Pescara, Clemente displayed various objects or “arredi” (such as a metal temple-like, circular structure, long rods, a barrier), also assembling “frames of lacquered wood” into standing little objects. The photographed drawings, installed inside these structures, now result as hardly readable, double-faced or unstable. *Strettoia d’inciampo* (more or less, “Bottleneck for stumble”), the installation at the Galleria Lucrezia De Domizio in Pescara in late April 1976 (**figure IV.61**), articulated between two screens or barriers, of which one was carrying a large print of a drawing. Some chairs were randomly grouped at the entrance, while one was welded to the floor. Alongside the chair, a curious structure leaned on the wall: two rods supported two frames with photographs (an upside-down self-portrait of Clemente turning his back, and the bird motif fabric with a bunch of lines departing from one of the crows), and an abacus on the top. At the centre of the room, hidden behind the second black standing barrier, an accumulation of ziqqurat-like stacked frames and long rods. Twelve photographs in the frames showed tiny drawings similar to the *Diagrammi*, laying on the ground and difficult to see.⁸⁷⁰

However, the 1977 text “sheds light” on the overall meaning of the installation: “This work is a kind of investigation on the mechanism of superstition assumed as working method. In this case, the artist imagined to be the victim of a psychosis. Each part of the work is left unfinished because the artist interrupted it, let’s say, because a fly came in through the window or else”.⁸⁷¹ As an intentional dismissal of planning and eventual comprehensibility from the part of the observer, the “psychosis as a method” embraces obscurity and coopts the drawings themselves in the same discourse: they

⁸⁶⁸ Francesco Clemente, presentation text, March 1977, Dossier Francesco Clemente, BDP 199, Fonds Biennale de Paris, Archives de la Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Paris.

⁸⁶⁹ See BODEN 2006: 228-232. Clemente might have accessed information about the *machina sopora* in the Italian edition of Walter Grey Walter’s *The Living Brain*, see WALTER 1957: 122.

⁸⁷⁰ A room view of the exhibition was later published on *Art dimension* (14, June 1978: 36) with the title “Le quattro metà della stanza” (“The four halves of the room”).

⁸⁷¹ Francesco Clemente, presentation text, March 1977, Dossier Francesco Clemente, BDP 199, Fonds Biennale de Paris, Archives de la Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Paris.

emerge as fragments of an unseen repertoire, hinting to a private dimension behind the theatrical presentation of the enlarged photographs. The wide range of style, technique and degree in photographic manipulation (from pencil miniatures of little emblems, to childish image in ink) even made it difficult to recognise a single draftsman.

Approaching Clemente's recent practice, Corinna Ferrari's 1976 analysis explained his "stubborn and imperturbable claim to indicate content, in the form of fields of vision offered to the observer"⁸⁷² in Lacanian terms of the gaze field ("The gaze being outside the beholder does not allow one to look without being looked at"). Hence the focus on the margins of the image, the "thickness of its frames and the shifting terrain of its boundaries", and conversely a detachment from the subject matter and the drawing ("the disinterest in representation entails the detachment of the drawing from its support, in order to render it, photographed, to the delivery"). Nevertheless, Ferrari acknowledged the photographic mediation as a specific operation on language, rich in expressive possibilities:

"Obviously, along the ridge separating the impression from the reproduction, a shift takes place. To photograph means to isolate a detail, to cut it out of context, to subject it to enlargement, but above all to deal with the depth of the field, with all its confusing density, its uncontrollable variability, and which takes the constant camera operator by surprise. In a fickle scale, indeterminate remains the boundary between infinitely small and infinitely large, the detail giganticises within the borders it finds itself and disappears as detail. Subjected to an uncertain exposure time, the identical blurs, repeating itself. Repetition then becomes a chessboard with variable borders, where geometry becomes the order of transgression".⁸⁷³

IV.3 *Looked-at-drawings*

At *Disegno in Italia*, in addition to the untitled photograph of his hand on a "portrait of spirit" (**figure IV.21**), Clemente was represented by a second work, that is an untitled black and white photograph, dated to 1976, on the back of which there is the label of the Roman address of Studio d'arte Cannaviello (proving that the work passed through the gallery before it moved to Milan).⁸⁷⁴ The image represents a corner of Clemente's second studio in via Riari (**figure IV.62**): attached to an open window frame and seen against the light, a transparent sheet of paper shows a simple linear drawing with two irregular lines meeting at a corner. Clemente then printed the same drawing (possibly using an actual transparency) repeatedly and in various scales onto the same photograph. The *mise en abîme* effect obtained created a visual depth within the image, from the object photographed (a drawing) to the photograph as the support for Clemente's own signs.

⁸⁷² Ibid.

⁸⁷³ FERRARI 1976B: 59.

⁸⁷⁴ It was purchased by Mario Bertolini (see BALDACCI, GIACON 2015: 101, inv. 418).

This work marks a progressive definition of Clemente's photographic works as a reflection on the field of looking, or, in the Lacanian terms used by Corinna Ferrari, of the paradoxical coincidence of "looking" and "being looked". Drawing functions as a device that interrupts the passivity of the photographic picture and activates instead the emersion of the signs toward the beholder, up to the surface. This is the way in which drawing also progressively emancipated from the physical constraints of the framed photograph. It actually happened at the end of 1976, when Clemente installed various works at Galleria Sperone in Rome, among which *Pitture barbare* ("Barbarian paintings", **figure IV.63**).⁸⁷⁵ Earlier photographic works are visible on the other walls, including a typical *deja-vu* piece like *Passepartout*, that combined a number of the artist's photographs in matted images;⁸⁷⁶ and a second version of *Machina sopora* hanging on the back of the wall.⁸⁷⁷ In *Pitture barbare*, an ephemeral installation, Clemente expanded drawing outside the frames and reported it directly on wall. An installation plan gives information about some elements which were later excluded or not photographed in the known room views.⁸⁷⁸ *I sogni del morto* ("The dead's dreams")⁸⁷⁹ is reported as the title of the seven wall drawings that float freely around four framed photographs (among which a detail from the "stones in the wood"). They were traced on the wall "following the diapositives", that is by a projector, as demonstrated also by the fact that they exactly reproduce ink drawings on paper (in one case, in reverse), now held in the Basel Kunstmuseum (**figure IV.64**). The brushy technique and the support of the originals group them together with the "portraits of spirits", while another title for the wall drawings is documented as possibly referring to the human figure lying on the bottom of the composition.

Moreover, the composition principle of two figures openly evokes the Surrealist practice of the "exquisite corpse". For instance, the figure on the left is developed from the addition of incongruous images, like a ribboned hat, a cup, an agave, a house (of which the façade composes a face) and a branch of rosemary.⁸⁸⁰ The exquisite corpses had just been celebrated a year earlier at an exhibition at Galleria Schwartz, where 33 drawings on paper and black paper had been exhibited with the indication of the author as "Y. Tanguy, A. Masson, etc.", and a catalogue collected memories about the invention of the game and its receipt by Breton, Tzara and others. More than the wonder of

⁸⁷⁵ The photograph from *Domus* is illustrated in ROME 2013: 58.

⁸⁷⁶ The work was illustrated with the date 1973 in MANNHEIM 1980.

⁸⁷⁷ The photograph of the installation was sent for the catalogue of the Paris Biennial, see PARIS 1977: 105.

⁸⁷⁸ See MINOLA, MUNDICI, POLI, ROBERTO 2000: 280. The sketch includes also a work on the ground captioned "bambù" ("bamboo") and the unidentified work *Proverbi con la macchina e il filo* ("Proverbs with the engine and the wire"). The work on the ground corresponds to *Parole amorse* ("Lovely Words"), dated 1975 and executed by Clemente and his partner Alba Primiceri. The work was illustrated in BONITO OLIVA 1979C: 17. The artist remembers that it was shaped obliquely in order to be exhibited on the ground (Francesco Clemente in conversation with the author, New York, December 10th, 2021).

⁸⁷⁹ The title captions the image of *Pitture barbare*, together with a detail of the "stones", in BARI 1977: 259.

⁸⁸⁰ The figure on the right is the addition of three phallus edges, two knees and a tail, some hair, a Donald Duck-like face, and an elephant raising its trunk.

“unforeseen creatures” (**figure IV.65**), it was the dispersion of authorship to interest Clemente: imitating the effect of exquisite corpses, “images unthinkable for a single brain”,⁸⁸¹ he performed a split of creative self, or a form of schizophrenic subject (to echo a definition for Alighiero & Boetti). *Pitture barbare* was illustrated in an important interview that celebrated the young artist on *Domus* in December 1977, after he had participated to the Paris Biennale. Another work, *Arredo sottosopra* (“Upsidedown interior decoration”, **figure IV.66**), was proudly captioned as in the collection of Mario Bertolini, who purchased it at the Galleria Paola Betti in Milan in June 1977.⁸⁸² Together with the two photographs illustrated on *Domus*, the work now includes some of the objects portrayed upside-down (a rolled tempera painting on paper representing two *ghanti*, or Indian bells, in a landscape; two actual bell bodies, that in the picture sustain two bowed blank sheets; two framed photographs of the same ink drawing; a larger framed print of another drawing, a wheeled blackboard on which Sanskrit-like signs are marked). Traces of his earlier trip to India were already present in the iconographic imagery of his recent figuration, but this time Clemente brought back from Madras (where he had been in the first months of 1977) actual manufactured objects and a painting. The paper installation made for Paola Betti, photographed and manipulated in the coloured element of *Arredo sottosopra*, might be also a response to Indian popular painting culture. The artist arranged a room of paper, displaying about 30 large sheets on the ground and up the corners of a squared room, in order to compose an all-over drawing that illustrated a landscape. From the central photograph of the work, taken from above, Paola Betti and her partner, the artist Diego Esposito, are standing and stepping on the surface of this drawn picture. Around them, a narrative continuous scenario includes a vast variety of images: clockwise, starting from the right side, a cloudy sky, a pentagonal temple, a person rowing, a nymphaea leaf, an erupting volcano, an embracing and kissing couple, a sword and a shell-like sack, thunders from clouds, a man eating from a bowl, an aerial shot of a river and some cattle, a flying dove, a crouching man leaning toward his anus, a building and cultivated field. Many of the figures are foreshortened as seen from above, and at a closer look many little drawings appear inside the contours. This second level of focus is explored in the 12 squared photographs that frame the central one: each photo illustrates a detail from the large landscape, showing the figures within figures, various motifs and also the different techniques used by the artist (and it is not possible to exclude the intervention of collaborators),⁸⁸³ felt tip pens, coloured crayons, gouache, China ink. Most of the details reveal urbanistic plans, that is zenithal views of houses, football fields, stadiums, car parks, tree-lined squares, lawns, woods etc.: a sort of prosaic, realistic urbanism within the fantastic vision

⁸⁸¹ Simone Collinet in BRETON 1975: 30-31.

⁸⁸² The work is now held in the Museo del Novecento, see BALDACCI, GIACON 2015: 101, inv. 391.

⁸⁸³ In particular, the detail of the flying dove shows a fairy image of a man sitting in a flourishing garden of an Indian palace, in a style that does not coincide with any of Clemente’s stylistic facies.

of landscape (**figure IV.67**). Defined as “an interesting photographic work on the theme of environment”,⁸⁸⁴ *Arredo sottosopra* might be read as a stance toward the recent renewed focus on environmental art following the 1976 Venice Biennale. The photographic documentation of the all-over drawn environment reduces its ephemeral spatial phenomenology (that was enjoyed by the gallerists only) to an impossible point of view, from which the narrative landscape is fully visible in turn. Moreover, the detailing of the drawings also dismisses a subject in space but requires miniaturistic attention (and they in turn reveal a plan view, that is, the reduction to graphic forms of the urban perception).

An analogous divestment of spatial primacy is the result of the second black and white photograph, taken by Forcella, that was intentionally illustrated the wrong way up on *Domus*, thereby channeling attention on one of the objects of the still life on the floor. The reversible drawing, or better “double-face”, was an exemplar from a large series, in which Clemente drew calligraphic brushstrokes of China ink both rapidly and carefully, in order to obtain signs that could be read in both verses. A personal verification of the Lacanian theory of the gaze, this device states the dependency of the spatial orientation on the photographic gullibility against the independency of drawing as a constant look onto the beholder.

The most recent work documented on *Domus*, *Allegoria gratis* (“Free allegory”, **figure IV.68**), was installed at the Paris Biennale after Clemente’s first idea to display *Machina sopora* was rejected due to problems of space.⁸⁸⁵ For the first time, photography was excluded from the elements of the installation, which were: a stack of typed sheets; a white board crossed by a metal thread on which some Italian banknotes hung; and a framed drawing made in pastel on paper. On the stacked sheets, framing a short poem about a sort of economy of love (“Par amour? / Oui, je pourrai te donner à nouveau / cet objet. J’en exigerai toujours / ce prix que, comme aujourd’hui, toujours / tu sauras me donner”), two hearted ribbons develop on the page as well as on the sides of the stacks. A statement by the artist, also published on *Domus*, meant to explain the work only framed its obscurity:

“Allegory requires the agreement between the one who traces a sign and the one who reads it, between objects and men. For free means you don’t have to pay. Allegory is for free, as much as separation between a man and another man and between men and objects doesn’t mean you cannot have an instant allegory tying together heterogeneous facts... [and shortly giving back words to objects and to a couple of humans]”.⁸⁸⁶

⁸⁸⁴ The short description appears on the daily exhibition calendar in *Il Corriere della sera*, June 26th, 1977: 12.

⁸⁸⁵ In the participation form, Clemente presented the work *Machina sopora*, with the indication of the 11 elements, the property of Alba Primiceri and a space requirement of 100 square metres (Francesco Clemente, participation form, March 28th, 1977, Dossier Francesco Clemente, BDP 199, Fonds Biennale de Paris, Archives de la Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Paris). Françoise Brutsch from the biennale curatorial team answered that, “as for the requested space, I have to tell you that we are not sure we can give you so much space” (Françoise Brutsch, letter to Francesco Clemente, April 5th, 1977, Dossier Francesco Clemente, BDP 199, Fonds Biennale de Paris, Archives de la Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Paris).

⁸⁸⁶ CLEMENTE 1977: 52.

The couple were depicted in the pastel, of which the eloquence of refined technique and brilliant colours ended up making it the catalyst for the whole, otherwise obscure installation. It captured Achille Bonito Oliva when he skeptically reviewed the Paris show, and privileged Clemente's work, which he interpreted as "an allegory of love as utopia of exchange".

The drawing, happily light and uninhibited, presents two figures, the male one turned upwards, sign of erection and tension, the female one lying and close onto herself, kept together by the link of the hands, and nevertheless both turned narcissistically to their respective gaze".⁸⁸⁷

The psychoanalytical references were all the more justified for the iconography of the drawing, that echoed illustrations from yoga textbooks. When Bonito Oliva published only the drawing among the illustrations of Bonito Oliva's article *La Trans-avanguardia*, the meaning of the installation as a unity was lost in favor of the painterly fragrancy and brilliant color of the pastel.

⁸⁸⁷ BONITO OLIVA 1977C. The drawing was published autonomously in CLEMENTE 1978, the artist book edited on the occasion of the artist's show at the Centre d'art contemporain in Geneve, run by Adelina von Fürstenberg.

IV Plates

Chapter 5 *Returns to drawing*

0 “*Che c’è di nuovo?*” A 1978-79 debate

Bonito Oliva’s *Drawing/Transparence* became the benchmark essay on avant-garde drawing in Italy between 1976 and 1978.⁸⁸⁸ In those years Bonito Oliva seemed actually intent on associating his name with the theme of drawing, by reviewing exhibitions dedicated to the medium (like the Hamburg exhibition *Die Gezeichnete Welt*, “The drawn world”),⁸⁸⁹ or by supporting some artists clearly associated with it, such as Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi. Nevertheless, when he gathered these and other artists under the label of “trans-avanguardia italiana”, drawing was never mentioned as a common trait, in favor of painting. This can be explained by the fact that the critic wanted to rehabilitate expressive, opaque and textured media (by using an eloquent expression as the artist’s “hands in the dough”),⁸⁹⁰ while his interpretation of drawing had been played on an opposite, dematerialized “transparence”. Furthermore, by late 1979, the theme of a return to drawing had spread to a quantity of critical discourse and artists’ practices that was already impossible to be claimed by a single current. By the time exhibitions of Transavanguardia drawings were organized, such as *Die Enthauptete Hand* in the spring of 1980, the specific functions of a generalized return to the medium were partly out of focus, absorbed by a dominant narrative of “new subjectivity”, “mental and sensorial pleasure” and “manualità” (manual dexterity). At that point, the 1976 transparence had become “sign, stroke, image, effigy, line, rough draft, arabesque, landscape, blueprint, diagram, profile, silhouette, cartoon, illustration, figure, foreshortening, printing, vertical section, model, mould, caricature, chiaroscuro, graphite, engraving, chiaroscuro, graphite, engraving, maps, lithography, pastels, aquaforte, wood-cut”⁸⁹¹ (the opacity of a new materiality, or rather an intentional “critical thickness”). In other words, the risk was to return drawing to a genre and a gregarious position toward painting.

Bonito Oliva’s strategy has been recently put in context, dissected and analyzed a militant operation, characterized by obvious limits in terms of historical reliability. In this way, Denis Viva has also demonstrated how various, parallel “returns to painting” were on place when the Transavanguardia claims occupied the national and international scene, and conquered the market.⁸⁹² This is equally

⁸⁸⁸ The essay was reprinted not only in the author’s anthologies, see BONITO OLIVA 1978A: 76, but also in a more institutional venue such as the sixth international Biennale della Grafica, see FLORENCE 1978: 97-98. It was a very large exhibition that included an avantgarde section curated by the young art historian, Alessandro Vezzosi, who invited emerging artists such as Bagnoli, Salvadori and Chia.

⁸⁸⁹ See BONITO OLIVA 1977B.

⁸⁹⁰ BONITO OLIVA 1979C: 17.

⁸⁹¹ BONITO OLIVA 1982 (the first translation in English of his text published in Italian in BONN 1980).

⁸⁹² See VIVA 2020: 161-185.

true for the “returns to drawing”, that articulated a multifaceted debate from 1977 to 1979. This is the subject of this chapter, in which I aim to reconstruct a stratified and international phenomenon that includes artworks, exhibitions, galleries and critical interventions. **Appendix 3** describes its historical complexity, by listing various contributing materials: exhibitions catalogues and critical interventions, but also artist books and journal insertions, like those on *Domus* around 1979.⁸⁹³ and publications of various kind, of which only a significant few will be fully commented in the next paragraphs.

The most important text titled *Ritorno al disegno* appeared on the 1978 summer issue of *Segno*, an art journal printed in Pescara since 1976 by Lucia Spadano and Umberto Sala, who were close to Bonito Oliva. The article was a reflection on recent exhibitions (almost all already reviewed in the previous issues of the same journal) by Adriano Altamira, who was not only an art critic but a conceptualist artist himself. He declared to address an ongoing conversation (“there has already been talk of a return to drawing for some time now”) but made the attempt to frame critically and historically the phenomenon. In addition to a geographical mapping of the major artists involved, that pointed to a new Southern axis (Naples), Altamira defined not a “tendency” but an “diffused need”. The spring of 1978 spoke for itself, as a sequence of exhibitions in Rome (see **figures V.1-3**)⁸⁹⁴ and Milan (see **figure V.4-5**),⁸⁹⁵ an artist book entitled *Disegno finto* (“Fake drawing”), realized by the

⁸⁹³ In particular, CORÀ 1979 represents an interesting long article dedicated to the ephrasis of a drawing by Vettor Pisani. The work, titled *Il Coniglio non ama Joseph Beuys* (“The rabbit does not love Joseph Beuys”) was modelled after a XIV century drawing, an alchemical depiction of the death of “Adam as prima materia, pierced by the arrow of Mercurius” with “the Arbor philosophica” is growing out of him”, as captioned in the book where Pisani obviously found his source, namely Jung’s *Psychology and Alchemy* (illustration n. 131). Jung’s text was a common source at the time and it probably explains the coincidence with a very similar iconography used by Francesco Clemente in private drawings of the mid-seventies, see BELLONI 2008: 159.

⁸⁹⁴ Altamira referred here to an undocumented group show in April 1978 at the Studio Cannaviello in Rome (where a venue in via Luciano Manara ran parallel to the move to new Milanese gallery until June 1978). Cannaviello presented three debuting artists: the scarcely known Viviana Benassi, Valerio Cassano and Pietro Fortuna. Benassi worked with glass lunettes onto paper supports, on which she glued with figure stickers and drew with colored inks and graphite (see **figure V.1**, and the review on *Segno*, BENASSI 1978). Cassano collaged cutout figures from illustrated books on large sheets, intervening then with few traits of colored crayons. Cannaviello presented his works twice in 1978 (see the reviews CASSANO 1978 and STELLA 1978), in Rome and in Milan, where Mario Bertolini purchased three large 1977 drawings, see Baldacci, Giacon 2015: 96, inv. 293. The Roman exhibition reviewed in FORTUNA 1978 included semi-mechanical drawing that alternated copying ink, typed ciphers, and biro, in hermetic figures accompanied by captions. All three wrote extensive, hermetic texts with extremely cultured quotes from classic and contemporary philosophy, from Foucault to Barthes and Irigaray.

⁸⁹⁵ Luciano Inga Pin organized a group show titled *Voltar pagina...* (“Turning page...”), in which Angelo Sègnieri, Maurizio Corona and Giuseppe Maraniello were each assigned a room at Il Diagramma (**figure V.4**). The following year, the gallerist published the documentation of the group show in the catalogue of a new exhibition on new artists drawing (among others, Benassi, Fortuna, Davide Benati and Marco Tirelli), see INGA-PIN 1979. Altamira’s 1978 text on the return to drawing was reprinted in the appendixes, together with other writings that alimented the debate on drawing. Sègnieri arranged a crown of feathers of the floor and a set of 14 drawings on the wall: “The feathers of various birds gathered along different paths simulate a hunting exercise, while their placement in a circle, each marking different directions, corresponds to the size of the artist’s body” (ibid). Corona’s drawings “representing two eyes, one framed in gold and the other in silver”, “looked at” two other drawings, all elements of an installation that ended in 12 bunches of marguerites. As for Maraniello, his installation was titled *La casa dal tetto verde* (“The green roof house”), which referred to a painting

artist Enzo Cucchi and Bonito Oliva; a cover of the most important art journal of the time, *DATA*, dedicated to a painting and a drawing show by the artist Mimmo Paladino, a young artist from Campania who was based in Milan at the time (**figure V.6**): all “underlined, if also on different levels, the urgency of this situation”.⁸⁹⁶

It was easy to Altamira, who had exhibited himself with Paladino and other artists, to point out the photographic background of many of the artists involved. The transition from one medium to the other, or their porousness, suggested to the critic a hypothetical generalization for the clue of such shared resort to drawing:

“Is it not the planning-magic allusiveness that drawing has over the somewhat more definitive (or defined) image that photography gives? For that matter, even in areas of research less versed in the “magical”, less played on affabulation, than in this case, drawing has been resorted to for some years, or months, now, to take away some of this colder determinacy that photography implies: it is a bit like comparing the “real” landscape of filmic fiction of the theatrical “scene”, decidedly fake yet winking”.

Above all, Altamira constructed a possible genealogy for the new generational need, which “feeds on atmospheres and suggestions from previous trends and artists”, that is a “linea Calzolari-Kounellis” (“Calzolari-Kounellis line”). This lineage was characterized by two attitudes:

“on the one hand a tendency toward performance-installation (or at least the legacies of its freedom of expression). On the other, the sign as a note, as a minimal unit of poetic signification as a “hermetic hint” as a minimal emotion that we find precisely both in Kounellis and especially in Calzolari's hesitant “graffiati” [“scratched”]”.⁸⁹⁷

Another fundamental aspect of the analysis took into account the iconography of the figurative cases of return to drawing, and the problem of obscurity. Altamira distinguished a “(falsely) ingenuous and allusive figuration”, which dispenses with a real clue for the interpretation of subjects and references; and the charging of “dottissime lettere” on “disqualified signs, as for proper drawing”, that required the observer to disentangle overcomplicated meanings from the work (“here, the visitor has to come to terms with their own culture”, as in a quote from the artist Pietro Fortuna).

In both cases, however,

on the right in which a house was seen from above, inverting the colors of the roof and the lawn. Two tiny structures with wooden sticks formed a corner and a “stair” of triangular paper with a little sculpture of a centaur on top. The paper were pressed with the symbol of a centaur, alternatively turned upside down.

⁸⁹⁶ ALTAMIRA 1978A: 20

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid.

“the drawing - sign, graffito, minimal signifying unit, almost ideogram - in this case becomes a barely emotional medium of a symbolic hint that is often absolutely gratuitous or uncontrollable, preparing an opaque thickness around the work, whose mystery corresponds to the very hermeticism of the presentation. Of course, the nickname of “naif conceptual” that the maligners have attached to the new trend is absolutely misplaced, even to the extent that this attempt to render a certain artisanal depth to the artwork tends decidedly toward a poetic reading. [...] the turn of events favors more and more the trend that tends to the ineffable, which after the work done on the myth, now reaches the fable, increasingly isolating analytical research in an anachronistic territory, the coldest trend and rational. Even photography, in this sense, appears more and more as a means of yesterday; but perhaps also specifies its nature, which essentially tends toward the document/statement rather than the recited symbol, of which all the flaws emerge here”.⁸⁹⁸

Lastly, Altamira anticipated one of the main arguments of Bonito Oliva’s critical construction for the Trans-avanguardia, namely the embracing of a renovated freedom in respect to the austere previous season of conceptualism.

“It could be added that in some cases abandoning photographic research - in a certain sense one could say a label for another - and tending toward a form of project-drawing-painting does probably want to be a returning to fit into a new pattern, but precisely a freeing of oneself from certain impositions, the prelude to a greater freedom, a greater fullness, cheerfulness of expression, outside the thinness, the compulsory fasting that certain conventions imposed until yesterday, when artistic Ramadan meant chastising oneself at all costs”.

A month later, the young art historian Mariantonietta Picone Petrusa published an essay with the anticipatory title *La Post-Avanguardia*,⁸⁹⁹ and added some market analysis to Altamira’s observations. She linked the “birth of new stars in the market universe”, namely photography and drawing, to the crisis of graphics, apparently due to massive forgeries, a technical decay and even “the aberrant burden of a 35% VAT”.⁹⁰⁰ Drawing appeared an “art form that seemed obsolete and is instead experiencing a new youth [...] refounding a genre by appealing to its ancestors”, as demonstrated by the section of *Handzeichnungen* (where hand-drawing stressed the difference from mechanical graphics) at *documenta 6* the year before. However, Picone Petrusa admitted a critical distraction that oversaw the “activity as draughtsmen” of “avant-garde artists, who seemd very distant from this practice”:

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid: 21.

⁸⁹⁹ Bonito Oliva echoed this formula few months later, writing on Art dimension on *La post-avanguardia e una nuova idea dell’arte*, see BONITO OLIVA 1979A.

⁹⁰⁰ DRAGONE 1978.

“This is the case, for example, with Kounellis, who last winter held an exhibition of drawings in Rome at the Galleria Pio monti that were unexpectedly expressionist in origin, but decanted in a personal intimism of his own”.⁹⁰¹

In fact, Kounellis’ 1977 show had a large resonance as some drawings were reproduced on *Domus* (figure V.7); while in the same year a group of ten works on paper by the artist entered the collection of Ingvild Goetz through the Galleria Lucio Amelio in Naples.⁹⁰²

After his own article was republished in October 1978 on the photography journal *Fotografia Italiana*, Altamira returned on the drawing debate in March 1979.⁹⁰³ This time he proposed a broader perspective outlining the history of the medium in the past decade.

“Drawing in the sense that one tends to give this term today (and to a certain extent one could then also speak of painting), that is, of a type of self-sufficient practice, which no longer stands as it once did in a project relationship with the finished work, but which exhausts a certain type of activity in itself, creating a more precise and less artisanal relationship with mental activity, while taking advantage of the ambiguity of a kind of non-finished, at least non-mechanical (this is the meaning of the abandonment of photography), was born in Turin, with Paolini, Boetti, and then discovered its own more specific way with Salvo in the early 1970s. Few remember that at that time this had already served to interweave a dialectical relationship with Milan, for example with the activity of an artist like Fernando Tonello, who unfortunately died prematurely. From Boetti, some already fairly precise characteristics of the current declination of ‘sign’ are communicated to younger artists such as Clemente, the one who will perhaps act as a more direct intermediary with the greater number of these artists who, for example, having abandoned photography, will seek a new, more dilated dimension, with space and time of exhibition. It is not for nothing that De Maria and Clemente are the two artists Paladino says are most interesting to him in the scene at the time. But compared to Chia, Cucchi, who define themselves as ‘dry’ [“secchi”], and again Bagnoli, Salvadori, Paladino and Esposito discover a different dimension, in which both the sign and the installation have a more physical depth, not exempt from the memory of the ancient ‘decoration’”.⁹⁰⁴

The correlation of drawing and painting had been made evident to Altamira after the large mural paintings realized by Nicola De Maria and Paladino. However, the interrogation of painting as a

⁹⁰¹ PICONE PETRUSA 1978: 16.

⁹⁰² See BASEL 2012: 128-9, nn. 40-49. All are dated “c. 1977”, but at least n. 47 might be anticipated to 1976, as it is close to the one serving as the cover of the art journal *La Città di Riga*, published in October 1976.

⁹⁰³ “A few months after an initial article I had written on the subject of a return to drawing, the situation on which I was trying to make a few notes has, at the same time, strengthened and also, in some ways, clarified. In this sense, both new news of exhibitions and installations that took place shortly before during or immediately after the summer, then the two exhibitions that took place in Milan in November at Toselli’s and at Galleria Il Diagramma by Mimmo Paladino and Enzo Esposito, respectively, provided very interesting elements. If on the one hand it was hinted at a Campano-Milanese axis different from a Roman axis, there are now more elements to say why, and to confirm, even beyond some common origins, that while the Roman axis tends to connote itself more as a post-conceptual type of practice, the group of Campania artists working in Milan tends to... de-conceptualise themselves in rather (deliberately) diaphanous, but decidedly anti-conceptual terms: with an entirely new attitude toward the subjective and creative spontaneity” (ALTAMIRA 1979: 38).

⁹⁰⁴ Ibid.

medium already involved drawing in late 1977, when the avantgarde gallery Banco in Brescia organized two shows, each dedicated to “Otto opere di pittura contemporanea” (“Eight artworks of contemporary painting”), that gathered various works from the past decade under the quite unstable label of “painting”: from Boetti’s *Tela mimetica* to André Cadere’s colored stick; from Paolini’s canvases to Garutti’s series of color photographs. Two drawings were included, and participated of the definition of painting: a 1969 *Autoritratto benedicente* by Salvo (see **figure I.**) and an unidentified, 18x24 cm pastel by Mimmo Paladino titled *Silenzioso*.⁹⁰⁵

This chapter organizes the numerous manifestations of the return to drawing according to two main kinds of narratives: those that constructed a substantial continuity with the older generation and with the previous history of drawing; and those that operated to interrupt certain practices and discourses proper to the arte povera group and early conceptualism in general.

I Narratives of continuity

I.1 “La linea Calzolari-Kounellis”

Altamira’s most convincing argument was the individuation of a lineage Calzolari-Kounellis, and its double, interdependent characters: the spatial and compositional freedom rooted in the practice of performative installations, on one hand; and the autonomous value of the sign as hermetic or “poetic”, on the other. In this paragraph, Altamira’s hypothesis will be verified and precised by tracing the parable of Jannis Kounellis and Pier Paolo Calzolari’s use of drawing in the seventies.

The duo was far from coincidental, and by the mid-1970s Kounellis and Calzolari were often juxtaposed or contrasted, although they rarely exhibited in the same occasion. Both artists had trained and debuted as painters in the sixties,⁹⁰⁶ then turning to performance and installation in the most systematic, radical and influential way in the Italian context. Analogies between the two included the frequent involvement of other performers, the articulation of multiple rooms, an overall ceremonial structure; but also, the “lateral” presence of drawing in the two’s practice. As for Kounellis, a

⁹⁰⁵ Only the gallery leaflet documents the two exhibitions, respectively opening on November 25th and December 17th, 1977. The first one included: Jannis Kounellis (*Roma*, 1961), Alighiero e Boetti (*Tela mimetica*, 1967), Mario Schifano (*Baci Perugina*, 1967), Salvo (*Autoritratto benedicente*, 1969), Robert Ryman (*Untitled*, 1969), Claudio Olivieri (*Magnum*, 1973), Niele Toroni (*Impronte di pennello*, 1975), Andre Cadere (untitled stick, 1976). The second gathered: Piero Manzoni (*Achrome*, 1958); Richard Tuttle (*Away*, 1965), Joel Shapiro (untitled 1972), Giulio Paolini (*Pendant*, “1975”, but 1976, GPO-0327), Cy Twombly (*Dyonisus*, 1975), Giorgio Griffa (untitled 1975), Michele Zaza (*Coltivazione*, 1977), Alberto Garutti (untitled, 1977), Mimmo Paladino (*Silenzioso*, 1977).

⁹⁰⁶ In Calzolari’s painted works from 1966-68, paper has a recurrent and fundamental function, as a separated, theatrical object in a New-Dada style (Jim Dine would be a direct source) or incorporated in the support, see BOLOGNA 1999: 72-78.

seamless production of drawings accompanied parallelly his most radical installation and performances, above all as marketable materials, in which his visual themes returned in an openly pictorial way. It is the case with a series of large works on paper dated to 1973 in which a drawing is juxtaposed to an oil lamp, that was becoming a recurrent symbol in his work at large.⁹⁰⁷ One exemplar, now at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, was hanging in the office of the Galleria Stein in Turin (**figure V.9**).⁹⁰⁸ Kounellis displayed in such works a non-chalante dexterity in his hand-made interventions, mastering various techniques from elegant contour drawing to painstaking hatching to complex collage insertions. Hypothetically, this kind of drawings might have been exhibited in separated spaces or a “side-dimension”, that is not interfering with the development of the actions or with the meaning of the installations.⁹⁰⁹ For their role in the artist production, market function and execution quality, they can be compared with those realized by Vito Acconci in the same years: for instance, Acconci’s *Deflection for Landscape* (**figure V.10**) was executed as part of a series⁹¹⁰ in May 1974 for the artist’s exhibition at the Galleriaforma, organized via the Sonnabend gallery right after a Kounellis show – and curiously included a similar device of a cut, movable “window”, which the Italian artist had probably imitated from a Surrealist book cover from the late fifties.

Calzolari had a drawing show at the end of 1974, at the Galerie Baecker in Bochum, with works from 1969 to 1974. Although the show remains insofar undocumented, the majority of Calzolari’s works on paper corresponds to a typology of finished, highly delicate and mixed-media works, marking a substantial continuity within the time span of the Bochum exhibition. They also run parallelly his mostly performative production from 1973 to 1975, also for commercial reasons, like Kounellis, and now both drawings are scarcely documented, and mostly on the private market. However, the subordination of the works on paper within the exhibitions fell on the occasion of Calzolari’s actions from 1975, from *Avere pallido il viso avere bianco il viso* (“Have a pale face, have a white face”) in Pescara, organized by the Galleria Lucrezia De Domizio on April 12th, 1975 and above all *Untitled*, held in large villa in Milan and organized by the Studio Paola Betti in October 31st, 1975. The former took place in many venues, so that its score was “almost impossible for visitors remaining in one place to comprehend”, and some sheets of paper were installed in the gallery, some displayed as a

⁹⁰⁷ See DI DOMENICO 2018: 226-228.

⁹⁰⁸ I am thankful to Esther Adler and Sheldon Gooch for making this information available (found in a description of the piece by Gianfranco Benedetti) during my visit to the MoMA Department of Drawings and Prints

⁹⁰⁹ A memory by Folker Skulima suggests a display like this in relation to Kounellis’s *Untitled* taking place and action on December 17th, 1971: “The audience came along to this – today it would be called a performance – and they were surprised that everything was so quiet, and that there was only this one painting, with the cellist [Mario Starita] constantly playing this fragment of the score that could be seen in the painting. A perpetuum continuum. It went for hours and was really wonderful. There were drawings as well” (SKULIMA, BÄTZNER 2019: 359).

⁹¹⁰ The other element was titled *Deflection from Mystery*, featuring an analogous horizontal composition and the insertion of a photograph. On this kind of works on paper, see the American artist’s own account in ACCONCI 1976.

series on the wall (six typewritten short poems) and some lying on a triangular table (some undocumented drawings) to be handled by the artist himself, juxtaposed to half a walnut.⁹¹¹ The latter, also composed by numerous stages happening at the same time, included a room where “large blocks of drawing paper hang on walls [...] They are the preparatory studies related to the installation and the explanation for the used symbols. On the pages of one block, some living snails leave their traces. The open windows [...] make the air penetrate, which moves the drawn sheets creating force fields”.⁹¹²

The ream of sheets was a device that originated in the early conceptualist season, and examples can be pointed out in late-1960s works by artists close to Calzolari, such as Paolini and Emilio Prini.⁹¹³ But the tautological standardization of the ream, a device that makes the page an opaque object and blocks its openness to representation and projection, is dismissed in the stacks staged within the installations and performances. The solid sum of identical sheets is enlivened, interfered with and crossed by natural or overtly fantastic elements, such as the wind, or even a model train, that lifted the sheets in Calzolari’s exhibition at Paolo Marinucci and Tucci Russo in Turin in 1977 (**figure V.11**).⁹¹⁴

Sometimes, the drawings installed in Calzolari’s work since 1975 are referred to explanatory sketches, containing planning information on the overall mechanism of the performance. It is worth precisizing that this material evidently did not serve “technically” to the artist to plan or to communicate the making of his works. It is doubtful that works on paper participated at all in the invention and composition of the installative performances, which as a practice are more similar to theater study and elaboration; while it is certain that the audience could not address this material for a clarification of their experience: even if they were in fully visible conditions, the figures represented tend to painterly indistinctness and constantly blend with delicate signs; but in general, the apparition of this drawn material was cryptic if not disquieting (thinking of snails leaving their traces on the paper...). Therefore, it is actually detachable an overt disruption of drawing as project, a turning point in the history of conceptualist drawing that was once more tempestively marked.

In his text, Altamira stated that Calzolari and Kounellis had already influenced the intermediate generation of Salvadori and Bagnoli. In this sense, Salvadori’s inaccessible *Disegni d’angolo* and Clemente’s *Allegoria gratis* (see **figure IV.68**) can also be indicated as a “haunted ream”. Bagnoli

⁹¹¹ See RIVOLI 1994: 176, and the photographic documentation in VADUZ 2019: 120-124, 405.

⁹¹² RIVOLI 1994: 177. Seven sketches are documented in VADUZ 2019: 406-407. Two of the drawings may be identified with the those illustrated and dated 1975 in BOLOGNE 1999: 41.

⁹¹³ For instance, Paolini’s 1968 *Necessaire* (GPO-0145) is a stack of white paper sheets, while Prini’s 1969 *Film TV 5 min* and *Magnete* involved the presentation of piles of photographic prints.

⁹¹⁴ In the same exhibition, that lasted eight months and was composed of various interventions scattered all over the big room, there was another drawing element, a cardboard disk put on a record player that carried some little faces.

had even anticipated Calzolari's installation modality concerning loose drawings as unreliable projects of blurred readability. Already for his first exhibition on March, 21st 1975, the Florentine young artist arranged a performative path divided in stages all around Salvadori's new, unfurnished studio in Milan (a former typography workshop). In the review of this ephemeral show by Corinna Ferrari, the performance paradigm emerges and suggests a dialogue with Calzolari: "The experience does not necessarily begin at the door accessed, perhaps at the walled window at the opposite end, in the dark room where something happens. Here, in the narrow conical space, which admits the company's minimal-intense, a small ritual happens: the match shines light on some drawings scattered on the floor, traced in the dark, the automatic representation of the external world outside the window. The representation closes and refers to itself"⁹¹⁵ (**figure V.12**). Bagnoli had actually executed the drawings rapidly with a simple felt tip pen, by looking not at the sheets but at the view outside the window before it got walled. The drawings appeared as unreadable architecture sketches, sometimes mere conglomerates of lines, and together with the instantaneous conditions of fruition (by a match), their referential presence contrasted the function of the project as a representation and information about objects or ideas.

A not dissimilar refutation of the project was also found in Kounellis's sketches, although sometimes they are also referred to as preparatory and one can perhaps understand their function of free graphic invention for the fixation of certain visual themes. However, drawings such as those published as "studies" for his action at the ADA - Aktionen Der Avantgarde in Berlin in 1974 (**figure V.8**)⁹¹⁶ cannot be read as elaboration pieces, and anticipated the autonomy of the works on paper collected in the drawing exhibition organized at Pio Monti in June 1977.

Kounellis had also maintained a frank pictorial use of drawing on wall as an element of his spatial installation. Already in 1974, one of the rooms of his four-environment installation at Galleria Christian Stein in Turin contained drawings on wall, around "a small table with an oil lamp on it, and next to it [...] a chair on which sat a dancer in a tutu" (**figure V.13**) producing the effect of "late-XIX century sweet and romantic environment, but also dangerously closed": "in the second room, painted in white and without windows, he traced on the walls a myriad of signs that soar through the air like a flight of swallows".⁹¹⁷ When Antonio Tucci Russo proposed a show to Kounellis in 1978 right after Calzolari's own installation (titled *Luogo, persona, tempo, ognuno dei quali influisce sull'altro*,

⁹¹⁵ FERRARI 1975: 14. Light conditioned the perception and conceptual presence of some sheets of paper in Bagnoli's second show in Pescara a year later, where a projector was positioned flush with the wall where they hang. See DE DOMIZIO 1976.

⁹¹⁶ See the memory of Folker Skulima about Kounellis' participation at Aktion der Avantgarden 2 in Berlin, while he was artist in residence: "He did lots of preparatory studies and sketches for a three-meter-wide painting of a nude for the stage" (SKULIMA, BÄTZNER 2019: 363).

⁹¹⁷ MINUCCI 1974.

“Place, person, time, each of which affects the other”, which in addition to the room with the toy train even included the removal of one of the outer walls of the gallery), the gallerist overtly wanted to thematized a certain competition between the two analogous researches – ending up to confirm a certain lineage between the two artists. For his untitled intervention, Kounellis installed a spiralic railway around a pillar in the gallery on which a train model lied, and above all marked a wall with two long cuts, filled with black paint (Tucci Russo remembered that he had made the cut himself on the artist’s instructions, **figure V.14**).⁹¹⁸

1.2 Fragility, provisional places, portability and chance: the poetry of drawing

Altamira indicated Calzolari and Kounellis’ legacy in a strategy of compositional and spatial freedom which came from installation and performance; as well as a use of “the sign as a note, as a minimal unit of poetic signification, as a ‘hermetic hint’, as a minimal emotion”, a residual of their former training in painting. The most evident heir of the lineage, Paladino had debuted in the late Sixties in Campania, between Benevento and Caserta, and after a discreet career (he also worked as a journalist), he achieved a name within the group of numerous artists using photography in a conceptualist way. Between 1976 and 1977, Paladino started experimenting privately with direct application of charcoal on wall⁹¹⁹ and the juxtaposition of framed photographs and drawings. His first exhibition including actual works on paper, at the Galleria De Ambrogi Cavellini (**figure V.15**), was reviewed by Barbara Radice, who became an important promoter of his, later publishing a long interview⁹²⁰ with the artist and including him in the 1978 Italian issue of *LAICA - Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art*. In Paladino’s new works, photographs and drawings were composed on the wall in geometric *accrochages*, and titled after Borges’ *The garden of forking paths* or *One Thousand and One Nights*. Photographs of flying swallows and rather ambiguous “flame-flowers that seem carnivorous plants, not really quite vegetal” were “both regressed to a very low denotative level”.⁹²¹ Such “minimal units of meaning” were exactly the channel through which Paladino crossed the two separated media. However, Paladino’s imagery opened up a new critical discourse on figuration and emotion, as subtly balanced between escapism of a dream condition and a disquieting opaqueness of

⁹¹⁸ Antonio Tucci Russo in conversation with the author, Torre Pellice, March 9th, 2023. The gallerist remembered also to have intentionally triggered the comparison between the two artists, who were the most important representatives of performance art in Italy and shared some features (like the tendency to organize and act “painterly”) and even details of their imagery (like the model trains that both inserted in their 1977 exhibitions at Tucci Russo). Kounellis executed a drawing too, as a poster for the exhibition, see CATALOGO BOLAFFI 1979: 155.

⁹¹⁹ Paladino first practiced wall drawing privately, in the empty rooms of a former barracks in Benevento, see CELANT 2017: 89. Some photographs documented his interventions, drawings of a moon and a bird, which is related to an actual stuffed black bird he had already used in previous installations, see *ibid*: n. 121.

⁹²⁰ See RADICE, PALADINO 1978.

⁹²¹ Mirella Bandini in TURIN 1977: [4].

meaning. Already in 1977, Radice tried to explain his novelty: “Mimmo Paladino rhythms his works on imperceptible variations, on states of transition so fragile, so ephemeral that not even uncertainty seems a sufficiently vague category to indicate them. [...] He invents balloons in which beings survive as fetuses suspended in a painless air that is no longer/yet life and not even/yet death. [...] But in its own strange way this planet attracts, it attracts as a corridor of salvation, as a bomb shelter, acknowledged false-myth but terrain-pause from stresses, and yet, it attracts because of the discomfort it manages to arouse, a discomfort without alternatives in which there is perhaps room to imagine wakefulness after the operation”.⁹²²

Moreover, a childish vein was detachable (“[Paladino] draws his worlds without chlorophyll with colored crayons, with pale and wispy, tiny colors”), which carried a psychological function. For example, the artist himself described the figure of an animal which often appeared in his pastels and watercolors as “the evil animal” (see **figure V.5**),⁹²³ quoting a Jungian passage (drawn from the dream of a little girl), the same that had been used by Marco Bagnoli for an exhibition in Turin in 1975. The artist himself explained his sensibility in a letter sent to the critic Mirella Bandini and published on the catalogue of the Turinese group show *Fotografia come analisi*.⁹²⁴ His words appeared paradigmatic for the diffused phenomenon of art practices shifting from photography to drawing in those years (and were definitely known to Altamira):

“[...] what interests me the most is the absolute freedom of reading through the fantastic datum which I propose; thus the causal layering of all the possibilities of decipherment, which simultaneously giving sack to intellectualistic schematicity generate a state of duplicity, reflexivity and thus ambiguity, which I believe is a constant in all my work. You know that these days I like to use photography less and less in favor of drawing, this is because I feel it shortens the distance that separates the ‘creative’ moment from the final act of the work; drawing is writing, it is immediate translation of an emotion, while photography chills this emotional state because of its slow technical temporality. [...] In the latest works [...] often the ‘objective’ photographic image is juxtaposed with the drawing (fragment of pure creativity); and is this not once again attempting the path of specular ambiguities, of displacement, of uncertainty?”⁹²⁵

By 1978, Paladino had fully deployed a multiple vocabulary for his own “return to drawing”. It spanned from an expressive manipulation of glass frames and plate (particularly elongated shapes and arranged in complex ensembles), retouched in ink; to very traditional graphite, ink and crayon figurative drawings (see **figure V.5**), but also pastels and watercolors, executed on Japanese paper of

⁹²² RADICE 1977: 64-65.

⁹²³ Ibid: 64. A drawing dated 1976 shows the earliest depiction of this animal, see BASEL 1981: 39, n. 15.

⁹²⁴ where Paladino sent a large wall-installation titled after Borges’s novel, *Il giardino dei sentieri che si biforcano* (“The garden of bifurcating paths”). It was made by 26 photographs of flying swallows and one drawing representing a couple of “animali cattivi”.

⁹²⁵ Mimmo Paladino, letter to Mirella Bandini, April 12, 1977, published in TURIN 1977.

rough grain. Collage unexpectedly achieved new importance, as demonstrated by a 1978 series of six works on paper, that were purchased by Mario Bertolini from Enzo Cannaviello, after a passage from the Galleria dell’Ariete. The pasted fragments of different kinds of paper, often aged or scarce quality, typically contained images and functioned as figurative organization of the rarefied composition, together with ink and gouache intervention, and hand-drawings. On one, in addition to the most “à la Kounellis” subject, the steaming ship, Paladino pasted two cut fragments from an earlier watercolor with two princess-like figures pointing to each other (**figure V.15**). Here, the hermetic meaning was set through a fairy tale imagery, that had immediate interlocutors in the contemporary works of other artists like Giuseppe Gallo⁹²⁶ and Valerio Cassano (see **figure V.3**), who also collaged actual figures and organized them with colored crayons.

This specific imagery was alien to the art history and conceptualism of previous years, but was timely sanctioned by the choice of *DATA* contributor, Rosamaria Rinaldi, to review Paladino’s exhibition at Giorgio Persano’s in March 1978 with a short fable, titled *Desideria e gli esserini* (“Desideria and the tiny creatures”).⁹²⁷ The show immediately became famous for the inclusion of an oil painting, *Silenzioso mi ritiro a dipingere un quadro* (“Silent, I retreat to paint a picture”), published on the cover of the magazine. Already in the late spring of 1977, Paladino had inaugurated forms of pigmentation of walls that paved the way to return to painting tout court.⁹²⁸ In Turin, *Disegni verticali* (“Vertical drawings”)⁹²⁹ decorated the entire space as juxtaposed unities, with single, unrelated subjects, on walls, ceiling and even one on a window frame. They were all equally mysterious: a curious recurrence was assigned to the theme of fire: burning bikes, gates and houses;⁹³⁰ a purple-red ray blossoming on one edge; a sort of Saint Marguerite with a sleeping dragon; a mountain on a perch (**figure V.16**). The higher in the space, the lighter, less colored and less painterly signs are used: on the ceiling, long lines with no apparent direction or meaning crossed the space.

According to Altamira, the most painterly features in Paladino’s work revealed his roots in the Calzolari-Kounellis line. In addition to the color palette and the already mentioned lyricity, the peculiar lack of compositional intention at Galleria Persano, and consequent suspension or crowding

⁹²⁶ See his collage illustrated on *Segno*, 9 (March 1979), p.n.n.

⁹²⁷ RINALDI 1978.

⁹²⁸ In Paladino’s career, a turning point may be indicated at the late spring of 1977, when two exhibitions opened at the same time, in Milan and Naples. At the Galleria dell’Ariete, he exhibited earlier photographic works, arranging *Spirale* (“Spiral”) on the floor (a spiral of photographs of sky views crossed by a bird); and other elongated glass pieces with ink retouches in walls. The show at Lucio Amelio, *Viaggio Notturno* (“Nocturnal Journey”), is fully documented in CELANT 2017: 100-101, 110-111, 117. Paladino covered a large wall with a blue pigment. This first approach to wall painting was explored further at Galerie Paul Maenz in Cologne in June 1978 and at Galleria Toselli in October 1978.

⁹²⁹ This title is documented on the back of the photographs of the installation in the Galerie Paul Maenz Köln records, b. 51, f. 18, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

⁹³⁰ The motif of the burning, unriden bike appeared on the invitation card of Paladino’s show at Galerie Tanit in Munich (June 1978), see CELANT 2017: 127, n. 183. The ajar gate returns as the subject of a large, almost monochromatic painting (*Cancelli*, “Gate”, see *ibid*: 115, n. 171). Interestingly, the depiction of the tiny burning house, with desperate tenants, simulated a paper support, framed by a graphite rectangle, from which a jet of purple color descends.

out of the signs, might be compared with Kounellis' purely lyrical and "painterly" cuts in the wall at Paolo Marinucci & Tucci Russo. From 1977, Paladino had also started to use a typical effect of accumulation of short segments, occupying vast surfaces of large drawings and pointing to a central subject: it is the case with one of the three drawings sent to the first Międzynarodowe Triennale Rysunku ("International Drawing Triennale") held from June to August 1978 in Wrocław, Poland (**figure V.17**).⁹³¹ The title *Viaggio notturno* ("Nocturnal Journey") was assigned to a number of works on paper, as in the case with *Silenzioso* ("Silent", **figure V.18**).⁹³² The vertiginous dilation of signs, the execution obstinacy and the apparent banality of composition served to "leaven the page to the extreme", as Gualdoni noticed,⁹³³ activating the entire surface and the limits of the support. Paladino's graphite traits shared rather the fragile suspension and delicacy of Calzolari and Kounellis (a convincing comparison can be made with the wall graphite signs, reviewed as "a flight of swallows", at the Galleria Stein in 1973, see **figure V.13**). Moreover, solutions of that kind alimeted the prosecution of the lineage and spread among the young generation. Another Southern artist mentioned by Altamira, Enzo Esposito, used an extremely similar accumulation in multiple works of his exhibition at the Studio Trisorio in Naples, in April 1978. Echoing Paladino's narrative, Esposito had transitioned from a photography to drawing, to wall painting.⁹³⁴ Interviewed by Altamira in early 1980, the artist highlighted the ephemeral status of the new large-scale installations of overt painterly style (**figure V.19**): "the wall is a temporary place. You can paint things on it then erase them... it's like working in a completely empty space where every mark you make slips away, it is not memorised and this made me feel a sense of total freedom/disappearance...". The freedom, and lightness, also involved this generation's new relationship with sources from other artists, unreflectively assumed or even "quoted" from other artists ("You say you find some things of a certain abstractionism, it is probable, precisely because there is not that rigidity toward one's work that is typical of those who adhere to an ideological guide... everything is more elastic... I let citations of certain artistic forms slip through my fingers, precisely because I do not take any as a model or guide").⁹³⁵ In 1980, Bonito Oliva's rhetoric of Transavanguardia was evidently already at work in establishing an anti-ideological

⁹³¹ See WROCLAW 1978: n.n.p., held at the Muzeum Architektury we Wrocławiu (the exhibition is not included in CELANT 2017).

⁹³² "L'ascoltatore ricorderà quei bellissimi disegni che Mimmo Paladino faceva scorrere nel 1977 sotto l'orecchio sordo di Goya, alla fine del concerto grosso delle avanguardie. S'intitolavano invariabilmente «Silenzioso», avvertenza per l'udito che tornerà in titoli successivi e nel blu dei Notturni affrescati" (Trini 1981)

⁹³³ Flaminio Gualdoni in MODENA 1987: 15.

⁹³⁴ The turning point of 1976-77 in Esposito's career was later indicated by the artist himself ("photography meant to filter the art making through a series of technical instruments, which pretended [...] to be the mediators of any "intervention", ESPOSITO, ALTAMIRA 1980: 22), and was later accepted as such in the literature, see BARILLI 1998: 21-33.

⁹³⁵ ESPOSITO, ALTAMIRA 1980: 22.

and stylistically fluid narrative that was soon shared by the artists themselves.⁹³⁶ Facing the same problem (“style is no longer a stable fact, but is constantly evolving: even references and quotations that may suit the artist are incorporated without difficulty”), Altamira had provided a different reading:

“What Barilli calls a ‘wall Kandisky or Mirò’, however, is also influenced by closer influences, from the aforementioned Clemente to the latest Calzolari: the same primary colours, yellow, blue, red, and yellow, which is also the same yellow that we find in certain things by Kounellis. The tendency to rediscover (to re-cover) vast surfaces becomes stronger, while drawing regresses, in some formulations, toward graffiti, more subtle and less visible in the vaporous spreading of colour”.⁹³⁷

Kandinsky, Mirò, and Matisse, were the first references coming to mind looking at the work of the southern, Turin-based artist Nicola De Maria, who was curiously ignored by Altamira, and nevertheless was among the first ones to approach wall painting. In May 1977, he frescoed a wall at Galleria Toselli in Milan and titled the room *La leggenda* (“The legend”), as the artist concomitantly spread the rumor that a gold sheet was lying underneath his painting. The fresco, an essential landscape of two, unblended colors, yellow and blue, meeting at a delicate demarcation curve, was executed a second time in Paris, at the Biennale des Jeunes. The 23-year-old artist had been sponsored by the critic Bandini and was assigned two contiguous rooms. The wall paint was executed in the second and more internal space, while the vestibule presented some earlier photographic works and two unidentified drawings, titled *Labirinto* and *A 1848 D*.⁹³⁸ They were extremely tiny in format (respectively 20 x 21 cm and 9 x 9 cm), and inaugurated an extensive production of “disegni tascabili” (“pocket drawings”) De Maria carried out between 1977 and 1978 (and later also collected in serial works like *40 ladroni*, “40 thieves”)⁹³⁹. Such drawings were actually portable, installed ephemerally

⁹³⁶ Also, the return to drawing, painting and figuration started soon to be looked at as politically conservative and compromised with the market. An early trace of this idea can be found in Tommaso Trini’s positive judgement on Paladino, who “creates figures and thoughts that have not been at home in art for a long time. There is something secret and unsettling in his way of drawing. Not least because this is how two or three other young people like him work. Of course, Ensor, the expressionists, the anguish killed by a sleepwalker.... These are figures that even the Left understands” (Tommaso Trini, presentation text in CATALOGO BOLAFFI 1979: 57).

⁹³⁷ ALTAMIRA 1979: 38.

⁹³⁸ The information on the installation comes from an interview with the artist, on July 14th, 2023. I am thankful to Nicola De Maria for the enthusiastic sharing of details about his early career. The list and technical information on the works brought to Paris can be found in the artist’s consignment note, March 1977, Dossier Nicola De Maria, BDP 203, Fonds Biennale de Paris, Archives de la Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Paris. In the first letters of the artist’s correspondence, he sketched the plan of a single room and a resuming scheme of the fresco which is named as *Labirinto*. The artist also brought to Paris (but probably did not install) a work already presented at Lucio Amelio’s in 1976, *Chorus Silentium*, that consisted in projected diapositives. In addition to the wall painting and the drawings, the photograph *Sconosciuto* was included and was chosen to be illustrated on two full pages in the review of the Biennale on DATA, see BANDINI 1977: 62-63.

⁹³⁹ *40 ladroni*, a group of forty 6x9cm works on paper in graphite, pastel, wax crayons and gouache, is partly illustrated in MANNHEIM 1980. Some exemplars have recently appeared on the private market, others have been collaged in larger works on paper in a second moment.

and most kept private (and showed on request).⁹⁴⁰ In 1978, the artist brought some (executed in graphite with delicate segments that could evoked Kandinsky) to Milan to be photographed for an insertion on *Domus* (**figure V.21**). The author of the page, Salvatore Licitra, the son of Lisa Ponti, interpreted at best the delicacy of the sheets (all measuring only 6 x 9 cm), and showed them as mobile objects composed in an irregular ensemble; a poetic text provided a hermetic comment to the image.⁹⁴¹ Only two months earlier, Licitra has published an insertion with the same editorial function and taste (**figure V.22**), to present Calzolari's *Cosiella ebbe il suo bambino...*, a handmade multiple edition of 30, made in late 1977 for the artist's important exhibition at the Museo Diego Aragona Pignatelli Cortes.⁹⁴² The title came from the text⁹⁴³ that was silkscreened on the sheets together with the red dot and the five signs above (petals? Rays?); Calzolari then differentiated each exemplar by threading a copper wire arching over the image. Richard Tuttle's *Wire pieces* were the obvious model (**figure V.23**), at a moment of highest fortune following the American artist's retrospective of drawing at the Kunsthalle Basel in the summer of 1977⁹⁴⁴: like Tuttle's, Calzolari's thread was photographed in order to register the subtlety of the shadow projection that doubled the line on the page. However, the comparison expressed at best the possible distance between a minimal, space-based use of the line, on one hand; and a hint to figuration and poetic contents, as Calzolari shaped the thread to trace the profile of a female mouth, possibly an apparition of the protagonist of the typewritten poem.

In short, the continuity of the Calzolari-Kounellis line could articulate an entire spectrum of devices and strategies for delicacy, ephemerality, hermeticism and suspension of the signs, and gathered genealogies rooted in earlier experiences of conceptualist drawing. In this sense, another exquisitely conceptualist element, the intentional use of chance, became a substantial feature of the return to drawing in the late seventies. Calzolari and Kounellis' background as abstract painters made all the more obvious the use of accidental stains, semi-calculated burns and random composition of forms, which all penetrated into their conceptualist, albeit richly material, practice. A final comparison, as a

⁹⁴⁰ The artist recalls the pocket drawings were presented in 1978 in an art fair (Bologna or Bari?) but only on request of the public.

⁹⁴¹ “[Desire] demands determined falls in love. Desire commands to occupy the boundary walls and lurk at the gates. backs to the wall that is sand, the gaze in trouble: it doesn't choose: stay all night looking one way or follow the natural hunger and spoil everything around by taking advantage of the darkness. if the house aims to be the substance of life it is necessary to put itself at its service and litter the yard with traps. Thus the natural hunger marries a new desire: as soon as it gets dark woe to those who resist” (DE MARIA 1978 – missing capital letters in the original).

⁹⁴² It was illustrated on the poster of the exhibition, which opened on October 27th, 1977. Lucio Amelio was probably the editor of the multiple.

⁹⁴³ “So she had her baby and named him Swallow / but the birth of the child did not bring a single piece of news and she soon / realized that she was abandoned and forgotten. / So her primitive love turned to hatred / she climbed to the top of the mountain and here she prayed at length for revenge / on him who had abandoned her. / A storm broke out so violent that she believed / there had been an answer to her prayer”.

⁹⁴⁴ The show was accompanied by a *Wire pieces* exhibition at the Galerie Annemarie Verna, which was then working on the *List of Drawing Material of Richard Tuttle*, edited in 1979.

further segment of inter-generational connection that substantiates the narrative continuity, can be articulated between two drawings by Kounellis and Sandro Chia. In a work on paper of undocumented provenance now held at the MoMA in New York, Kounellis playfully left some sepia stains (coffee?) and seven ink blots falling on the page and then traced a tangle of lines interacting with the blots (**figure V.24**). In contrast with the cold treatment and “ready-made” sampling of random drippings in most Surrealist tradition of chance strategies, the artist reacted with an overkill of dramatic lines and troubled, fragrant signs of pencil hatching blurred with fingers. On his turn, Sandro Chia addressed directly the theme by the programmatic work *Caso* (“Chance”), which he meant to exhibit at the Paris biennale, before giving up due to not covered shipping and travel costs. Although he planned to executed a very large triptych of paintings on canvas,⁹⁴⁵ the mysterious work documented in the catalog appears as a tiny work on paper, written with notes and some diagrams, almost covered by colored blots (**figure V.25**). The image corresponds to the “sheet drawn and inked in blue [...] inside a small box and under a pane of glass”⁹⁴⁶ that was reportedly inserted on an old table, in the context of a multiple and undecipherable installation at the Galleriaforma in Genoa in early 1977.

II *Old Master Draftsmanship and Paul Maenz’s Colonia Italiana*

Although it demonstrates a careful knowledge of the recent history of Italian art, the passage from Altamira’s 1979 text about the connection between Turin and Milan via Paolini and Salvo may be slightly corrected. If Paolini’s paradigm of contour drawing is definitely compelling for Tonello’s drawn copies after Neoclassical etchings, it would be simplistic not to distinguish the case of Salvo from this lineage. Instead, it is rather interesting to discuss Salvo’s drawings from 1973 as an early step of a broad phenomenon of appropriation of the Old Masters, and their refined draftsmanship, which at the end of the decade merged with the trend of quotation of the *Trans-avanguardia* and *Anacronismo*. Moreover, a sort of “linea Salvo”, certainly less pronounced than the Calzolari-Kounellis lineage, can be discerned by following the special attention dedicated to Italian art by the Galerie Paul Maenz in Cologne. In particular, Maenz dedicated his whole 1978 calendar to established and younger Italian artists, registering the expansion of drawing in a generational spectrum.

⁹⁴⁵ See the consignment note in Dossier Sandro Chia, BDP 197, Fonds Biennale de Paris, Archives de la Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Paris.

⁹⁴⁶ CONTI 1977. I am thankful to Alessandro Ferraro for sharing with me the only review on Chia’s show.

When around 1975 the German critic Werner Lippert wrote an essay on Salvo (announcing the artist's catalogue raisonné that never saw the light),⁹⁴⁷ it was clear that the fundamental theme of the artist's path was the "self-portrait" as a device to interrogate "the problems of the history of culture and the formation of cultural theories". This reading emerged from the consideration of his recent works altogether: photomontages with his portrait inserted in place of various personages; impersonations of Christ in the action of blessing; transcriptions by hand of texts that were modified to include himself as a character; and lastly, large drawings and paintings where "he inserts his own portrait in famous paintings re-painted by him"⁹⁴⁸ (**figure V.26**). Since the late Sixties, drawing was a privileged field of Salvo's research, as demonstrated by the self-portraits drawn in pencil or pastels "in the act of blessing" mentioned in the first chapter and dating from 1969. It is worth noticing that he inscribed them with the caption "approximate reproductions of blessing Salvo executed by himself": the artist performed a "religious" exaltation of his self and at the same time seemed to admit his limits, as the approximation of his draftsmanship. Although in the same years he resorted frequently to photography as a much less approximate medium of "reproduction", Salvo maintained an awareness and conceptual use of his personal "hand", for instance in the form of handwriting, that distinguished him from others (from Paolini, for example, who looked for neutrality in writing and drawing as an indisputable form of precision). Salvo's own drawing style showed that he was a self-taught artist, as he adopted a very simple hatching, avoiding dramatic chiaroscuro and often encountering some evident clumsiness. An "average style", so to say, easily recognizable and personal and therefore manipulable at will in conceptual terms. For example, such draftsmanship was perfect to the exercise of copy of Old Masters' paintings and drawings not as a reproduction (by retracing or other exact devices) but as an appropriation and impersonation, as the artist's style remained intentionally recognizable. When he started to exhibit large drawings made in pencil and crayons, and then painting on large canvases, in art galleries like Franco Toselli or Paul Maenz, their anachronism and conceptual provocation was obvious, and dramatically expressed by the ambition to a magniloquence to obtain without the necessary tools and skills. This form of self-portrait as an ambitious, obstinate artist even touched on a personal form of "institutional critique", or at least a reflection on the institutionalized tradition of Western painting. In fact, when he was involved in *Projekt 74* through his gallerist Paul Maenz, Salvo obtained that his painting (a free copy of *Saint Martin and the poor* by El Greco, with his self-portrait as the saint, later repainted) was exhibited at the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum together with a selection of Old Masters paintings from the collection (**figure V.27**).⁹⁴⁹ As

⁹⁴⁷ The sixth issue of the art journal *EXTRA* was announced for October 1975 and its contents as "Salvo, catalogue raisonné", see the advertisement in *DATA*, 5, 16/17 (June 1975): 31.

⁹⁴⁸ LIPPERT 1976: 51.

⁹⁴⁹ In the catalogue, see COLOGNE 1974: 308-311, Salvo illustrated the six works he had chosen from the museum (Simone Martini's *Virgin Mary with the Child*, 1320-30; an altar piece by Stefan Lochner; Lucas Cranach the Older's *Saint Mary*

Lippert put it, “The relationship with our own history is necessarily a matter of self-awareness and self-comprehension [...] It is the artist (the person to be evaluated) who determines his own value and that of his work”.⁹⁵⁰

Salvo’s self-aware draftsmanship might have had more echoes than usually expected (for example, in the early painted works by Francesco Clemente).⁹⁵¹ Here, his heritage may be rather traced within Maenz’s taste and preferences for some Italian artists like Salvo, Paolini, and Carlo Maria Mariani, the Roman painter who started to be represented by the Cologne gallery in 1977, via his most important Italian dealer, Sperone. Although he belonged to an earlier generation debuting in the fifties, Mariani declined his academic skills first into Hyperrealistic painting and later into an analytic practice based on the theme of the copy. Like Salvo, Mariani constructed self-portraits by copying or re-making paintings of the past, taken from art history and in particular from the Neoclassical age. The analytic approach was evident in the juxtaposition of the elements, photographs, drawings and painting, as well as in the artist’s total control of the copied image, often a detail (**figure V.28**). The conceptual effect of impersonation and artistic appropriation was produced, in a 1974-75 work titled Mengs-Maron-Mariani, by the sequence of: photographic reproductions of Anton Raphael Mengs’ and Anton von Maron’s respective painted self-portraits (1774 and 1789); a photographic reproduction of the painted portrait of Mengs by Maron based on the former’s already illustrated self-portrait; an oil on canvas by Mariani with the portrait of Maron based on the latter’s self-image; eventually, a photographic self-portrait by Mariani himself (made with the self-timer). With the same strategy, Mariani intervened on drawn and painted works, and their copies, by Leonardo, Van Dyck, Dürer, Angelica Kauffmann. In terms of drawing as a self-declaration of personal style and ability, however, Mariani expressed a different position in respect to Salvo’s. In fact, he used to reach for exact imitation of drawings and paintings and from that position of exactness, he started to invent new works adhering to a simulation of Neoclassical style.⁹⁵²

Magdalene, 1525; a portrait by Rembrandt from 1644; Boucher’s famous *Girl resting*, 1751; and Cézanne’s small *Still Life with Pears*), followed by his own *San Martino e il povero*, a 1973-47 large drawing in pastel and graphite on paper, freely copied from the same subject in the *Polyptych of Saint-Martin* by Bernardo Zenale and Bernardino Butinone (1485-1505, San Martino, Treviglio, Bergamo). In the museum, thou, the selection was slightly changed: instead of the Boucher, Nicolas Lancret’s *Children at play* (1730 c.) was included; Salvo substituted his drawing with the same-subject painting, which was copied after El Greco. The painting, now in the collection of the Galleria Civica d’Arte Moderna in Turin, was later repainted and the self-portrait was canceled.

⁹⁵⁰ LIPPERT 1976: 50.

⁹⁵¹ A possible comparison can be made between Salvo’s *48 poeti* (“48 poets”, see **figure V.26**) and the series of Clemente’s *Coppie al lavoro* that share a basic composition of fluctuating, isolated figures described with naïf precision.

⁹⁵² Other episodes of return to the copy of Old Master and a self-conscious declaration of traditional draftsmanship might be referred more or less directly to the example of Mariani. The early activity of the artist space, La Stanza, founded in late 1976 in Rome by a group of young artists, demonstrated a lively interest in the richness of drawing techniques and in art history. The opening show, by Antonio Borzi, was titled *Paesaggio, colore, disegno* (“Landscape, color, drawing”) and included some diagrammatic works, in which the admitted models were “Robert Rauschenberg, Jim Dine, Cy Twombly, Gastone Novelli, Mario Schifano” – the names “thanked” conceptually in the exhibition catalog, see ROME 1976c. The academically trained painter Stefano Di Stasio, who introduced Borzi’s catalog, and later joined Mariani in

If Paolini remained an inevitable reference for such manipulation of art history, it can be interesting to discuss here Giuseppe Penone's drawings from Leonardo, published in the catalogue of his retrospective at the Folkwang Museum in Essen in 1978. Presenting his first works of the series *Soffio* ("Breaths") in bronze and terracotta, Penone executed for the publication a series of drawings directly copying Leonardo's drawings, from anatomical studies of the respiratory system to a project for a deviation of the river Arno and the famous tempest drawings. It wasn't the first time that the Turinese artist appropriated Leonardo's drawings: after the already mentioned 1969 *Progetti per Leonardo* (see **figures I.23-25**), he had collaged reproductions of anatomical studies of the mouth, tongue and teeth (taken from a richly illustrated publication on the Renaissance artist) in his series titled *Cambiare l'immagine*, in which he intervened with sculptural gesture like biting and chewing the paper support. In the exemplar n. 5 of the series, Penone also drew his self-portrait starting from the cast of his own teeth, emulating Leonardo's fine chiaroscuro and subtleties (**figure V.29**). In 1977, the artist searched for a convincing representation of the breath, and explored further a Renaissance repertoire: by "drawing after" Leonardesque representations of the fluids, as well as many head profiles, various anatomic studies and optics diagrams; by manipulating the image of the god of wind, Boreas, from Botticelli's *Spring* (**figure V.30**); by adopting a sepia ink hatching technique on a rough grain paper support to gain a refined effect, and sometimes even simulating the aging of his drawings with ink splashes (**figure V.31**). In the Essen exhibition, in the same room of his bronze version of *Soffio* (a cast of the inside of his mouth mounted on a small tree) Penone also hung seven drawings entitled *Studi per soffio* ("Studies for breath") that actually represented multiple view of his mouth in the act of blowing. The artist has recently remembered that his first idea was to transfer the drawings to the wall and covered them with a light carbon powder, before blowing on them to make the images appear all at once. The anecdote bears witness to an idea of drawing that eschews the intervention of the hand and relies on the contact of materials, but also to a highly complex construction of the effect of instantaneity. However, in their more traditional version on framed paper sheets, these drawings alimented the debate on a return to sensible draftsmanship.⁹⁵³

the group of Anacronismo, also had his first show at La Stanza: he executed a wall drawing after a painting by Titian held at the Galleria Borghese, *Venus Blindfolding Cupid*, in which all the characters and props of the painted scene had been isolated in an analytical disjunction and copied in graphite one after another. The early works of the Bologna-based artist, Omar Galliani are clearly indebted to Mariani's drawings from 1975, with an analogous analytical composition of photographs, drawings and objects. In Galliani's work, "drawing in particular is not only a reference, a means to remind to something else, but it stops the deception and proposes its own reality by openly revealing itself as imitation. It opens a conversation with what it represents and distinguishes from it as well, and at the same time it gets in contact with the objectual presence which is alongside it and to which it is linked to a reciprocal allusion. [...] here, then, is the recurring theme of Galliani's work, the investigation of art on Art History, manifested in its reposed but most penetrating characteristic of unveiling the repressive practice that Art History entails on art" (Giovanni M. Accame, in PRATO 1979: n.n.p).

⁹⁵³ They were illustrated alongside CELANT 1978, and again on *G7 Studio*, 4, 2 (February 1979): 4-7.

All the disparate “Old Master drawings” mentioned insofar gravitated around the Galerie Paul Maenz. Maenz, who represented Penone since 1972, bought the mentioned exemplar of *Cambiare l’immagine* in 1976⁹⁵⁴ and then supported the artist’s show at the Folkwang Museum, one year after Salvo’s first retrospective at the same museum and Paolini’s important exhibition at the Mannheimer Kunstverein.⁹⁵⁵ At the same time, the gallerist became the “exclusive” gallerist of Mariani,⁹⁵⁶ offering him two shows in 1977 and 1978. The German gallerist’s correspondence shows how on that occasion he entered in touch with the critic Italo Mussa, who was close to Cannaviello and Sperone. In a letter, Mussa proposed a possible show in Germany on the theme “Problema dell’immagine” (the problem of image), involving four artists: Mariani, Salvo, Hidetoshi Nagasawa (“whose work is of an entirely classic-oriental beauty”) and the younger Roberto Barni (“who works on the historical image since 1971”):

“I would like to emphasize and demonstrate how the current artistic moment, after Duchamp’s “silence” and Paolini’s “citation”, is now characterized by the desire to cancel the positivistic concept of history (in our case of art history). [...] So everything is still possible, at the cost of starting all over again. If one cannot go back and stand still, then what looms in our future is a “postmodern” period”.⁹⁵⁷

There was no follow-up of the exhibition concept, but in 1978 Paul Maenz dedicated the entire program of his gallery exclusively to Italian artists. The unprecedented project, with which the gallerist affirmed his own primacy as the major promoter of Italian art in Germany, was originally named “Colonia Italiana” (“Italian Cologne/colony”). In late 1977, a letter was sent to many Italian artists (“Anselmo, Calzolari, Chia, Clemente, De Dominicis, De Maria, Kounellis, Mariani, Merz, Ontani, Paolini, Penone, Pisani, Salvo, Zaza, Zorio...”) asking for singular proposals to be scheduled at some point in the next year’s activity of the gallery. In the invitation, Maenz explained that “the

⁹⁵⁴ Information about the work and the numbering inscribed on it are requested to the artist in a letter by Gerd de Vries dated April 26, 1976, DE Maenz 01, Archivio Penone, Turin.

⁹⁵⁵ See ESSEN 1977 and MANNHEIM 1977.

⁹⁵⁶ Writing to Sperone “You know that in two years I have organized two Mariani shows in my gallery, that I bought quite some works, that I have initiated various positive press reviews, that I am promoting two museum exhibitions (Eindhoven and Cologne), etc. I do this with pleasure. But I can do this only under the condition of having the “exclusives” for Mariani, at least for some years. Considering your sales to other German dealers (or collectors), even from Cologne, I will not be able to continue working for this artist” (Paul Maenz, letter to Gian Enzo Sperone, January 22nd, 1979, Galerie Paul Maenz Köln records, b. 12, f. 1, GRI)

⁹⁵⁷ Italo Mussa, letter to Paul Maenz, December 5th, 1977, in Galerie Paul Maenz Köln records, b. 9, f. 8, GRI. In the same letter, Mussa enthusiastically commented Paolini’s exhibition at Galleria Ugo Ferranti “Paolini’s exhibition at Ugo Ferranti’s is extraordinary: through a series of sheets Paolini “reviews” his work, from 1961 to the present. As always in Paolini, the work “Annali” is extremely fine, both in conceptual and visual content. In the last sheet, in fact, the eye (of Paolini) embraces, as in a visual pyramid, all the mental and visual possibilities of Paolini’s work” (ibid.). *Annali* (GPO-0370) was exhibited at Galleria D’Alessandro Ferranti in Rome and was reviewed on *Segno*, 6 (January 1978): 34-35, and on the newspaper *La Repubblica* (December 4th, 1977) by the important art historian Giuliano Briganti, who was close to Paolini.

reason is that here unfortunately we still know too little about recent Italian art”,⁹⁵⁸ and offered 500 German Marks (about a million Italian lira) for the sending a work or arranging, or any other “realization of an idea”, advertised by the gallery’s letterhead poster.

Despite the large inclusivity of the preliminary list, Maenz valued and eventually discarded some artists, for instance Diego Esposito and Marcello Camorani (although the latter was insistently sponsored by Mussa).⁹⁵⁹ A hint of a possible project proposed by Luigi Ontani (on Nazarene painter Johann Friedrich Overbeck) did not follow up;⁹⁶⁰ while Paolo Icaro participated with a mail work.⁹⁶¹ In respect to the preliminary list, which already comprehended young artists like Chia, De Maria or Clemente (who had been invited to the Paris biennale), the least established Luciano Bartolini, Ernesto Tatafiore, Alberto Garutti, Nino Longobardi, and Paladino.

Registering the Italian scene in 1978 and giving large visibility to the younger generation, Maenz’s Colonia Italiana ended up highlighting a centrality of drawing, as the medium was protagonist in the majority of the exhibitions. It is not by coincidence that the contribution of Jannis Kounellis to the project was a drawing sent to be illustrated of the cover of the *Jahresbericht 1978*, the gallery annual record (**figure V.32**). A comprehensive essay about Italian art since 1968 was commissioned in late 1977 to Germano Celant,⁹⁶² who delivered it in the spring of 1979. Titled *Die Italienische Erfahrung* (“The Italian experience”), the essay followed a parallel between recent artistic developments in the country and the socio-economic situation, especially in respect to the revolutionary impulses in 1968 and 1977.⁹⁶³ As he wrote probably in early 1979, Celant had no difficulty to individuate the centrality of drawing characterizing the younger generation (even if he had more likely not visited the 1978

⁹⁵⁸ Paul Maenz to Giuseppe Penone, December 10th, 1977, Archivio Penone, Turin.

⁹⁵⁹ Mussa, who sustained Camorani since his collaboration with Seconda Scala and Studio Cannaviello, tried

⁹⁶⁰ “As I am interested to exhibit in Cologne in the fall, simultaneously to another gallery in the same city that had previously proposed to me, I would like to expand the possibilities and change the title and ... / Friedrich Johann Overbeck = Italy and Germany 1828” (Luigi Ontani, letter to Paul Maenz, March 9th 1978 (from Madras, India), Galerie Paul Maenz Köln records, b. 10, f. 4, GRI). The correspondence interrupts after Maenz had answered to the Roman address, proposing the month of November.

⁹⁶¹ See CONTE 2016: 460.

⁹⁶² Maenz first contacted Celant on the advice of Gerry Schum in May 1970. Celant on his part asked Maenz for artists books in 1972. In June 1975 Celant the essay for the celebratory volume Paul Maenz 1970-1975. In late 1976 Maenz also asked Celant for a text about Paolini for the artist’s show in Mannheim but opted to quote from the 1972 Sonnabend monograph. Also, Celant was sent the invitation for the 1978 Italian project. He suggested to include Marisa Merz, Marco Bagnoli and Michelangelo Pistoletto; and expressed his appreciation: “The program seems very interesting and in the near future, I think, very important” (Germano Celant, letter to Paul Maenz and Gerd de Vries, December 15th, 1977, Galerie Paul Maenz Köln records, b. 3, f. 6, GRI).

⁹⁶³ The text was reprinted in the *Italienische Kunst* (fall 1980) issue, of which the critic Marlis Grüterich was the main curator. When the publication was in preparation, Maenz wrote to Celant that the critic’s contribution “gives me the effect of a “tranquilizer”: Marlis’ and the other people’s idea of Italy is interesting, but almost completely fixed (Merz, Kounellis, Fabro and Calzolari; the rest is just “the rest”)”. According to Maenz, Paolini was the most important figure in Italy: “you [Celant] are the only person who profoundly is aware of Giuslio’s significance and his historical importance. Please try to make this clear. If not, he will be “forgotten” and completely at the sacrifice of Kounellis. (According to Marlis’ relationship, which is minly personal.) [...] Paolini deserves this justice, as a friend – but really as artistic figure” (Paul Maenz, letter to Germano Celant, November 22nd, 1979, Galerie Paul Maenz Köln records, b. 3, f. 6, GRI).

Italian shows in Cologne). Nevertheless, the following passage is interesting for the stress on the generational turning from the arte povera group:

“Pencil and watercolor thus return to produce from the ego-center drawing(s) [Zeichn(ung)en] that are theatrical and metaphorical. It is the overhand from body to the sign, from the person to the figure, which turns the sheet into a second skin. The surface becomes a memory trace, and what remains of it is the libidinous, sensual power of these artists. They **transfer** themselves to the paper, on which each personal, fantastic event takes the form of another over-impression. The hand stands behind the sign and executes it, trying to forget conceptual metaphysics and corporeal super-physis. This is no longer the tactile formulation of the Arte Povera artists or the eloquent advance of the conceptual artists, but the intense silence of the charade and enigma, where the meaning remains incomprehensible and labyrinthine. Such a speech of ambiguity cannot be fixed; on the contrary, it provokes exciting maneuvers of intellectual “perversion”, similar to a baroque machinery. What is startling is the decline of the material and the devaluation of the physical-sensual, that is, the abandonment of the achievements of the anti-society of 1968, in favor of a literary, refined, intangible abstraction. The explosion of natural and corporeal signs of the seventies is followed by an implosion that tends to collect the minimal signs: the wrinkles in the skin of the paper, the traces of the fingers”.⁹⁶⁴

In the passage, it is possible to indicate points of contact with other narratives about the young Italian generation, but Celant’s reference to the “tactile formulation of the Arte Povera artists” might have indirectly addressed Penone’s draftsmanship as the most eloquent counterpart to understand the overturning taking place in those months within the medium of drawing. It might be not a coincidence that one drawing from Penone’s series of *Studi per soffi* had been illustrated few months earlier on *Domus* (**figure V.33**), alongside Celant’s article *Verso un nomadismo dell’arte italiana* (“Toward a nomadism of Italian art”), in which the critic had pointed out how appreciated Italian art was in Europe and indicated its historical role as “the only one that has given rise to a «critical» state, a state of perceptive nomadic instability, aiming at expansion rather than at compression. Let proof of this be the fact of two generations, between the end of the 1960s and the end of the 1970s, who swapped places complementarily [che trapassano l’una nell’altra complementariamente]”.⁹⁶⁵ Penone’s most refined and inedited autographic drawings may have served to illustrate a continuity with the most recent expression of drawing as light traces and handcraft.

Moreover, Penone was the first artist exhibiting within the Colonia Italiana project (with *Patate*, a case of real potatoes, with some grown in casts of the artist’s face and then cast in bronze) and above all he executed a permanent wall drawing, *Pressione* (“Pressure”) in the new space of the gallery (when Maenz moved from Lindenstrasse 23 to Schaafenstrasse 35 in August, see **figure V.34**). The

⁹⁶⁴ CELANT 1979: 38-39.

⁹⁶⁵ CELANT 1978.

following shows listed: Nicola De Maria (February, 28th – March 17th), Luciano Bartolini (March 21st – April 8th), Ernesto Tatafiore (April 13th – 29th), Francesco Clemente (May 3rd – 16th), Luciano Fabro (May 18th – 30th), Alighiero Boetti (May 31st – June 10th), Mimmo Paladino (June 13th – 28th), Alberto Garutti (July 6th – 18th), Nino Longobardi (July 20th – August 5th), Giovanni Anselmo (in Schaafenstrasse, September 26th – October 19th), Salvo (October 20th – November 2nd), Carlo Maria Mariani (November 3rd – 15th), Sandor Chia (November 18th – December 14th) and lastly Giulio Paolini (December 15th – January 16th 1979). In terms of drawing, this series of exhibitions could exemplify: the subtle relationship between drawn sign on paper and photography (Bartolini’s installation of photographs and pasted Kleenex sheets (**figure V.35**); Garutti’s photographs of vermicular graffitis; Clemente’s enlarged photograph of his earlier drawing *Se i buchi del corpo sono nove o dieci* (“Whether the body holes are nine or ten”) surrounded by fragments of torn paper with a printed fish motif, **figure V.36**); the versatility of drawing as a form of painting (the same wall got painted with a large, red geometric motif by Paladino, and covered with charcoal by Longobardi; both artists also distributed smaller-scale paintings, watercolors, drawings or photographic works all around the major piece, **figure V.37**); the spatial dimension of drawing as an object with a performative or topological meaning (Anselmo’s *Particolare di infinito* was included in his show titled *Un disegno e un particolare a est, trecento milioni di anni a ovest* (“A drawing and a detail east, 300000000 years west”) in which various object were aligned on the east-west line; but also Paolini’s loosely rolled photographic print of an engraving from Diderot and D’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie*, illustrating the measures of the Farnese Hercules).

Mariani’s exhibition shared in the most classical sense this climate as Maenz presented the painter’s *Cartoni* (“Cartoons”), the actual preparatory, charcoal drawings of the same large scale of the painting.⁹⁶⁶ Nicola De Maria, instead, scattered “palm-size drawings, watercolors and gouaches were spread across several rooms”, on walls and furniture of the gallery. Like the title suggested (“Il desiderio comanda di occupare tutte le case”, “Desire commands to occupy all houses”), “the most colorful cards occupy their environment, in which they were included and which they include”. What is interesting is that the tiny fragments of paper were mostly positioned on the frames of other artists’ artworks (mostly drawings) that hung in the gallery rooms and offices: for instance, a couple of Robert Barry’s diagrams;⁹⁶⁷ Giulio Paolini’s paintings *Ebla* and an unidentified, three-elements collage,⁹⁶⁸ but also Mariani’s *Ritratto di Raffaello e del Sodoma* (“Portrait of Raffaello and Sodoma”, **figure V.38**), a à la Salvo drawing. With such a very light gesture, De Maria highlighted the context under his intervention and literally took a “standpoint” within it, at the same time by setting a dialogue with

⁹⁶⁶ Three studies were exhibited, on rough support presented unframed, see MAENZ 1979: 26-27.

⁹⁶⁷ Barry’s untitled drawing dated to 1976 and remained in Maenz’s collection, see BERLIN 2004: 85, n. 11.

⁹⁶⁸ GPO-0362, left, and GPO-0366, right (both were exhibited in December 1977 Paolini’s solo show at Paul Maenz’s).

colleagues and competitors, and by disposing of all artworks as material under his hands. A sort of generational challenge⁹⁶⁹ must have been evident in the contrast between the improvised freedom and pulsing colors of his gouache and the sophisticated, very much controlled monochrome of Barry's graphed drawing, Paolini's black and white collages of columns or Mariani's chiaroscuro.

Some of the elements of Sandro Chia's installation, hermetically titled *Per organi* ("For organs"), remained in Paul Maenz's collection and are now held at the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin.⁹⁷⁰ The gallery room was arranged with works on paper rolled on three white pillars, while a mass of different-size sheets lied freely at the center (**figure V.39**). The first element to be encountered on a pillar was a copy of the letterheaded poster provided by Paul Maenz for Colonia Italiana, on which Chia printed a drawing (as an unsettling subject, he drew an anthropomorphic crocodile lying down, kicking an elderly woman carrying loaves).⁹⁷¹ The exhibited exemplar was futuristically colored in crayon and colored pens. The pillar on the right held a tempera painting on paper with a dance class apparently taken from a commercial photograph. On the third pillar, Chia enveloped a 57 x 77 cm, heavy weight sheet in which he had drawn 23 diamonds with red pastel and a multitude of faces scuttled in the interspaces, with graphite (**figure V.40**).⁹⁷² On the floor, 17 same format sheets were amassed, each showing one diamond painted with red oil stick in the middle (like large playing cards with aces). Chia had stapled the sheets at the edges in order to join them so that they arched off the floor, and then scattered among them other smaller loose drawings, made on thinner paper with various techniques and subjects. What is striking in Chia's largely obscure intervention is the cynical compresence of refined, cultured or technically impeccable works and inferior, even vulgar or instrumental elements (like the advertising material itself). The carefully studied coordination⁹⁷³ elicited a deliberate contrast between high and low: for example, the unifying element of the red stars returned in the gouache with the dancers in leotards at the point of their genital-(organ)s. The installation was parted after its dismantling, as the gouache and the smaller drawings got dispersed separately, while the series of large sheets remained with the poster in Maenz collection.

⁹⁶⁹ A 1978 title (later reused) might be useful to understand the posture of gentle embracing of space and external elements on one side; and bold appropriation of his spreading intervention: "Il talento, unico suo possesso" ("Talent, his only possession"), see FRANKFURT 1985: 472 (then property of the Galerie Tanit in Munich).

⁹⁷⁰ See BERLIN 2004: 73, 89-90, n. 29.

⁹⁷¹ The original drawing in graphite appears illustrated in CHIA, CUCCHI, OLIVA 1978: 41.

⁹⁷² On the back of the sheet, Chia studied a variant in graphite for the composition of the diamonds, aligned on a straight line and clearly traced with a stencil; a face is fitted in the semicircle generated by two contiguous diamonds. The theme of the faces, generating from an independent image, occurs elsewhere in Chia's works of 1978: see for instance, the seven faces ironically casted on the shape drawn on a dog's derriere, as the subject of a 1978 drawing (see FRANKFURT 1985: 92, 461) and a painting dated 1977, now both at the Groninger Museum.

⁹⁷³ At the time, Chia was exploring quite brutal spatial arrangements of loose, unframed sheets: for instance, in October 1978, in his show at Galleria dell'Oca in Rome, he pinned various small drawings or etchings forming a stripe (of six to nine pieces) that was attached to the side edge of three unframed paintings.

III Disegno finto: *narratives of discontinuity*

In Altamira's 1979 text, a quick mention was reserved to the "artisti secchi" ("dry artists") as an alternative path of the return to drawing, to be distinguished from the Calzolari-Kounellis line, and to be impersonated by Chia and Enzo Cucchi. Their exhibitions and publication in 1978 effectively formed a parallel and autonomous strategy that addressed the rhetoric about drawing as such, that is as a "performed draftsmanship", and they will be the object of these final paragraphs. Although their relationship with Bonito Oliva had already a central role in such experiences, it is possible to demonstrate that the exchange was fully reciprocal and took on the form of a proper collaboration, rather than a critical guidance or launch. Chia and Cucchi came respectively from a strongly conceptualist background and a few experiences in poetry, and their proclaimed turn to drawing in 1978 was a sudden and deliberate standpoint. They "performed" their new draftsmanship, that is they not only made and showed works on paper, but spoke about them and defined themselves as draftsmen, they started to "theorise" albeit hermetically on drawing, creating a debate and a discourse, with Bonito Oliva as a support. But why drawing? One preliminary reason lies in the cliché on the confessional immediacy and autography of the medium. Against such "arte della verità" ("truth art"), the new draftsmanship opposed an "arte figlia dell'inganno" ("art as daughter of deception"), as Pietro Citati put it in his 1979 review of Jurgis Baltrusaitis' book on anamorphosis, which influenced Chia and Cucchi too.⁹⁷⁴ In this sense, Cucchi spoke of a "disegno finto" ("fake drawing"), and constructed a narrative of discontinuity, a break with the tautological, analytical or process-based discourses on drawing that dominated in the seventies.

III.1 *Gossip, puzzles, quotations: late conceptualism in drawing*

Enzo Cucchi's *Poison has been stirred up and carried away* appeared in 1977 (without much resonance) as the book of a poet,⁹⁷⁵ who was based in Ancona and only recently had approached Rome. Following typical trends in contemporary avantgarde poetry, Cucchi realized an intentionally obscure text. He himself declared in the foreword: "This book attempts to re-establish the balance of a route thrown into a perspective of pleasure. A daily route about which the reeling images are very far from being mere information sources concerning quality, objects and particular events".⁹⁷⁶ In fact,

⁹⁷⁴ CITATI 1979.

⁹⁷⁵ See RIVOLI 2002: 336. The 2002 chronology does not include the earliest solo shows by Cucchi in Ancona, Jesi, Macerata, Camerata, and some graphic edition by the Galleria Il Foglio in Macerata (all documented in BUGATTI 1970). In 1974, he published the artist book *ENZO CUCCHI ex ENZO CUCCHI* by Seriate editions, Ancona (98 exemplars).

⁹⁷⁶ CUCCHI 1977: [3].

the title and illustrations of the book remain impenetrable (**figure V.41**), while the structure follows a sort of “textual fading”: four main texts are repeated and progressively reduced to one word. The main narrative can be read as a recollection of a mundane event, which could be fictional but is consistent with Cucchi’s 1977 introduction to the Roman milieu.⁹⁷⁷ The topographical information is quite detailed: in Piazza del Popolo (from where the narrator could see the “Rosati”, the famous artists’ café), a debate is taking place about a sculpture, “artists on one side and art scholars on the other. It’s a motionless hand-to-hand fight [...]”.⁹⁷⁸ In a following passage,⁹⁷⁹ the action moves to the Incontri Internazionali d’arte, Bonito Oliva’s general district in the Palazzo Taverna⁹⁸⁰: “You have reached Palazzo Taverna by car, on foot, by bus / some are tall thin, some limp, they are fair-haired / people inside get aside along the two walls of the room / Sargentini is wearing a green rain-coat / a German girl hands out with her left a child / Pisani hides his eyes behind dark spectacles / in a corner a small group. A.B. Oliva is holding a revolver in his hand / people must go against the wall / near a writing-desk Menna is touched by some of them and speaks of “hunter’s behaviour” / the persons present mix together, try not to get [recognized]?”. Other people are then mentioned, such as the art historian and critic Maurizio Calvesi, the artist Emilio Prini, the gallerist Pio Monti. A third episode takes place in Piazza di Spagna, on the balcony of the Galleria Rumma, where three artists “aligned as a jury”: “first, Kounellis with his parrot”, “Mattiacci with the monkey”, then “another traitor: A. B. Oliva, who, with a certain indifference, tries to push De Dominicis who is at his side, to climb the balcony railing to perhaps attempt to perch with a short flight”.⁹⁸¹

From these few fragments (the only ones quite understandable in the text), Cucchi’s story appears not entirely fictional, but rather a playful mixture of paradoxical images and references to real personalities of the Roman scene. Moreover, Cucchi’s position is not merely chronicling, as the context is precisely where he debuted in the same year 1977. On June, 18th, he realized a wall drawing (actually on two large linen sheets) titled *Ritratto di casa* (“Home portrait”, **figure V.42**) covering two walls of a room in Palazzo Taverna, illustrating two strangely prolonged houses around a child in fetal position. His perspective on the Roman milieu, characterized by conflict between artists and critics, as well as judgement from established and famous colleagues, positions himself too within the scene; on the other hand, Cucchi’s reader is also internal to the community, as they must be aware of the references. Rather than diaristic, then, this kind of writing corresponds to gossip as it has been

⁹⁷⁷ “The magic hand whereby the city had grasped me silently has no romantic touch” (ibid: 13).

⁹⁷⁸ Ibid: 15.

⁹⁷⁹ There are also references to a concert in Rome by the American musician Terry Riley.

⁹⁸⁰ See Bonito Oliva’s own account of this institution as an “open area” in BONITO OLIVA 1977A: 232-234.

⁹⁸¹ The references are to famous artworks and performances by the mentioned artists: the parrot standing on a perch in Kounellis’ 1969 untitled; Chita, the monkey included by Pascali and then evoked by Mattiacci; and De Dominicis’ video piece *Tentativi di volo* (“Flight attempts”).

analyzed by Patricia Meyer Spacks: “If gossip has moral and aesthetic aspects, both of which fiction transforms and exploits, gossip also reveals an economics. The subject of dialogue calls attention to it. A mode of exchange, gossip involves the giving and receiving of more than information”.⁹⁸² The economics at the core of Cucchi’s text is that of the art scene, articulating market, galleries, criticism, collectors and artists. In this sense, its gossip might be interpreted as a syntonic form of “institutional critique” as “an investigation of the material and sociopolitical conditions of contemporary artistic practice”⁹⁸³ – with many obvious differences from Hans Haacke or Daniel Buren’s defining practices in that field. Two typical features of institutional critique in particular, namely spectatorship and the “death of the author”, are turned into a substantial self-referentiality: Cucchi himself is the spectator of the events and the subject of the novel, embracing the context. His book was probably meant to be read by the very same community it mentioned and represented, which clarifies the performative, rather than analytical, character of his critique. Actually, though, as a protagonist, he maintains a low profile and a marginal position (gossip is defined by speaking of to third parties) from which his cinematographic description (one would define the two extracts quoted above as “Fellinian”) is at the same time detached and judgmental. Indeed, the actual first community Cucchi approached at his debut in Rome was composed by the numerous personalities quoted in the text, most of them originally from the Marche, such as Pio Monti, Gino De Dominicis (but also Eliseo Mattiacci). Bonito Oliva also had a determining role for his debut at the Incontri Internazionali d’arte – his disquieting part in the story might indicate the artist’s fascination with the critic’s *L’ideologia del traditore* (“The ideology of the traitor”). After all, Bonito Oliva had since 1975 written about the “art system” as a field of relations involving artists, gallerists, collectors – now the object of Cucchi’s work.⁹⁸⁴

Another artist based in Rome, Sandro Chia, had developed since some years an analogous “institutional critique” based on the thematization of the artist’s talent and fortune, the critical approval and the market competitions. A full reconstruction of Chia’s numerous and disparate exhibitions and performances from 1975 has still to be done, but in 1978 he had recapitulated his own career in an artist book published on the occasion of his solo show at Studio Giuliana De Crescenzo. This gallery opened in late 1977 and was a space where two generations – to quote Celant – “swapped together complementarily” (from Agnetti and Anselmo to Chia, to Penone and Boetti to Clemente and Cucchi). Drawing as a shared medium especially marked this continuity.⁹⁸⁵ The book *Intorno a sè* (“Around oneself”) was conceived as a summary of Chia’s career and past exhibitions, albeit not

⁹⁸² SPACKS 1985: 21.

⁹⁸³ PELTOMÄKI 2007: 38; see also BUCHLOH 1990.

⁹⁸⁴ See BONITO OLIVA 1975, published and presented by Lucrezia De Domizio.

⁹⁸⁵ In his 1977 exhibition, Anselmo presented *Lato sinistro*, a sequel of *Lato destro* (see **figure I.41**) made on a larger format. Penone exhibited drawn works too, that is an exemplar of the already mentioned series *Impronte della mano sulla matita prese durante l’esecuzione*, and a *Pressione* executed on place. Boetti’s show was titled “Disegni 1978”.

in chronological order, and it is structured as a coordination of texts (mostly poems) and images (mostly drawings). The incipit on the cover defines the title and the contents of the book as a “collection”, and also explains the meaning of an ink blot printed as the accent of “sè”: “The collection [...] is suited to a drawing that can be a random blot. I collect as I cast, which is to say, spur-of-the-moment; therefore, imagine me enthusiastic about my improvisations but hesitant around which title to collect”.⁹⁸⁶

The self-presentation as hesitant and subjected to other’s judgement is a recurrent feature in the book, as are irony and deadpan wit, in a repertoire of puns and charades (up to uninhibited vulgarity) partly for their own sake and partly in a conceptual relationship with the works. The book opens with a mathematical question about a “triangular duel” among three differently talented shooters with respective percentual of success. The paradoxical solution follows: “the worst shooter, Jones, has the greatest chance of survival”. Chia implies that the terms actually refer to artistic success and critical evaluation: “Is it possible for the worst to prevail? Although in an unusual duel.... Perhaps that strategy and calculation are the real strength? Perhaps that the terms best and worst are said too soon?”.⁹⁸⁷ Here, criticism, art quality and talent are thematized in a theatrical, ironical and detached way.⁹⁸⁸ This work is related to a scarcely documented exhibition at Galleria La Salita held in June 1976 (**figure V.43**),⁹⁸⁹ and to a contribution to the already mentioned article by Corinna Ferrari published on *DATA* few months later (**figure V.44**). There, the triangular duel text is associated to another short story and three schematic drawings: the former is a word pun (the exhibition title, “Due moneli guardano ne limo un limone” that is “two twins looks down to a lemon in the deep”) which also reveals that the looking twins are the best shooters, while “the third is the one who speaks [that is, Chia himself], who is then the ‘worst’ shooter with the best probabilities not to die, shooting in the air in the triangular duel”. The drawings are a vectorial diagram of the shooting triangle (with the third’s divergent line “in the air”); a cartoonish sketch of the twins looking down to the lemon; and a retouched photocopy from the drawing effectively exhibited in the gallery. From considering altogether texts, illustrations and exhibited drawings, Chia’s peculiar use of drawing emerges as a conceptualist device. Graphic language reflects the topology essential to the idea (three positions in

⁹⁸⁶ CHIA 1978: cover.

⁹⁸⁷ “Viceversa, / for nothing / and at sword’s length / we decide the «best» / of the «worst» / and the «mediocre» / in the unusual and triangular and probabilistic / duel at the gun” (ibid: [2]).

⁹⁸⁸ For instance, a passage from the text refers to “a painter skilled in executing extremely realistic depictions, [...] ready to draw the landscape” who is hindered by a physical mutation (“Is prevented from performing the drawing by the sudden growth of hand nails?⁹⁸⁸ / By the sudden growth of hair, which has a tendency in him to fall over the eyes?”, ibid: [5]) This might be a sort of self-portrait, as Chia was famous for his academic training and skills, and had already thematized technical ability in opposition to bestiality in a performance where he wore a monkey costume and acted like an animal in front of a realistic painting of a monkey by another painter. The performance, *Il tempo mi consuma lo spazio è mio amico* (“Time consumes me, space is my friend”) took place repeatedly within the series *24 ore su 24* at L’Attico, from January 26 to 28, 1975.

⁹⁸⁹ See RIVOLI 2002: 334.

a triangular, two points and a third in the deep) by diagrams and above all by the disproportioned elongation of the lines (of “looking”) departing from the two twins, at the right edge in the largest exhibited drawing. In the actual space of the gallery, drawings as objects, often framed, also occupied a conceptual topology, which is now difficult to reconstruct and appears arbitrary. For instance, a watercolor illustrating a lemon was juxtaposed to the mostly blank scheme of the twins at La Salita. Or, in the same months, Chia arranged a couple of framed drawings on the wall of the Studio Paolo Marinucci & Tucci Russo in Turin: here, they participated of the rarified installation of tiny objects in the vast space, as unities or stages of the overall obscure meaning.⁹⁹⁰ The drawings maintain this function even when they are properly reproduced as “illustrations”: they do not simply clarify or plainly represent what is written in the texts and the poems, and rather expand autonomously their themes or diverge sensibly from them, alighting on obscurity and deadpan complexity.

Chia also adopted quotation as a systematic language. The “triangular duel” text is a long extract from *Enigmi e giochi matematici* (“Mathematical and logic puzzles”), the famous anthology of Martin Gardner’s columns on *Scientific American* collected in various editions in 1973 and 1975. Other themes and direct quotes come from that volume, like the tangrams (a Chinese game of decomposable geometric shapes) and reversible writings (see **figures V.45-46**). Again, the drawing that should “illustrate” the 1977 poem *¡Hoh!* actually translates it into a reversible drawing, a composition of vertical, horizontal and circular stripes, hatched with charcoal with stencils on a refined rice paper. By these material qualities, it is possible to refer the work on paper to a complex installation known by photographs, that likely was exhibited in a group show at Galleria Sperone in late 1977, where Chia exhibited with Giulio Paolini and Salvo (**figure V.47**).⁹⁹¹ A standing sword pointed onto a rice paper sheet on the ground, piercing a paper regular solid; two other sheets hung on the corner walls around the sword, of which a long vertical stripe was torn and met on the solid.

Chia’s deliberate agglomerates of installations, texts and drawings staged a tension field in which the artist is not in control and they are described as discomfited, inadequate or uncertain. Even a title could contain a contextual, performative indication: for instance, a work made the positive and

⁹⁹⁰ Opened in May 10th, 1976, Chia’s exhibition remained opened for almost five months throughout the summer. The invitation card, printed with the text about the sudden growth of nails and hair impeding the skillful painter, bore the exhibition title, *La spada (il culo)* and a nursery rhyme about a donkey and a jennet in a room without furniture. The theme of the furniture dominated the tiny installations scattered all around the large, single space of the gallery. Chia constructed tiny models of chairs and tables, and inserted them inside previously made holes in the walls; and beneath a structure in metal laminate. Two drawings (one illustrates a dressed donkey) hanged obliquely, in thick black frames, on the same wall. On the laminate, some shaped fragments of glass composed a form that returned in the invitation card, under the poem, as well as at another corner of the room. See CHIA 1978: 5, 6.

⁹⁹¹ Without further documentation (the show is not included in MINOLA, MUNDICI, POLI, ROBERTO 2000), it is difficult to reconstruct this exhibition on the basis of reviews. The title *¡HOH!* suggests that the work *Campeggio* was included (**figure V.47**). The only review mentions that “among other, [Chia] presents an old refectory table [the same that served earlier that year at Galleriaforma in Genoa, see *supra*: 16] on which a sort of curved sling lies, bent over a tiny drawing of XVIII century taste, in which a satiric scene is readable on the two verses” (BILARDELLO 1977).

negative prints of the photograph of a sculpture (a dotted, formless mass) set in a garden was titled *Qualcuno disse: «Falla stampare» Altri dissero: «No» Qualcuno disse: «Potrebbe essere utile» Altri dissero: «No»* (“Some said: “Print it!”, Other said: “No”; Some said: “It could be useful”; others said: “no”), hinting to a possible causal origin of the work and the external influences on the author.⁹⁹² Another self-reference is in the title of an exhibition held in 1976, *Ometto quando ti sentirai a tuo agio visto che sei a casa tua?* (“Little man, when will you feel comfortable since you are at home?”) was commented with revealing intention that can explain the overall strategy of the artist book: “it is well known that when a thing is at such a sign free and suspended even an expert is lost. Since no one can take into account positions and directions assumed simultaneously by floating bodies, any definition is illusory and comical, and under such conditions feeling at ease is truly impossible”.⁹⁹³ A last characteristic can be pointed out in the drawings published on *Intorno a sè*, that is a precise, intentional traditionalism. For instance, the eponymous⁹⁹⁴ work on paper at the end of the book is a frank demonstration of academic technical skills, subtleties of tones, atmospheric description, fine hatching (**figure V.48**). As pointed out by Fabio Belloni, the source for such sophistication came from the history of art, as the boy dipping his toe in the pond is modeled precisely after a detail from Pontormo’s fresco of the *Visitation* at the Florentine church of the Santissima Annunziata. This mural painting was very familiar to Chia, who studied at the Accademia di Belle Arti (just around the corner) and Pontormo had recently been at the core of Bonito Oliva’s 1976 study on Mannerism.⁹⁹⁵

III.2 *From Disegno finto to Tre o quattro artisti secchi (1978)*

Two months after Chia’s show and publication *Intorno a sè*, Enzo Cucchi also exhibited at Giuliana De Crescenzo⁹⁹⁶ and published a same-format catalogue, *Disegno finto* (“Fake drawing”). Both Chia’s and Cucchi’s books were introduced by Achille Bonito Oliva, and inaugurated a relationship of support, reciprocal exchange and common creation that resulted in an actual collaboration at the end of the same year, when *Tre o quattro artisti secchi* (“Three or four dry artists”) was published. The book was edited by the Galleria Emilio Mazzoli in Modena, and opened the series “Con-Arte”,

⁹⁹² The title appears under the photographs in CATALOGO BOLAFFI 1979: 34. It is absent from the illustration of the work in Chia 1978, as well as in the page on *Domus* where the relative exhibition was presented by a leaflet published for the occasion (“Pupa. Preliminari di una mostra a Roma”, *Domus*, 580, March 1978: 53), that was illustrated by photographs and poems.

⁹⁹³ CHIA 1978: [7].

⁹⁹⁴ See CATALOGO BOLAFFI 1979: 72 (where the drawing is estimated 500.000 liras).

⁹⁹⁵ In Bonito Oliva’s book, vast excerpts from Pontormo’s diary (with curious details on his alimentation and various states of sickness) are reported and analyzed as proof of the artist’s hypochondria and psychopathy. On the book’s models and the importance, see CORTELLESSA 2012.

⁹⁹⁶ The show is documented by room view of the single room of the gallery, crossed by a huge plastic tube (“almost a little sign of marble, engraved”) on which “two drawings attached by a rope” were suspended (CUCCHI, DI PIETRANTONIO 2017).

determining not only for the selection of artists to be gathered as the Italian Transavanguardia, but above all as an experiment of collaboration between artists and the critic. In this paragraph, the last segment of Italian drawing of the seventies will be analyzed as comprised between the two publications and their conceptual apparatuses of “fakeness” and “dryness”.

Cucchi’s *Disegno finto* appeared less as a recapitulation (after all, its author had only one year of real career) than as a declaration of intent: although the text is, as usual, obscure, many definitions are formulated and “theoretical” arguments are put forward to defend the author’s positions and his proposal of a “fake draftsmanship”. Poetic and prose texts are divided into a “proem” and eight sections, while half of the 15-pages volume are devoted to illustrations.⁹⁹⁷

The introductory poem is a good example of the mixture of philosophical references, theoretical manifesto, metaphor and nonsensical obscurity of Cucchi’s artist book, which can partly be interpreted as a definition of “disegno finto” (“fake drawing”). The subtitle, “earth keeps staying” is a quotation from Ecclesiastes 1:4 (“A generation goes and a generation comes, / but the earth remains forever”): with this, Cucchi could have introduced a specific theme of his production such as the attachment to his own local background (for example, the local toponymy is recurrent in his titles), and it could have appeared as an element of great novelty (not less surprising was a content reference to the Bible). Other references sounded much more in tune with the critical agenda of the late seventies (from Lacan to Nietzsche) and above all, with the contemporary artistic scene and recent famous works. Here is a possible translation of the proem, with some possible references in footnotes:

“«Curved glance» Then I am observed!⁹⁹⁸ All this material is what I saw there, the right way up or upside down.
I recognize everything with a clean shot.
Let it be known that none of this material is fanciful or fortuitous, as for what may catch the eye. Every description, every statement can be found thousands of times; in a curved glance, although an oblique walking is underneath each word I wrote, to shake my pencil.
«you [sic] can think about it only before head,
sometimes further from light
and closer to the fire.
to [sic] the changing of the skin to roll up
and unroll (in the longevity of time,
the alternating cosmic and terrestrial images

⁹⁹⁷ The nine parts carry the following titles: “Disegno finto (LA TERRA RIMANE AL SUO POSTO); BAMBINO ADULTO?; CONSIDERAZIONI; RITRATTO DI CASA; L’INTELLIGENZA SALE DA DIETRO LE SPALLE; Montesicuro Cucchi Enzo giù; ENZO LA TERRA RIMANE AL SUO POSTO CUCCHI; DISEGNO FINTO an (aria nel miele, foglie “spada”)”. *Montesicuro Cucchi Enzo giù* was the title of the exhibition held in 1977 at the Studio De Ambrogi Cavellini, that included “a drawing completely disappeared” and “an enormous concrete knife! It was a 7 meters long work, it was buried and nobody knows where it is” (CUCCHI, DI PIETRANTONIO 2017).

⁹⁹⁸ See Jacques Lacan’s already mentioned theory of the gaze and “reciprocité du regard”: “je ne voie que d’un point, mais dans mon existence je suis regardé de partout” (LACAN 1973: 69).

highlight the rhythms they all
 take: representable forms?).
 Finding oneself lost in the room upside down
 indicates doing and undoing.⁹⁹⁹
 It is the rhythmic return.¹⁰⁰⁰
 We unravel the fates of forms
 at the opaque frontier of skin
 and the number of the plants.¹⁰⁰¹
 The animal does not see the drawing: things
 that come out in the daytime
 and the things that come out in the dark».¹⁰⁰²

The main theme here is the “curved glance”, an unstable and deviant state that involves the gaze and the use of the hand on the page (“an oblique walking is underneath each word I wrote”). Now, obliquity, as well as strabismus or the “curved glance”, obviously resonated, but in a very general way, with Deleuzian concepts that were abundant in the criticism of the time (especially that of Bonito Oliva).¹⁰⁰³ However, Cucchi claimed such themes for his own draftsmanship, and it is worth attempting to link this strongly theoretical text with a practical and visual device like anamorphosis. Anamorphosis, or perspective aberrations, had received great deal of attention in the mid-seventies, after Baltrušaitis’ famous book had inspired thinkers such as Barthes and Lacan¹⁰⁰⁴ to develop the theoretical implications of the device. Popular exhibitions, such as *Anamorfofen: spel met perspectief* (“Anamorphoses: Playing with Perspective”), which travelled from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, to the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, in 1975–76, testified to and further increased interest in the practice.¹⁰⁰⁵ A review of the exhibition was published in *L’Espresso* in April 1976 with the title “L’occhio storto vuole la sua parte” (“The curved eye wants its share”). The reviewer, Giancarlo Marmorì, wrote that anamorphosis was an “already psychedelic hallucination’ born from the minds of ‘maniacs of mathematics”, a popular opinion that may have been shared by a number of artists too, who were probably not able to fully understand Lacan’s sophisticated arguments. “Anamorphoses were not freaks, nor were they social pastimes in constant search of hedonistic stimulants. If anything, they responded to the needs of hermetic thinking, a propensity for analogical subtext or a widespread

⁹⁹⁹ “Fare e disfare” echoed Boetti’s titles (although it is not a squared word).

¹⁰⁰⁰ See the Nietzschean, well-known idea of the eternal comeback.

¹⁰⁰¹ Hypothetically, this cryptic expression might relate to arte povera artists such as Penone (for his works on the skin) and Mario Merz (for the Fibonacci progression of plants).

¹⁰⁰² CUCCHI 1978: [1].

¹⁰⁰³ In his introduction to *Disegno finto*, Bonito Oliva quoted the concept of “clinamen” from *Logique du sens*, that was edited in Italian in 1975, see BONITO OLIVA 1978B.

¹⁰⁰⁴ See LACAN 1973: 75-84.

¹⁰⁰⁵ See AMSTERDAM 1975.

playful temperament of which there is almost no trace today”.¹⁰⁰⁶ Chia’s response to this fascinating subject was timely: a two-part drawing published in *Intorno a sè* (**figure V.49**) is dated May 6th, 1976 and shows an intuitive application of anamorphosis. On the left is a distorted image of a tiny statue of Buddha placed next to a ruler; on the right, the same composition appears stretched along its horizontal axis, rectifying the distortion. This effect could easily be achieved by mechanical reproduction; therefore, Chia’s decision to draw the second image too, perhaps with the help of a distorting lens or mirror, is all the more meaningful. In particular, the presence of the ruler and its objective function of measuring makes the optical aberration of the left image all the more obvious. It might also be a mocking reference to the recurrent presence of photographs of rulers in Paolini’s collages on paper, a way of rejecting the tautological function of measurement. Anamorphosis is essentially an optical illusion, and in this sense, it corresponds to the notions of curved glance and oblique handwriting evoked by Cucchi. Chia’s strategy works subtly, by presenting the original and its anamorphosis together, and both the ‘true’ and ‘false’ images are drawn with a dexterous, precise hatching. As an exercise in copying, the anamorphosis also represents a discipline of faking, and the artist is now trained to see their models through a ‘curved’ lens. In 1977, Chia copied Giorgione’s *The Tempest* (1506–08; Gallerie dell’Accademia, Venice) in graphite, gouache and watercolour (**figure V.50**). Although some of the figures in the painting are perfectly recognisable, there is a major anamorphic distortion in the lower left-hand corner. The drawing was part of a larger project that was presented at the Incontri Internazionali d’arte on 8 March 1977¹⁰⁰⁷ and published in *DATA* and *Intorno a sè* a few months later. In Palazzo Taverna, Chia installed a large ceramic basin on which he placed a reproduction of the Venetian painting (modified to remove the lightning in the middle of the landscape),¹⁰⁰⁸ following the concave shape of the object (**figure V.51**). In this way, Chia caused the viewer to enact an inevitable, ever-changing curved glance on the reproduction. Obviously, such images and drawings are not intended to be reconstructed by looking at them from a calculated position, which would require a precise geometric construction. Instead, they are designed to deny a clear, objective status of truth, and to implement a general strategy of ‘fakeness’. Other details of the transformation of the original image are mentioned in a contextual poem, full of Lacanian references

¹⁰⁰⁶ MARMORI 1976: 83. Achille Bonito Oliva also reviewed the Parisian stage of the show, defining anamorphosis as “the last exercise possible, where they clearly want to show the reducibility of the whole real world, of the visible and the invisible, the sayable and the unspeakable” (BONITO OLIVA 1977A: 203). Corinna Ferrari already used anamorphosis in her reading of Duchamp’s *Large Glass*, see FERRARI 1976A.

¹⁰⁰⁷ It was part of the program “Istituzioni artistiche e didattica delle informazioni” curated by Bonito Oliva from March 7th to 18th. Chia’s intervention was titled *Tema da convenirsi* (“Theme to be agreed”) or *La conferenza imprevedibile* (“The unpredictable conference”).

¹⁰⁰⁸ Another photographic modification is documented between the first publication on *DATA* and the second on *Intorno a sè*: in the latter, Chia traced onto the same photograph of the installation a “G” – evidently for Giorgione – in a trompe l’oeil effect as it followed the circumference of the basin (see CHIA 1978: 17).

(“this is what saw us! / this is what we see!”; “a glance”)¹⁰⁰⁹ which was certainly a term of dialogue for Cucchi’s *Disegno finto*. After all, in his own installation at Studio Giuliana De Crescenzo, the younger debutant artist also followed Chia’s early and influential interest in anamorphosis.¹⁰¹⁰

After the declarative proem, *Disegno finto* unfolds as illustrated texts whose style and structure deliberately simulate various genres, from scientific reports on the psychological development of the child; to personal diary of childhood;¹⁰¹¹ to geometric demonstrations; to sapiential, mysterious text; to an argument in art debate, always avoiding logical content. The subjects also range from cosmic genealogies to agriculture and the latest black news,¹⁰¹² to, of course, drawing. In such a fragmented and obscure discourse, it is difficult to understand exactly Cucchi’s reflection on the medium to which he has given the title of his artist’s book. Moreover, the illustrated drawings function both as a counterpoint to the texts and as their objects; in other words, the meaning of “fake drawing” emerges from both the texts and the drawings.

Drawing is described as something corporeal, expressed by the body rather than the mind: “the birth of the image goes out from the stomach not from the head in a drawing”.¹⁰¹³ The physical origin of drawing, however, does not imply its exactness, necessity or any analogy with objective measurement. Other passages stress a certain imprecision instead: “A man says that while he moves, he traces some drawings, he says that such drawings hasten or delay certain facts of his”; see also: “Man has always drawn with the same proportions an ant and an elephant [...]. One could say that a

¹⁰⁰⁹ As usual in Chia’s work, poems contribute to the work as much as the images. Moreover, the artist slightly changed it when he republished it in *Intorno a sè*. First, the title dropped: «La tempesta cronologica». *Esercizi sulla tempesta senza il lampo* (“The chronological tempest. Exercises on the tempest without the lightning”). The second version of the poem discarded some verse, reported in the following transcript: “[A glance / A movement of ours / a sudden noise / the ghost turned around / and saw us /] THEME of a moment / [sudden scare /] this is what saw us / this is what we see. / Do you AGREE? / [From the painter’s place /] a glance / a sudden noise / at the appropriate time / re-enacts the event. / What to do in an afternoon / of such uncertain weather? / Playing with dice [Data, a playful homage to the journal] / shaking [T]hem in silence / [with yearning languor /] in a bad mood / until releasing them at a stroke / certain of chance / Thinking follows them / and of course wins / if it [who] invents the rules / of the already-played game. / What is assigned at stake / [neither true or false /] is a thunder, [/] the fall of a veil. / The youth seizes / the moment / and casts intrusively / the hoped glance / at the right moment / of the right thunder / which brightens the scene / of the seated woman / slightly cluttered / and naked by chance / who looked back to us: / me, the VOICE the noise / you G.[IORGIONE], the lightning-fast [pervert] painter”.

¹⁰¹⁰ A sequence of three exhibitions demonstrates how anamorphosis encountered the interest of young conceptualist artists in the Roman scene. Chia’s show at Giuliana De Crescenzo (March 1978) included a basin similar to the one carrying Giorgione’s *The Tempest*: this time the reproduction showed an abstract, geometric image similar to a constructivist painting of the twenties. The same image was reproduced onto a half-rolled textile sheet hanging on wall, and onto the curved surface of a vase hanging from the ceiling and turned upside-down. The theme, then, was the distortion of a geometrical, modern painting onto concave and convex surfaces. A month later, the artist Gianfranco Notargiacomo, very close to Chia, installed a anamorphic self-portrait together with little sculpture of himself at Galleria La Salita. Lastly, in Cucchi’s *Mare mediterraneo*, the installation at Giuliana De Crescenzo that was accompanied by the publication of *Disegno finto*, included two long rubber silhouettes of humans that artist himself remembered as “anamorphic” (CUCCHI, DI PIETRANTONIO 2017).

¹⁰¹¹ See in particular the references to vivid moments of daily life in the countryside, CUCCHI 1978: [3-4].

¹⁰¹² For instance, “Sam’s son who kills only women with long red hair ont heir back” (ibid: [13]) is mentioned, referring to the serial killer David Berkowitz who was arrested in the Summer 1977.

¹⁰¹³ Ibid: [8].

relation of submission to the necessity of time does not exist between man and things. The DRAWING of man shortens or delays the indication of things, that's it!". Hypothetically, this convoluted allusion may address forms of process art, based on bodily objectivity. In this sense, Penone's draftsmanship could correspond to the polemical target of Cucchi's "fake drawing". Few months after Cucchi's show, Penone executed an exemplar of his series *Pressione* ("Pressure") in the same gallery, and on the opposite wall, he arranged an even more objective, or "true", drawing: *Impronte rilevate sulla matita durante l'esecuzione* ("Fingerprints Taken on the Pencil During Execution", **figure V.52**). Bonito Oliva eloquently reviewed the wall drawing as a "subtle but rigorous work, where drawing is at the service to a work that manages to inscribe sculpture on the wall" and the five, framed fingerprints as "signs of a processuality, in which the art making directly witnesses the objective presence of the body in art".¹⁰¹⁴

Another disavowed feature in Cucchi's *Disegno finto* is perspective, a frequent visual element in conceptualist practices like those of Giulio Paolini or Claudio Parmiggiani. "I have eliminated perspective from the house": this phrase is contained in a text illustrated by a perspectival drawing of a room, in which a house is raised on four tree trunks, and surrounded by a comb, a knife, a sword and a human figure (**figure V.53**). As bizarre as this iconography was, it found a palpable comparison with the photographs of a 1977 installation by Michelangelo Pistoletto, in which the Turin-based artist had raised a table and a chair out of rough logs. It was entitled *Sopra sotto – sotto sopra* ("Above Below - the Below Above"), because mirrors had been placed under the furniture to reverse the perspective of the observer from below (**figure V.54**).¹⁰¹⁵ The quotation of this recent work may have been hinted to in the opening text too, where the theme of the "stanza sottosopra" ("room upside down") returns again and again. Elsewhere, Cucchi re-used the scheme for *Ritratto di casa* but he smashed and compressed it in three different ways, as a violent anamorphosis set against the perspectival intelligibility of architecture.¹⁰¹⁶

However, in a declarative and provocative passage, Cucchi positioned against visuality as a primacy of seeing. This time, the target could have been Paolini's work as based on the phenomenological "eye":

"It is because all art has always worked «on its own eyes», on what it sees. For this man, the work done "above the earth and within the earth" was not creative at all. A GRANTED COSMIC LOSS RELATED TO TIME AND DURATION IS THE IDEA OF DRAWING: there is a time of drawing: the time of replication of this drawing.

¹⁰¹⁴ BONITO OLIVA 1978C.

¹⁰¹⁵ The installation occupied a room in Galleria Persano in Turin and was documented by Paolo Mussat Sartor.

¹⁰¹⁶ See CUCCHI 1978: [22].

Drawing does not exist: drawing experiences a double moment, the moment of the idea and the moment of the articulation of it; an artistic invention emerges «laterally», one that does not mark the field of action of that knowledge of the thing that the thing was previously designated to contain”.¹⁰¹⁷

The ultimate statement of a “non-existence” of drawing contrasted strongly with the abundance of illustrations, and suggests that “disegno finto” is the strategy itself to counter those paradigms of draftsmanship that belonged an earlier generation of artists.

As obscure as the texts they “illustrate”, the drawing resulted strongly autonomous, even if some were juxtaposed on the same page and most are made by the same peculiar ink technique (with occasional additions of watercolour) that determined an irregular trait. They dated to 1977 and sometimes got manipulated in the course of the publishing process, in order to obtain incongruous superimpositions. Despite their strongly figurative subject matter, a content reading reveals almost always impossible and opaque, while recurrent visual themes echoed textual expressions like “curved glance”, “rhythmic return” or “upside down”; figures are elongated, anamorphic, their appendages curving like sticks, their limbs repeating beneath them.¹⁰¹⁸

The autonomy of each drawing stimulated another interesting critical response, that is an inevitable resort to ecphrasis. Bonito Oliva, who had dedicated a careful and positive ecphrasis to Clemente’s pastel *Allegoria gratis* few months earlier, positioned himself as the beholder of the sequence of Cucchi’s drawings, merging in the fragmentary narratives, in a fully cohesive reading (alimented by the same philosophical sources, like Lacan and Deleuze). Here are two examples of illustrations and respective ecphrases:

“[See **figure V.55**] The child has then an inclination to gaze, that is an open attitude and a hidden intention, he carries around his waist a horn/dagger, which cuts/kills: a tool to fly away from home, to cut the cord and fix it to the house [...]. The dagger does not grow, it becomes a miniaturistic tool ornating the side, arms the nudity of the child up to the curved line of the birds. [See **figure V. 53**] The house escape continues, it raises with itself the built part and the future building, the anamorphosis of the man who works on the roof in an oblique navigation of the universe, along a path that tries to paraphrase deep impulses, a way, according to Lacan, where the desire field meets the domain of vision ”.¹⁰¹⁹

It is quite interesting to notice the fundamental shift that happened in the conception of an artist book in the relation of drawing. *Intorno a sè* and *Disegno finto* proposed a very traditional illustration, with the singular drawings alongside texts; sometimes illustrated directly on the page; but often, photographed with a clear indication of the support too. In the case of Cucchi, the illustration strategy

¹⁰¹⁷ Ibid: [15].

¹⁰¹⁸ See FRANKFURT 1984: 109, 462.

¹⁰¹⁹ BONITO OLIVA 1978B.

can be better understood by remembering that in the same months the artist was collaborating to a children's volume, Ruggero Guarini's *Silenzio e Desiderio* ("Silence and Desire") edited by a small publishing house in Teramo (**figure V.56**).¹⁰²⁰ The drawings, published courtesy of the Studio De Crescenzo, occupy the entire two-page space and animate the book almost distracting from the text, to which they only vaguely respond: the two kids of the story appear in the middle of a quantity of other creatures and colorful figures typical of Cucchi's imagery (he abundantly used the gold leaf). The dreamy incoherence and substantial autonomy of each drawing joined the already mentioned fortune of the fairy tales, to produce a remarkable shift in the meaning and taste of artist books in the late seventies. The most important examples of artist book and catalogues by artists of earlier generations had intentionally refuted the static relationship between text and illustration: the results were proper conceptual artworks like Anselmo's *141 particolari di infinito*, or retrospective recapitulations of a career, like Penone's *Rovesciare gli occhi*, both seeking a coherence between drawing interventions, photographic documentation of the works and texts. Typically, full-page illustrations were privileged, in order to conceptually coincide with the paper support, or sophisticated graphic systems crossings through pages.

This shift was most strongly perceived when *Domus* published together the reviews of *Tre o quattro artisti secchi* and Valentina Berardinone's *L'arte dell'immagine – a mia immagine e somiglianza* ("The art of image – in my image and likeness"). The latter, published in 1978 by La Nuova Foglio (the same publishing house of like Cucchi's *Il veleno è stato sollevato e trasportato*), is an eloquent example of a systematic and conceptual artist book, by an artist that debuted in the sixties as a pop painter and then developed a multimedia practice involving sculptures, photography, video and drawing. As it was stated in the introductory note, Berardinone gathered "many notes sheets – words, drawings, phantasies – which in the last two years accumulated on my work desk".¹⁰²¹ Although fictive this information might have been, it stated the unity and coherence of entire work: although "the last page is such by chance, the book may never end...", she articulated a "continuum of false resemblances and revealed ambiguities, of questions and desires, of censored confessions and confessed censorships". The result, a work "on the image (on the condition itself of identity and desire...)", appealed to formal strategies of drawing that can be compared to other Italian analytical practices (**figure V.57**). Berardinone's interrogation of the image, as a copy and the place of a system of gazes, is indebted to Giulio Paolini, as are the classical references: however, the identification with the poet Sappho addressed a female (if not feminist) perspective within a purely analytical approach.

¹⁰²⁰ See GUARINI 1978, edited by Lisciani & Zampetti within a series titled "C'era non c'era". At the end of the same year, Guarini published an interview with Bonito Oliva on the journal *Art dimension*, in which two drawings from *Disegno finto* were also reproduced, see *Art dimension*, 15-16 (September-December 1978): 44.

¹⁰²¹ BERARDINONE 1978: [3].

Retracing and repetition, sometimes mechanical, are the most used devices: a declared homage to Boetti's *Cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione* is on a page where the graphed paper is retraced once by hand and once with a ruler, and captioned: "Also in order to say that resemblance is the last illusion of harmony, I seek the borders of difference". Elsewhere, the strong autography stated in the book's title is affirmed visually by an insertion of transparent pages, showing in sequence the imprints of the fingers and the hand palm – an image of objectivity overtly *à la Penone*.

The contrast with *Tre o quattro artisti secchi* was evident from Lisa Ponti's few but precise words: "Three authors superimposing each other. They do not mention their names. They do make their own portraits. Or self-portraits. For 64 pages straight, drawn and written, written-drawn, only avoiding the stop. With care and non-care. Without ending. There is the attempt to lean out of the book. A litter of sentences [...] «At the setting of the sun of civilisation, even short men cast a long shadow» (Kraus)".¹⁰²² Her conclusion (actually a quote from the book itself!)¹⁰²³ seems to inaugurate a diffused skepticism on the commercial relaunch of painting operated by the Galleria Emilio Mazzoli and critical intervention by Oliva, whose narcissism was denounced by the choice of reproducing his portrait included in the book. That drawing could be easily attributed to Cucchi, but as for all the other 44 illustrations (with only two exceptions), no caption appears and it is not always easy to recognize Chia or Cucchi's polymorphous style. Moreover, it is likely that the two collaborated by drawing on the same sheet in some cases. In any case, the dismissal of autography is the most evident factor of the opposition with conceptualist artist books like Berardinone's, although it is an evidently conceptual strategy on its own.

However, the collaboration directly involved Bonito Oliva too, who aligned his intervention to the nonsensical strategy that already characterized the two artists' work. The book is a montage of fragments of different texts, interlacing one after another and reciprocally interrupting; sometimes, a single excerpt is recognizable by the italics. What is plausibly Bonito Oliva's own part starts on page 13 and is printed in bold: it can be identified because of a quote from Nietzsche that was already used for the introduction to *Disegno finto*, and more evidently because of the subject of the essay, which is his own name, "A.B.O.". A possible precedent for the three-headed conversation might be found in Chia's career and in an earlier collaboration with Bonito Oliva, that was evoked by a drawing included in *Intorno a sè*. With great dexterity, the initials of Bonito Oliva, Gian Enzo Sperone and himself are knotted together within the image of a match between a kangaroo and a boxer (**figure V.58**). The image (not by chance a fight) was conceived for a show at the Galleria Sperone in Rome in early 1977, together with an invitation on which a dialogue between the three actors (the artist, the

¹⁰²² PONTI 1979.

¹⁰²³ See BONITO OLIVA, CHIA, CUCCHI 1978: 46-47.

gallerist, the critic) was printed, with a paradoxical discussion on the need for the exhibition to take place by surprise and sanctioned its logical impossibility.¹⁰²⁴

Emilio Mazzoli recently recalled how he first met Cucchi and Chia in Modena, when they proposed the publication and brought him drawings that were probably also exhibited at the gallery.¹⁰²⁵ According to this recollection, Bonito Oliva was involved at a later stage, but it is more likely that the initiative came directly from all three (or four, including Mazzoli): not only were the contacts between the critic and the artists already established, but the book was published as the first issue in a series that would later include the other artists of the Transavanguardia.¹⁰²⁶ All the “three or four dry artists” (“secchi” meaning roughly, “bold”) therefore decided from the outset that drawing would be the underlying theme of the work.

In the long body of the text, made all the more massive by its interrupted flow and the nonsense of almost all the contributions, the terms “drawing” and “to draw” recur frequently (some 65 times). The disparate variety of themes and motifs was probably achieved through improvisation, free association, even psychedelic alteration: in the face of such discursive disconnection, the continuity the drawing seems all the more evident.¹⁰²⁷ The following passage, for example, is impossible to understand in terms of syntax, point of view and theme, but drawing is a key word:

««And I didn't know?» by us everything concurs to make the dear drawing very docile, expelling everything natural, original and wild: then it is a good reason to take a trip together. Hey, this way! Hey, over there! Fear behind. Every step, every word could mean a drawing. «One should not have underestimated the height at which he held his gaze.

No one is afraid anymore. We would draw only to defend ourselves.

In the end: drawing. Officially forbidden. Now one big drawing of things a day. At hand also....but yes!, stop at every major center. The atmosphere changes three times in two hours.

«Shut up!»».¹⁰²⁸

¹⁰²⁴ See MINOLA, MUNDICI, POLI, ROBERTO 2000: 281.

¹⁰²⁵ “They came from Rome by train. They wanted to publish that famous book which became *Tre o quattro artisti secchi*. Cucchi had also made some drawings on toilette paper. I found the book very interesting and I decided to publish it immediately. The relationship with Cucchi was born in this way as well as the first show *Tre o quattro artisti secchi*. [...] Everything starts with Cucchi going around Roman galleries like Pio Monti's and meeting Chia. An intrigue arises between the two. Chia is a man of great culture, with a past in the academy, who knows the tools [...]. And he met Cucchi, the visionary. [...] Cucchi and Chia made various paintings together [...] works at four hands [...]" (D'ERCOLE 2014: 14-16).

¹⁰²⁶ Ironically, Bonito Oliva reviewed the book on *Il Corriere della Sera*, see BONITO OLIVA 1978D. After *Tre o quattro artisti secchi*, Mazzoli edited Chia's *Mattinata all'opera* (“A morning at work”), Cucchi's *Canzone* (“Song”), Clemente's *Vetta* (“Peak”), Paladino's *En de re*, all introduced by Bonito Oliva, who had tried out this form with the two catalogs of the Studio Giuliana De Crescenzo.

¹⁰²⁷ The beginning of the text contains a possible reference to the project origin: “We ventured, on both sides. It all started adventurously from two movements after departure”. Elsewhere, anecdotes of the transportation of the drawings might have been inserted and veiled with hermetic tones (“it is on the it is on the asphalt of the national road that these drawings are scattered here and there behind an engine”), see BONITO OLIVA, CHIA, CUCCHI 1978: 9, 11.

¹⁰²⁸ Ibid: 33-34.

If some interesting observations about the art context can be extrapolated (like the hint to a “official prohibition” of drawing, possibly referring to strict conceptualism), their proper meaning is but conjectural. Sometimes, when a drawing is mentioned, it works rather as a prop: it has a function in the narration and action described, it is located spatially (for example, “here a dear drawing floated in the tank”,¹⁰²⁹ or “near a haystack”¹⁰³⁰) while nothing is said about its formal characteristics or subjects. This appears consistent to the 44 drawings illustrated in the volume, which create a disparate imagery that is only vaguely related to what is written (for example, a haystack and dogs recur). Two illustrations are dedicated to a bizarre object, a brick or a stone enveloped in a paper sheet covered with frottage-like signs (**figure V.59**). On the side of the object, Cucchi clearly drew a figure in his own typical style.¹⁰³¹ It would be interesting to put this work in relation to another “sculptural drawing” by Chia, which is not documented in a specific exhibition although it was published as a photograph. *Sulla terrazza* (“On the terrace”, **figure V.60**) was published on a 1980 group catalogue edited by Paul Maenz. It seems possible to individuate three separated object, a morbid, tiny sculpture enveloped by a thread on a pedestal; a paper sheet full of handwritten writings and the sketch of a man in jail; and a larger drawing representing a form similar to the sculpture itself. As it will be mentioned further on, the figure of the prisoner is present in *Tre o quattro artisti secchi*, and this outdoor installation may be collocated in the same months of collaboration.

Chia and Cucchi’s drawings were the starting point of the construction of the book. Looking closely to the tiny illustrations (and sometimes it is possible to doubt the effective visibility of the illustration and the general technical quality of the publication), it is possible to understand that some parts of the text were first written by hand and alongside drawings on overloaded sheets. The sheets themselves may have actually served to the printer (one is numbered “Foglio n. 1”),¹⁰³² that in some cases could not understand everything on the page. One illustration even shows a text that was eventually excluded, which refers to the “impaginazione” (“layout”) of the book.¹⁰³³

The making process was a first cause of the general fragmentation of the text: it was accounted as an anecdote, with usual hermetic tones, in the following passage that was written on two drawings:¹⁰³⁴

¹⁰²⁹ Ibid: 17.

¹⁰³⁰ Ibid: 33.

¹⁰³¹ Ibid: 12, 15.

¹⁰³² See the drawing illustrated ibid: 40.

¹⁰³³ Ibid: 19. A few instructions are readable: “splitting the page in two like a hair, so that the binding doubles”; “Useless to proceed with the enumeration of pages when each one contains two or more. Useful to free veils by leafing through sheets”.

¹⁰³⁴ The drawings are reproduced on pages 22 and 17.

“[**figure V.61**] A dry, lively evening full of phenomena, spent with friends: So far, it has not occurred to anyone to review or even reread what was noted in the assembly.

Whoever took the floor entered the scene like a joker who had forgotten his part and score; in fact, at our assemblies [**figure V.62**] it also happens that we sing, in the luxuriance of the aptitudes

[line left blank, probably because the original handwriting in the drawing is unreadable]

[im]peded to cheer the dry evening with songs and rare eloquence, but prompted each of the friends to make quick notes on the phenomenon. What follows is a verbatim transcription of the readable part of those notes, including three or four drawings, which, if I remember correctly, were made in almost total darkness. The text was written on impulse and in a state of semi-consciousness so that rereading it is an intense surprise even for us”.¹⁰³⁵

Again, drawings are part of the action, “made in the darkness [...] in a state of semi-consciousness”. During this assembly between the two artists (and maybe the critic), some of the themes they were interested in at the time came out, like the problematization of the concept of quality. It is at the core of an apologue about a hiker which was handwritten all around a female figure in the pose of a callipygian Venus (**figure V.63**):

“So, the hiker starts with a first step to the town the village to gather impressions. A second step and he sees someone sitting in the countryside intent on drawing and says to himself: I expect from him the drawing of a well-drawn face. One step after another and he wonders if his own [expectation] is for a drawing that captures the resemblance to a model. The answer is; No!, not having thought of a model when he said to expect the drawing of a well-drawn face! So; the expectation drawing must be something independent of a model.

So how does one say that a drawing is well-drawn? SIMPLE! The same way one decides that an egg is well-drawn. Taken aback by the extravagance of the comparison, the hiker stops and hesitantly wonders if the uncooked drawing is not the blank page and if the known drawings do not correspond to the varying degrees of cooking of the egg. Step by step [...] the walker is behind the draughtsman actually intent on admiring the beautiful drawing of a face. Is it really the drawing of the waiting? [...] No, in part this drawing was already present in the hiker's expectation and as such he expected it, for the rest the drawing realises its completeness responding to the expectation right here behind the draughtsman's back by manifesting itself to the hiker's eyes as the well-closed oval of a well-drawn beautiful face.

This is the reason for the comparison with the well-cooked egg, and that the egg is well-cooked is told to us by the hiker who eats the drawing with his eyes”.¹⁰³⁶

The obvious clue to the overall meaning is overtly Lacanian and is provided few lines further, where it is said that “It is necessary to clarify that the hiker means ‘the observer’ and that the essential in

¹⁰³⁵ Ibid: 42-43.

¹⁰³⁶ Ibid: 56-58.

exposing the dangers of the hike is the care in seeing and more generally is the experience of the senses”.¹⁰³⁷

Although Lisa Ponti defined the book as “without ending”, the last fragment of text is positioned not by chance. Now, the text directly addresses the reader and is written in first person: the narrator is an artist-prisoner. Only “the light of a lamp some paper sheets and some chemical substances which escaped the control of my tormentors allowed me to derive the colours that adorn the drawing from a prisoner’s rare moments of peace”. The last phrase, then, hands over to the reader the book:

“Profit from the teachings of your friend, they are so clear that there would be much to fear if this writing fell into hands other than your own. What are you complaining about, what are you bathing in! And remember not to overlook anything: a misunderstood line, a forgotten letter, a lost drop, would prevent you from lifting the veil of the drawing that would appear quite different.

Do not pity me, for at the first assembly you will see me again in your despair, having escaped from where I was ordered to spend the night”.¹⁰³⁸

On the whole, though deliberately “careless”, “mindless” and nonsensical, *Tre o quattro artisti secchi* articulates through a self-aware, double representation. On the one hand, the book is made on itself, describing its own making and illustrating the drawings in which it was first conceived and drafted: this device can be read as a subversion or distortion of classic examples of conceptual artist books generated “from within”, by a tautological rule. On the other hand, the authors stage an insistent self-representation, that starts from the Lacanian problematisation of the self as a component in a field of vision, and arrives at an eccentric, deviant or marginalised self-portrait (as a prisoner, as a hiker, a “guitto” that is a “joker”).

The field of vision between the three is also activated by the respective drawn portraits illustrated in the book, which were the only drawings to have a title (by inscriptions and dedications like “A Mr Enzo Mr Sandro Chia”, **figure V.64**). Cucchi’s homage to Chia, in particular, is a disquieting vision from behind, in which the subject has a blank-gloved arm on the shoulder of a companion who is invisible except for his arm ending up in Chia’s trousers.

III.3 La mano morta: *plagiarism and performativity*

The dismissal of autography between Chia and Cucchi was less a negation of subjectivity than a playful subversion of the system’s rules, a provocation to the beholder (the reader, the gallerist, the

¹⁰³⁷ Ibid: 61.

¹⁰³⁸ Ibid: 63-64.

collectors). In this deceptive game, Achille Bonito Oliva participated actively from the artists' side, playing the part of the deceived critic. Few months after the publication, in a review dedicated to the further editions of the "Con-Arte" series,¹⁰³⁹ he imagined a conflict between the judging critic and the artist the recalls directly his experience within *Tre o quattro artisti secchi*:

"To the critic's sarcasm, the artist replies with a mockery: he shows him some paintings painted by another artist. [...] The critic's praise is followed by the revelation of identity: the great artist is a monkey. Then the crime occurs. The critic tries to kill the artist, who has witnessed the failure of his gaze, and amputates his hand, thus suppressing the head of the work".¹⁰⁴⁰

If the dramatic tones, literary were a heritage from the artists, and the figure of the monkey had been already used by Chia as the traditional alias of the artist/critic, the image of the "dead hand" (the article's title), amputated for the deception, is at the origin of the *Enthauptete Hand* exhibition in 1980. In fact, in relation to drawing, the idea of interrupting the channel between mind and hand (making the latter, the "head of the work") was all the more powerful, as the medium had stood as a sincere, im-mediate confession of the self.¹⁰⁴¹

Although these have always been considered as the prodromes of the Transavanguardia, Chia and Cucchi's strategy stemmed from earlier conceptualist practices of the seventies. Unsurprisingly, plagiarism of a prestigious Duchampian lineage did not spare drawing, as a privileged object of assigned "truth". With timely irony, a rigorous artist like Maurizio Mochetti had questioned the recent (market and critics') fascination with the most fragrant and refined aspects of drawing. For his first show with at Galleria Persano in Turin, in late 1977, he presented three drawings of mediocre quality, made in charcoal, and portraying three film stars, Jean Harlow, Gary Cooper and Katharine Hepburn (**figure V.65**). Mochetti revealed that they had been made in 1936 by an unknown artist, whose signature was curiously identical to his. With a gesture of appropriation that echoed Duchamp or Paolini's precedents, the artist questioned autography and quality as specific features in the observation, evaluation and attribution of drawing. Another meaningful case of appropriation of the autography of drawing was *Autoritratto attraverso mio padre, 1933-73* ("Self-Portrait Through My Father, 1933-1973"), that was conceived in 1973 and elaborated in 1977 as a multiple for the Edizioni Lucio Amelio.¹⁰⁴² It was the photographic reproduction of the artist's portrait as an infant made by

¹⁰³⁹ Namely, Cucchi's *Canzone* and Chia's *Mattinata all'opera*, see CUCCHI 1979 and CHIA 1979.

¹⁰⁴⁰ BONITO OLIVA 1979B.

¹⁰⁴¹ "But what can the hand ever demonstrate in a drawing? Take this exhibition: is it really what-almost as an obvious fact-we expect from a hand drawing? The individuality of an artist, the authenticity of a person? Or is a different perspective being announced today [...]?" (FAUST 1980).

¹⁰⁴² The edition was titled *Un'ora dedicata ai 31 giorni del mese di marzo 1977* ("One hour dedicated to the 31 days of March 1977): on 31 sheets printed with the drawn portrait, Pistoletto wrote a sentence drawn from a text that was written in one house. See BIELLA 2019.

his father, the painter Ettore Pistoletto Olivero in 1933 (**figure V.66**). In this case, the appropriation stood for a manipulation of the genetic parentage too, a paradoxical overturning of the lineage (that might involve physical traits but also personal style) by the reflective possibility of photography. In a related text written for the edition, Pistoletto stated: “I found my father’s traits in this drawing of myself” and “this drawing presents me with the image of my father”. This profound meaning was transmitted by the choice of a highly sensible, moving graphite sketch, a manifesto for the sincere affections transmitted through drawing (as well as for the painting skills of his father, which Pistoletto had renounced for himself).

A more subtle critique and deconstruction of the mind-hand-drawing channel was put in place by Gino De Dominicis, with an apparently simple work. *Ovale eseguito a mano libera* (“Freehand oval”) was probably made in 1969 (**figure V.67**) and represented the artist in *Disegno in Italia*. Although it demonstrates the exercise-like layout and material rarefaction that is typical of Post-minimalist drawing, it also disrupts the necessary equivalence between the making and its visual outcome. The agent of such disruption is the deceptively simple title: indeed, it is difficult to believe that the artist created such a perfect shape without the aid of a mechanical tool, French curve or a stencil. However, a later testimony by the critic Bruno Corà, who recalled the artist’s performance taking place at the Incontri Internazionali d’Arte in Rome, advocates for the freehand execution:

“Gino De Dominicis turned up one morning, which was unusual because he was usually not seen until evening, and asked for some reams of extra strong typing paper and some pens and pencils. He then withdrew into a room and began drawing a single figure quickly on the sheets, trying to make the beginning and end of the line coincide perfectly in an ellipse. He observed the result after every attempt and threw it away as a failure. He was left alone so as to help his concentration and I looked in every so often to see the results. I remember that he went on drawing the figure for hours and it increased in precision after a few hundred attempts. [...] Thus it was that the freehand drawing executed with ever-greater rapidity resulted at a certain point in an authentic miracle. A perfect ellipse with all the points equidistant with respect to the foci appeared on the umpteenth blank sheet of paper, where it was impossible to distinguish the beginning and end of the line. Gino immediately stopped and held the formidable figure up for us to see”.¹⁰⁴³

One could take this eyewitness account at face value, but the *Ovale*’s meaning is only fully understood by considering the recollection of its making as an ally to De Dominicis’s own rhetoric. Part of a broader self-construction of his artist persona, this ‘performance’ was in fact a direct quotation of Giotto’s legendary ability to draw perfect circles. The crucial factor in such an operation is the delegation of meaning to the belief of the observer. Other coeval works by De Dominicis functioned in the same way: for instance, he had exhibited a ball lying on the ground and labelled it ‘Rubber ball

¹⁰⁴³ Bruno Corà, quoted in TOMASSONI 2011: 302–03, n. 219.

(falling from 2 meters) in the instant immediately preceding the rebound', as well of one of his many 'invisible sculptures', signaled by a square marked out on the floor with tape. Although certainly less impossible than stopping time or achieving invisibility, the doubtful, 'handmade' oval separates truth from drawing; by doing so it transforms autography – which is essential to the medium – into a performative condition. Here, such performativity stems not from the art-historical category of 'performance' but instead from queer theory: in order to frame an essentialist concept such as authorship, Judith Butler's well-known definition of gender as constituted 'through a stylized repetition of acts'¹⁰⁴⁴ is used. *Ovale eseguito a mano libera* requires the repeated act of (sceptically) believing, that was performed collectively by the public, the critics around the artist and even his colleagues (for example, among the private drawings by Remo Salvadori there is a sequence of many tentative ovals that can be dated to 1976 – and no oval is perfectly executed, as it turns out). The performance of authorship is not the artist's, but rather the viewer's.

In a fortunate series of works presented in 1979, De Dominicis created an analogous discourse for sculpture: "11 sculpture in movimento" ("11 sculptures in movement") had to be imagined in the position where the respective straw slippers lied, and where a straw hat was suspended in the air. The first version of such device was actually a complex installation executed in a group show with Kounellis and Ettore Spalletti at Galleria Pieroni in 1979. It was titled *Disegno* (**figure V.68**) the absent sculpture was installed as the observer of a framed little drawing (with an apparently abstract, monochrome subject). "De Dominicis determines the focus, the point of observation of the drawing on wall" by indicating its "co-ordinates": the beholder's mental projection is not exhausted in an imaginative "sculpture", but is involved in a complex gaze field that mirrors the beholder themselves. It may be no coincidence that De Dominicis chose and entitled a "drawing" instead of a painting, as the scale of a framed, tiny work on paper requires an intimate scale of perception and observation: in this sense, the photograph of the work, published few months later on the cover of *Domus*, triggers the *mise en abîme* of looks one onto another. Not only De Dominicis seemed to respond to the return to drawing, he might also have looked to Chia's earlier works, which presented strongly isolated, framed drawings that interrogated the role and the possibilities of comprehension of the beholder's. The two artists' "conversation" may have followed when Chia installed his sculpture *Intermezzo*, in the group show *Arte Cifra*, opened in June 1979 at the Galerie Paul Maenz in Cologne. On a high pyramidal pedestal, a bronze bust of a man with a top hat and caricature traits was turned toward the wall, where six paper works hanged in a free ensemble. A bundle of lines drawn in graphite directly on the wall ran around the outer perimeter of this group of sheets (**figure V.69**), in a wall-sculpture

¹⁰⁴⁴ See BUTLER 1990: 179.

composition that was still inscribed within the Kounellis-Calzolari lineage.¹⁰⁴⁵ They were two gouaches and four aquaforte etchings, realized with a calculated morsure in order to present accidental signs, hatchings and dirty or crafty surface, and colored with sepia ink. It is possible to see that the etchings' subjects were portraits: one in particular, a dandy figure in his nightie, seems conceived by mixing Bronzino's masterpiece of Mannerist portraiture, the *Portrait of a Young Man* at the Metropolitan Museum, and Sargent's famous Doctor Pozzi. This sheet was dedicated to Paul Maenz and Gerd de Vries with a sentence, "Eleganz mit Unvollkommenheit" ("Elegance with imperfection", **figure V.70**), that seems to resume Chia's self-conscious attitude toward etching (and drawing) as well. However, the bronze bust stood for the looking beholder and/or artist: *Intermezzo* in this sense might indicate an in-between moment of self-reflection and meta-representation the creative act or the exhibiting moment. In this frame, the presence of an additional sheet placed on the hat of the looking figure, who could not see it, might be interpreted as a playful element of deception.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Starting from 1977, Calzolari exhibited large paintings coordinated with slender sculptures, see MUSSAT SARTOR 1979: 60. For his show at Konrad Fischer, in February 1979, Kounellis arranged a sequence of sculptures on the wall and traced a curved line that passed through them, directly on the wall, in charcoal.

Appendix 3 *The “return” to drawing (1977-1980)*

Italy	International context
1977 Exh. <i>Chartae/Paper</i> , Milan, November Exh. <i>Otto opere di pittura contemporanea</i> , Brescia, December S. Sproccati, “Il disegno nell’arte contemporanea”, <i>G7 Studio</i> , December	Exh. <i>Drawings</i> , Castelli Gallery, NY, May Exh. documenta 6. Handzeichnungen , Kassel, June Exh. <i>American drawn and matched</i> , MoMA, NY, September Exh. <i>Die Gezeichnete Welt</i> , Hamburg, October
1978 “Che c’è di nuovo? Il disegno...”, <i>Questarte</i> , January Exh. <i>Disegni a mano libera tedeschi</i> , Galleria Quaglino, Turin, February E. Cucchi, <i>Disegno finto</i> , Rome, March M. Paladino, R. Rinaldi, “Desideria e gli esserini”, <i>DATA</i> , March Exh. <i>Voltar pagina...</i> , Galleria Diagramma, Milan, May A. Altamira, “Un ritorno al disegno”, <i>Segno</i>, Summer M. A. Picone Petrusa, “La post-avanguardia”, <i>op.cit.</i> , September A. Altamira, “Ritorno al disegno”, <i>Fotografia italiana</i> , October Exh. <i>La spirale dei nuovi strumenti</i> , Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, November S. Chia, E. Cucchi, A. Bonito Oliva, <i>Tre o quattro artisti secchi</i>, Modena, December	Exh. <i>Bilhauerzeichnungen</i> , Stuttgart, galerie Mueller-Roth, March Exh. <i>International Drawing Triennale</i> , Muzeum Architektury we Wroclawiu, Wroclaw (Poland), June
1979 A. Altamira, “Ancora sul disegno”, <i>Fotografia Italiana</i>, March A. Altamira, “Tra segno e installazione”, <i>G7 Studio</i> , March R. Maestri, “Disegno. Il gesto ridistinto a un nuovo incontro”, <i>Domus</i> , May L. Inga Pin, ed, <i>Voltar pagina...</i> , Legnano, June Exh. <i>Pittura ambiente</i> , Palazzo Reale, Milan, June Exh. <i>Mostra del disegno. 30° mostra di arte contemporanea</i> , Torre Pellice, August B. Corà, “Vettor Pisani. Il coniglio non ama Joseph Beuys”, <i>Domus</i> , September A. Bonito Oliva, “La trans-avanguardia italiana”, <i>Flash Art</i>, November	Exh. <i>Artists draw</i> , Artist Space, New York, January Exh. <i>Drawings about drawing today</i> , Ackland Art Museum, January G. Celant, “Die Italienische Erfahrung”, <i>Jahresbericht 78</i> , Maenz, Cologne, June Exh. <i>1. Internationale Jugendtriennale der Zeichnung</i> , Nurnberg, June
1980 L. Parmesani, “Immagine: un’arte felice”, <i>Flash Art</i> , February Exh. series, <i>Acquerello (Napoleone, Tuttle, Caciotti, Bianchi, Scialoja)</i> , Il Segno, Rome, February-December Exh. <i>Nuova Immagine</i> , Triennale, Milan, April	Exh. <i>Die Enthauptete Hand</i>, Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, January Exh. <i>Drawings: The Pluralist Decade</i> , American Pavilion, Biennale, Venice, June

V Plates

Conclusion

At the end of this dissertation, the question of a “return to drawing” and the dispute over its fundamental characteristic of truth seem all the more rhetorical and instrumental to critical constructions such as Bonito Oliva’s or multi-layered, performative self-representations of artists themselves in their writings and artworks. Drawing was never abandoned. The rich panorama of drawing practices covered in this research speaks to the vitality of the medium in that decade; and, conversely, to the inadequacy of any reductionist account of the relationship between conceptualism and drawing (epitomised by Altamira’s reference to the “artistic Ramadan”). The five chapters have addressed only some of the problems and issues that originate from this panorama, and the disposition of the selected arguments avoids a hierarchical structure. In this sense, the choice to define the “central” figures such as Paolini and Boetti as paradigmatic only points to the possibility of discovering the original responses to these paradigms in less known or celebrated works, enriching the reading of the latter.

The most part of the materials discussed here have never been devoted close attention, and they did not contribute to the dominant narrative of the Italian conceptualist turn in a decisive way. Many perspectives open if drawings are included in the interpretation of the practices and works for which the seventies is mostly known. This was the case with Penone’s debarked trees and their frottage, or Mario Merz’s diagrams and his spatial installations from 1970 to 1975; but one could follow up this approach and re-read some examples of “pittura analitica” as based on a drawing-based analysis of painting. One of the most important results of the present research has been to draw works on paper out of the comfortable and reassuring position alongside major works, as their secondary confirmation or footnotes. This allowed to problematize common assumptions and stale (albeit still used) critical labels, from *arte povera* to *transavanguardia*, on the basis of the artist’s material practices.

As for the methodology available and necessary to frame the specificity of drawing practices in the art of the seventies, some strategies used in the present historical account appear valid for further application on other subjects. Researching on works on paper has involved the handling of a massive quantity of objects, like Salvadori’s thousands of drawings, but also materials like sketches and studies, the status of which does not meet entirely the convention of an art object. Or rather, they require tools not typically adopted in the literature on contemporary (not to say conceptual) art, one of which is the formal sequence from the Kublerian theory. A great attention has been devoted here to printed materials as a fundamental vehicle and impulse for drawings. The study of other media such as photography and printmaking can certainly take advantage of analogous perspectives, both in respect to serial extension and intrinsic intermediality with published material.

As recalled in the introduction through Bentivoglio's definition of drawing as a shadow, the medium is literally "out of the frame" in the most seminal images of the decade, so important in documenting installation works, performance art, ephemeral actions or conceptual exhibitions. However, the presence and the importance of drawings in the same events has been largely reconstructed in all the chapters (from the inclusion of Annette Messager's drawings in the Ketty La Rocca's photographic retracings; to the paper sheets variously installed by Calzolari; to the photographed details in Clemente's installations). An observation can then be made about the usual scale of art historical analysis. The cold, objective "distance" usually associated with conceptualism should not be confused with an art historical point of view. In photographs and room views of the time as well as in documentation, drawings require to be found; it brings the gaze closer, and many other unexpected things usually come up from such an intimate experience of the artworks.

The marginality of drawing in the Italian debate of the time has been a key to critical framework on the medium. The scarcity of documentation and the difficulty in tracing the materials have been taken as a starting point for the interpretation and not merely as deficiencies to be remedied. Contrary to theoretical frameworks based on the "primacy" of drawing, the demonstration of the medium's relevance and continuity was not aimed at a univocal, new history of Italian art of the seventies. Rather, without regret, it renounces the convergent orientation of the variety of the possibilities of drawings that have been described; and looks first and foremost for multiple ways of reading works of art in the light, or rather from the shadow, of overlooked material.

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