Intermedia in Italy
From Futurism to Digital Convergence

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From Futurism to Digital Convergence

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Clodagh Brook,
Florian Mussgnug and Giuliana Pieri

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In memory of Mike Caesar
1945–2022

Torcello, Venice, 2018

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CHAPTER 1

❖

Introduction

What is needed today is not more knowledge but a better understanding of the relations between fields of knowledge.

Robert Frodeman[1]

1.1. Intermedia: A Paradigm Shift in the Arts

In Italy at the turn of the twentieth century, the arts drew suddenly closer. As the century was born, a curtain was raised on a magical new hybrid art: cinema. This seventh art merged six others in a single screen, at least according to the first theoretician of cinema in Italy, Ricciotto Canudo.[2] This would rapidly create an industry which drew together writers, photographers, artists, dancers, singers, actors, musicians, directors, and even circus performers. During the same period, poet, writer, and bon viveur Gabriele D'Annunzio, under the influence of Walter Pater and French Symbolism, spoke about how poetry tended towards the condition of music. D'Annunzio did not stop with music: he was also experimenting with absorbing painting into his novels through ekphrasis. Poetry in turn-of-the-century Italy was becoming more visual too, influenced especially by poets such as Guillaume Apollinaire and the Imagists. The Italian Futurists, after their early dabbling in synaesthesia, launched a manifesto, *Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo* [Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe] (1915) which presented a radical rethink of the concept of artistic and media boundaries and an even more radical approach to intermedial practice. This ushered in the second phase of the Futurists' work in which the 'opera d'arte totale' [total artwork], which juxtaposed or hybridized the arts, would dominate.

The early decades of the twentieth century, therefore, saw the excitement of bringing the arts together into a single space, a fascination which would only grow in importance throughout the twentieth century as new hybrid genres like sound art, video art, graphic art, and performance art were born and new sites and technologies for hybridity were developed (television, video projection, museums as white boxes, computers, the Internet). Over the twentieth century and on into the twenty-first, Italian cultural practitioners have shifted between art forms with striking fluidity. Bruno Munari played with the very notion of the book in his beautifully designed book-objects and unreadable books. Fausto Melotti moved between sculpture, ceramic art, and poetry under the foundational twin influence

of his musical and technical training which married electro-technical engineering and fine arts practice (this ended up influencing Italo Calvino's writing in the late 1960s). Italian designer-architects were all trained in three key areas which profoundly shaped their practice: fine arts (especially drawing), architecture in its most technical and structural aspects, and also a broad humanistic curriculum which included sociology and philosophy. This allowed them to link with great ease the fields of design, architecture, city planning, and technology to wider societal concerns. Gio Ponti's *Domus* magazine of the 1950s and 1960s is indicative of the ease with which traditional boundaries were being crossed: architecture, interior and object design, contemporary art, writing on art, society, and literature are presented in a cultural continuum. Pier Paolo Pasolini shifted between the world of cinema, prose, and poetry: his cinema often draws explicitly, and remediates, medieval and Renaissance painting. By the 1970s and 1980s, videoartists like Studio Azzurro and Gianni Toti had developed new hybrid forms which blended performance, video, music, and text. In the 1990s, writers like Enrico Brizzi and Niccolò Ammaniti were peppering their novels with rock music and television. By the time we reach the twenty-first century, the collective Wu Ming were creating interactive websites for their novels and in that virtual space drew together novels, music, graphic art, films, and games. These artistic interrelations represent a field of exciting experimentation at the level of artistic practice and have created intense theoretical debate throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

This book is rooted in the hypothesis that the ever-closer relations between artistic practices have been a key cultural force driving creativity since the start of the twentieth century. Throughout the period that interests us here we find movements and artists who, in theory or in practice, rethink the ways arts and media intersect and interconnect, thereby shifting and stretching previously accepted boundaries. While we do not deny the place of artistic crossings before the turn of the twentieth century, we identify the development of intermedial practice as one of the most significant paradigm shifts of the last twelve decades. It has changed the face of cultural production. The swift rise of intermedial art has quickly transformed how art is produced, and how and where we consume culture. It has radically changed what it means to be a writer, a musician, an artist. It has transformed all forms of cultural production. In tying our project to the start of modernism, we are following the distinguished narratologist, Werner Wolf, who posits the existence of an 'intermedial turn' in Western culture and situates it at the time of modernism, as manifested in many forms of experimentation, such as collage, happenings, installations, and so on.[3]

Our book is born from an urgent need to understand and map a process that has been subjected to only fragmentary charting up to now. This is not to say that the relations between the arts and media (new and old) have not attracted scholarly attention. As we will outline later in this introduction, a great deal of excellent and original work has already been accomplished. However, the work of mapping change, of trying to uncover the reasons for that change, and of producing an overarching frame (however incomplete and provisory that this will necessarily

be) has not been done. Creating a project to map this shift was not possible until relatively recently for several reasons. Firstly, its potentially vast size requires sustained collaborative practice that represents a shift away from the 'individual scholar' model on which our discipline (Italian Studies) was founded. Secondly, it requires the use of interdisciplinary methodologies which have undergone theorization and practical application only relatively recently as part of an 'interdisciplinary turn'.[4] Finally, it rests on an anti-essentialist academic foundation, laid down especially during postmodernism, which provides space and support for challenging canons and closure.[5] This nexus of collaboration, interdisciplinarity and anti-essentialism has come together in academic practice in the Humanities only over the past ten to fifteen years. It provides those of us working now with a unique vantage point from which to rediscover, and rewrite, the cultural past and present.

In attempting to map the process of the interrelations of the arts in this volume, it is hoped that a book centred on Italy, the first of its kind in English, will strike a chord with our colleagues both in Italian Studies and outside it, especially those in cognate disciplines: in English Studies, Comparative Literature, and across Modern Languages, and in the various other academic artistic disciplines, from literary and film studies to history of art, performance, and music. While the mapping we attempt here is necessarily preliminary, it provides, we believe, an indispensable starting point for a discussion about the broader shifts which underlie the relations between the arts in Italy, and elsewhere, across this timeframe. It also highlights the need for disciplines to focus away from the centre, and shift attention onto what happens either in the periphery of arts and media or, importantly, in the spaces across and in between places, where new forms are being created. In his Intermedia chart of 1995, Fluxus artist Dick Higgins visualized the new art forms that were created at the intersection of old arts and media as several concentric and overlapping circles that expand and contract in relation to the wider intermedia frame that connects them.[6] It is this ever-changing creative space imagined by Higgins that rewards far greater academic attention.

The mapping and conceptual framing we have endeavoured to bring about in this book has helped us to configure our objects of study over almost a decade of close collaboration. As authors of this book and leaders of two *Interdisciplinary Italy* research projects (both supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council),[7] we have trained our critical eye to focus away from the more stable centres of arts and media in Italy, opting instead to focus on connectivity and boundary shifts. Our work is born out of a small but significant shift in focus: in this book, we combine a wide-angle lens, which tries to capture the broader patterns of intermedial exchange, with the close-up analysis of case studies (seven years, ranging from 1915 to 2020), which help us to ground some of the changes in theory and practice at key stages in Italian culture of the past twelve decades. The result is a curious, and we hope an interesting and challenging, one: what looks central under the lens of the monodisciplinary microscope will not always be so from an interdisciplinary and intermedial one.

1.2. Intermediality: Terms, Tensions, and Theories

Whilst the idea of studying the interaction between the arts stretches back to antiquity, with Horace's *ut pictura poesis*, and has an illustrious scholarly pedigree, including *ekphrasis*, the *paragone*, and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's sister arts paradigm,[8] the term we have chosen to work with in this book is more recent: 'intermedia' denotes fields of enquiry with their roots in the mid-twentieth century.

Like any cognate expression that we might have chosen, 'intermediality' is imperfect.[9] It is a notoriously slippery and unstable term. For a start, it simply does not mean the same thing in different fields. Irina O. Rajewsky notes that many critical approaches employ the concept, each with its own 'premises, methodology, terminology and delimitations'.[10] She notes too how the objectives of intermedial analysis vary depending on whether critics are coming from media studies, from art history, musicology, philosophy, sociology, and so on. In other words, intermediality, as a young discipline, suffers from a dearth of shared understandings of what it means and where it might be used. Nonetheless, Rajewsky does plunge in and provides us with a broad definition of intermediality, which can act here as a starting point. She tells us that, '"Intermediality" refers to relations between media, to medial interactions and interferences'. It can therefore be 'applied to any phenomenon involving more than one medium'.[11] While this is an extremely broad definition of intermediality, it is with this as a starting point that we can now look at the development of the term, some key issues that it raises, and endeavour to refine our understanding of the concept to provide a grounding for the work we will do in this book. We premise our exploration by noting that our concern in this book is not to provide an exact taxonomy of these phenomena. A complex topography and taxonomy of intermedial relations runs the risk of reinforcing, on a conceptual level, the boundaries between media and arts which are being crossed in creative practice. Rather, we are interested in the ways in which artists work between media, how their practice is affected by creative exchanges between the arts, and ultimately how we can study the creative outputs generated by these encounters by shifting our own disciplinary positions in order to respond to the artistic and medial complexity of these new objects of study.

Intermediality was first theorized by Fluxus artist Dick Higgins in the 1960s. For Higgins, much of the best artwork of the mid-1960s was 'fall[ing] between media', and a critical apparatus with its roots in the Renaissance separation of the arts had, in his eyes, simply failed to deal adequately with hybrid forms like concrete poetry (graphic art and poetry) or happenings (painting, theatre). In this context, 'intermedia' was both experimental practice and a critical tool for understanding art works which may otherwise appear 'opaque and impenetrable' because they sit outside the established boundaries of arts and media.[12] Higgins visualized intermedia as a free, uncharted *space* between media and the arts in which new art could be created and operate. He also understood intermedia as a methodology that enabled artists and critics to overcome the rigid categorization and separation between media, and find new ways of seeing and understanding artistic forms that were being created between established media. Higgins, in other words, saw intermedia

as a liberatory space of experimentation in which something entirely new could be created, rather than some combination of media or process of (semiotic or other) transposition between them. Higgins's emphasis on intermediality as an open and ever-changing act places the spotlight on questions of *process*, and simultaneously undermines the concept of an artwork as a final, complete, and unchanging object. Higgins would go on, later in his career, to call for a complete dissolution of the boundaries between media, and to postulate a horizon of artistic practice beyond and outside genres and disciplines.

Our conception of intermediality in this book owes a great deal to the vibrancy of Higgins's creative understanding of intermediality as radical experimentation. For Higgins, intermedia is found in the constant tension which is born of the desire to experiment and innovate between established arts and media. This linking of intermediality and creativity would reappear in Henry Jenkins's work five decades later. In *Convergence Culture* (2006), Jenkins explained how people without specific training would use digital tools to appropriate and transform narratives, shifting them from platform to platform and from one artistic medium (say, a book) to another (say, a videogame) with relative ease, vastly increasing the amount of creativity in the general public.[13] This is not to say, however, that intermediality does not develop its own fixity over time. When revisiting his 1965 essay, Higgins noted how these tensions are not stable and how, as time progresses, 'there is a tendency for intermedia to become media with familiarity'.[14] These innovations often develop, in other words, into new, stable, accepted arts and media, and as such they then may begin the creative cycle once again. Higgins stresses the idea of flux in experimentation, pointing towards a constellation of moving alliances and intersections between arts and media. Experimentation is a fluid field which, however, tends to recreate boundaries once new intermedial forms become more established. In this book, we take impetus from Higgins in our charting of the relationship between intermedial experimentation and its normalization, a key tension between opposing impulses towards stability and instability which lies at the very heart of intermedial practices. Part of the work in this book consists in identifying where waves of intermedial experimentation rise and where they instead grow still and petrify, before freeing themselves again and moving onwards again towards a fresh peak.

A second element we take from Higgins is his questioning of critical fields. Both his early and later interventions call for a rethinking of how we, as cultural critics, approach our respective fields, and he questions how much we are prepared to collaborate, across critical and disciplinary divides, to look at intermedial art from multiple, complex, intersecting foci. Higgins is not alone in this, of course. Numerous critics have recognized the way that intermediality challenges disciplinary fields. Steven Greenblatt, for instance, notes the mismatch between the collaboration that underpins intermedial experimentation in the arts and our practice as critics. He writes that 'our great art forms are for the most part collaborative enterprises that depend upon creators with different areas of expertise talking and working with one another, and it is long overdue that scholars begin to

do the same'.[15] Bernd Herzogenrath notes that intermediality 'comprises both the links (and cross-breeds) between various art forms, and the various *disciplines* with which we talk about these media',[16] and acknowledges the fraught epistemological issue of looking at any one medium through the lens of other media and disciplinary languages and frameworks. What is particularly important to note in the work of critics like Higgins, Greenblatt, and Herzogenrath is how they call out the poor fit between the more fluid intermediality of artistic practices and the strictures of disciplinary frameworks. For them, if artists cross art and media boundaries with ease, so should scholars who approach these intersecting fields. None of these critics, however, claims that such critical work will be easy. They are not alone in this. If Roland Barthes sees interdisciplinary work as being far from peaceful as the 'solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down', Julie Thompson Klein takes the war metaphor a step further to claim that disciplines are 'warring fortresses between which envoys are sent and occasional temporary alliances formed'.[17]

The relationship between researching intermediality and questioning the field has had a profound effect on our own project. In our fortnightly blog posts on our project website,[18] and during *Interdisciplinary Italy*'s conferences, workshops, summer schools, exhibition, and public events, we have dealt with art objects and processes that are arguably more marginal and certainly less stable than those that defined the canon of Italian Studies in the twentieth century. Shifting the focus onto intermedial processes and relations in this project, as well as in the work of our many colleagues now researching in this way, has resulted in a re-orientation of the field. This allows us to question canonicity and take stock of our changing discipline(s) at a time when political and socio-cultural forces, both at home and abroad, are asking us to redefine what we do as cultural critics in response to major global challenges. While this disciplinary questioning is not itself the focus of this book, it is impossible, we believe, to read an intermedial history like this one without highlighting its implications for disciplinary practice. Three articles that we have written together over the course of our project have dealt specifically with the question of disciplines: 'Italian Studies: An Interdisciplinary Perspective', 'Italianistica in Gran Bretagna: tra interdisciplinarità e tradizione', and 'Interdisciplinary Italy: Disciplines, Inter-disciplines and Multimediality'.[19]

Intermedial research leads almost inevitably to a questioning of what we do, and what falls inside and outside its boundaries. Disciplines, with their identities, shape the discursive lens through which intermedial exchanges are viewed, and point towards the centrality of interdisciplinarity in our project. Intermedial studies fundamentally entail a movement away from an absolutist conception of truth to a conception of truth that is situated, perspectival, and discursive and that informs and is informed by the investigator's own sense of self-authorship. The intermedial perspective is not, however, one that posits a pure relativism in which all knowledge claims are always equal. Instead, it rests on the assumption that disciplines and their practitioners, as well as their activities and concepts, are already socially constituted. The task of the intermedial investigator, then, is to challenge pre-existing discourses and, following Carolyn Haynes, to embrace a criticality which combines key elements of several disciplinary discourses and which is in keeping

with their own sense of self.[20] It is a task that requires an awareness of our own situatedness as cultural critics, and the uncomfortable feeling of not being expert enough when we conduct our analysis.

What we have found over our years of collaboration, both in the core team (Brook, Mussgnug, Pieri) and when working in a much wider field of fellow researchers, is that what at times felt like a weakness became a point of strength. Being off-centre facilitated a more nuanced exploration of fields of enquiry and critical frameworks which were familiar enough to us but had not settled into pre-existing paradigms and habitual epistemological frameworks. In this respect, Haynes's position, cited above, strikes a chord with our own reflections on disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity. We are neither jacks nor masters of all trades. Our disciplines, at any one point, have shaped our critical approaches but, importantly, they have also shifted and changed as our collaborative work across borders increased and we found ourselves in dialogue with unfamiliar arts, media, and disciplinary approaches. Our book is explicit about its own situatedness and about the serendipitous and deliberately incomplete nature of the pairings (years and concepts) which have helped us to navigate through the transhistorical grids and mappings of this volume.

If we move on from Higgins to the later critical work in the field of intermediality, one of the key discussions to emerge centres on what is meant by 'media' in the term 'intermedia'. Werner Wolf points out that critics such as Friedrich Knilli, Ernest W. B. Hess-Lüttich, Jürgen Müller, and others have frequently commented on a plethora of meanings of 'media' in 'intermedia', some choosing broad definitions and some far narrower.[21] In the narrower sense, 'inter*media*' sees its object of research as old and especially new media, and therefore focuses on social media, cinema, hypercinema, computers, radio, newspapers, and so on. Many researchers have taken this critical road. Even where the focus is not on media alone, critics were influenced by this narrow meaning of 'intermedia' and have emphasized the role of media and technology in the growth of intermedia. Christian Emden and Gabriele Rippl are among those who see the rise of intermediality in contemporary literary and cultural studies as very closely related to the fact that the role, and even the very nature, of media has undergone considerable transformation over the course of the twentieth century, culminating, at least for the time being, in an increasingly digital life world 'characterized by the confluence of different media, both visual and textual'.[22] Emden and Rippl also discuss a shift that occurred with the advent of what they call 'technical images', especially photography and film,[23] given their easy accessibility and reproducibility, and, we would add, the increasing ease with which we can interact with them and to an extent modify and appropriate them via digital technologies. Technology and new media thus are seen to have encouraged and facilitated both the way the traditional arts and media interact in creative practice and the ways in which, as cultural critics, we study these relations and their creative outputs.

In the early twenty-first century, discussions of technology and new media were swept up into a debate around the concept of convergence. The publication of

Henry Jenkins's *Convergence Culture* in 2006 was a critical catalyst in this debate. Jenkins's important book assessed the converging of new digital media with old media. To explain this process, he provides the example of Bert, a yellow muppet from the long-running children's television show, *Sesame Street*. This benign muppet from old media (television) travels across multiple media platforms, frequently being transformed into an evil character in the process: from *Sesame Street* he moves through Photoshop into the World Wide Web and, Jenkins notes, 'from the posters held by anti-American protestors that are captured by CNN and into the living rooms of people around the world'.[24] Jenkins defines this process as the 'flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want'.[25] Later in his book, Jenkins uses the term 'transmedia' to describe the ways in which narrative travels across multiple platforms. His taxonomy of convergence provides a wider range of meanings and includes: (1) technological convergence, i.e. transforming old media into digital information as performed by digital cinema and digital books, for instance; (2) economic convergence (exploitation of media by companies); (3) social convergence (so-called media stacking, such as listening to music while searching on Facebook) and (4) cultural and global convergence (cultural hybridity created from the international circulation of media content). Jenkins's use of the term 'convergence' signals, in other words, a cluster of diverse typologies, which range from the concept of *merging* to the rather different idea of *flow* across platforms.

Jenkins's metaphor of merging is far closer to the etymology of 'convergence' ('con' = with; 'vergere' = to bend towards) than his metaphor of flow is. In other words, it is not just that media and arts are placed in the same space (*multi*media) or that they are passing through from one media to another (*trans*media), but they are, as the etymology hints, 'inclining together' at one point. Jackson Pollock's most famous drip painting, *Convergence* (1952), provides an apposite image for this process: the painting, created by the artist standing over the canvas and allowing the paint to drip down onto it, creates a network of lines and colours which converge. The title of the painting draws attention to the importance of the *points* at which the lines of paint meet. Convergence, as merging, therefore, focuses attention on a single space which permits diverse items to appear together before once again diverging. It is, in other words, a moment in space and time where things collide before returning to their more solitary trajectories. Jenkins does not believe, however, that convergence will result in one single black box in which all digital formats will merge: instead, multiple media will converge on a variety of different digital points. This broad, and more traditional, definition of convergence, as a bending and tending towards (*merging*, in other words), sits for Jenkins alongside *flow* between platforms, seen instead in the travels of the yellow muppet Bert. Together, these two meanings, which encompass a range of taxonomies, provide some essential keys for understanding the relationship between arts and media in the twenty-first century, and we will look at their impact in Chapter 7.

The influence of technology and both new and old media on the development of intermediality is clearly of critical importance, and in the later chapters of our book we deal with the effect of precisely these media and digital frames. Nevertheless, our definition of intermediality remains broader than this. We do not see intermedia as being *determined* by either the rise of mass media or technological innovation. Indeed, we suggest that new forms of intermediality have emerged *both* in response to technological progress *and* when artists rejected innovative technologies because of their alleged complicity with hierarchies of social, political, and cultural privilege. Many performance artists of the 1970s, for example, rejected publicly funded cultural institutions, with their access to expensive new technologies, and shared instead an interest in 'poor' materials, spontaneous creativity, and public participation, as will be explored in Chapter 5. Ultimately, our definition of 'intermediality' is close to that furnished by Wolf, who notes that his understanding of the concept includes the traditional object of 'interart studies' into a broader and more modern concept of intermediality.[26] Wolf positions intermediality in a central place along a continuum between the narrow technical expression of 'media' (newspapers, social media, and so on) and the extremely broad understanding provided by Marshall McLuhan, for instance, for whom a medium is any 'extension [...] of man'.[27] This 'moderately broad' definition of medium that stems from Wolf's position is the one that we follow in this book. Wolf writes that a medium is

> a conventionally distinct means of communication, specified not only by particular channels (or one channel) of communication but also by the use of one or more semiotic systems serving for the transmission of cultural messages.[28]

Our definition of intermediality is also moderately broad in terms of what kinds of intermedia we cover in this book. Following Rajewsky, we include in our definition of intermediality three subcategories of intermediality: medial transposition (where a source text is transformed into another medium, as for example in adaptation); media combination, or the co-presence of at least two media (as seen in comics or graphic novels); and intermedial reference, where a second medium is not materially present, but is referred to in the first medium by imitating aspects of it, such as references to painting in film or to music in a poem. Our focus here largely falls on the latter two of these catogories.[29]

This definition allows us to explore the traditional arts — from literature to theatre — as well as old media like cinema, and new forms of artistic communication such as Wu Ming's website for their novel *Manituana* (2007), or an art exhibition in the virtual space of Second Life. Our definition of intermedia also applies to the various forms of Extended Reality (XR) that we see emerging in our writing present, as outlined in Chapter 8. The discussion of Futurism, in the first part of our book, shows that intermediality, as we define it here, was already well-developed at the very start of the twentieth century, long before the processes that Emden and Rippl describe above. In brief, our 'moderately broad' use of the term 'intermediality' serves to address and to resonate with different historical and cultural contexts, and to achieve methodological openness. It replaces the awkward double term 'Interart/Intermedia' that we used for some years to signal to our colleagues that our work

was not just on the digital or technological, but was focused on relationships across the arts, from the Futurist art of noise to graphic novels, fashion, concrete poetry, and artists' websites. Herzogenrath, who takes a similar approach to Wolf, notes that the 'object of inquiry' of intermedia analysis is 'the entire culture of the media (literature, paintings, film, music, digital art, photography, installations, comic books and more)'.[30]

There is one final area of the intermedial debate which has been particularly important for underpinning our work in this book. This is the concept of 'in-betweenness' and the related discussion of borders. Higgins's 1965 essay focused explicitly on the spaces *between* media. More recently, Lars Elleström was curious about where one can find the gaps between the different media. For him, what intermediality had to offer was thus a bridging of these gaps or simply a better understanding of what happens inside the in-between space of media. Henk Oosterling and Eva Plonowska Ziarek take this further in their reflection on intermediality as a critical discipline and methodology:

> methodologically, the intermedial approach to 'being in common' [inter-esse] does not focus on the shared identity but promotes research on the epistemological, ethical, and political status of *inter* (the in-between) — the term evoking the competing claims of relation, separation, interval, multiplicity, singularity, difference, and community.[31]

Our discussion of in-betweenness entails revisiting and revising conceptual systems based on concepts of fixity, linearity, centre, and hierarchy. Exploring the in-between refocuses attention on notions of networks, links, nodes, and boundary crossings. However, discussions of the in-between cannot exist either in abstract terms or indeed in isolation. They necessarily call back into being what lies on either side of the 'between'. Consequently, when we embark on 'investigations of "in-betweenness" ',[32] we also need to remain alert to medium specificity and the materiality of media, whilst taking into consideration the heterogeneous nature of the sites of inquiry that we have selected for our analysis.

What is striking about the discussion of intermediality as in-betweenness is that it points to the fact that all too often we conceive artistic media — and indeed also disciplines — in geographical terms as 'delineated by definable borders'. Consequently, we often see intermedial studies 'as a kind of topographical description'.[33] There are important implications in this topographical model. Mediatic and artistic encounters can be characterized by the transgression of borders or by the enactment of one medium within another. These encounters have the potential to give the consumer of these artistic forms access to different levels of meaning, while some artists set to challenge the limits of media and representation more than others. Yet this geographical and spatial conceptualization is also problematic in that it, perhaps unwittingly, taps into an imaginary geography that reinforces the idea of boundaries. Crossing can thus become reminiscent of territorial conquest rather than the free creative space imagined by Higgins. For Henry Giroux, '[t]hinking in terms of borders allows one to critically engage the struggle over those territories, spaces and *contact zones* where power operates to either expand or to shrink the

distance and connectedness among individuals, groups, and places'.[34] Giroux's reference to contact as a site of power struggle is also central to Mary Louise Pratt's notion of the contact zone, which we have found particularly productive for our work.[35] The contact zone is a site that facilitates exchange between a dominant and a less dominant power in the imperial context. At its most fundamental it shows that in the colonial context (one of spatialized and racialized domination) 'cultures, meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power'.[36] The concept, which has travelled across other disciplinary contexts, is also helpful to our understanding of arts and media border-crossings as spaces where cultures (and in our case disciplines, arts and media) meet, compete, and blend. It is important to be mindful of the ways in which borders imply what is inside and outside of them, and what is kept at their margins. As David Forgacs reminds us, margins are not 'simply there', 'they are produced by particular ways of seeing and organizing social space'.[37] Throughout this project we have challenged ourselves to acknowledge the spatial and power relations evoked by the concept of borders and the ways in which academic disciplines and methodological approaches are influenced by spatial representation.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, travelling and crossing borders, both physically and metaphorically, was fraught with ideological and political controversy. In a post-pandemic world and in post-Brexit Europe, such tensions have once again become familiar and it is easy to forget that, for much of the twentieth century, ideas and metaphors of mobility and internationalization carried entirely positive connotations. As we show in Chapter 4, this was the case, for instance, throughout the 1960s, at least in the context of the Italian neo-avant-garde. An emblematic example here is Alberto Arbasino's celebrated 1963 essay in which he laments the atrophy of post-Fascist Italian culture and encourages Italian intellectuals to cross borders, wryly exhorting them to take a simple day trip to the small Swiss town of Chiasso (a mere two-hour bicycle ride from Milan).[38] The physical and metaphorical crossing of boundaries is here imagined as a liberation from aesthetic and political strictures, in a manner that recalls Higgins's spatial visualization of intermedia: a free zone across media borders that encourages contact and experimentation after the stifling impact of Fascism. (Curiously, as we shall see in Chapter 3, the Fascist regime was also interested in the idea of a dissolution of boundaries between the arts, in order to better police and regulate creative activities.) More than fifty years on, the value of internationalization and transnational flow appears once again questionable. Less positively accented, these processes have become increasingly associated with homogenization, global sameness, and loss of distinctive cultural traditions. In Chapter 7, we will observe how these more negative connotations of cross-border mobility began to emerge in the 1970s, when theories and practices of intermediality were taking root alongside anti-capitalist protest movements and early forms of environmentalism.[39] In brief, what we see as we move across the second half of the twentieth century is a never-ending flux in the perception of intermedia border-crossing: Higgins's and Arbasino's utopian visions of free, creative experimentation emerge in response

to the disciplinary and political strictures of earlier decades and, in turn, become tainted, from the 1970s onwards, by geopolitical anxieties.

To sum up, our focus in this book takes inspiration from a range of debates in the often amorphous, and still developing, field of intermedia studies. The intriguing relationship between intermediality and creative experimentation — so clearly expressed by Higgins, and decades later re-imagined by Henry Jenkins in his discussions of Pierre Lévy's collective intelligence — provides a foundation stone of our work. We are treating this concept with vigilance, nonetheless, as it can lead to superficially utopian discourses of ideal, free, and democratic interminglings, which bely, to use Michel Foucault's words, the 'dissention' and 'disparity' at the 'origin of things',[40] as well as missing the power that inheres in the creation of intermedial art. The different case studies in this volume serve to illustrate these workings of power across a variety of historical contexts. For example, in Chapter 3 we discuss the complicity of experimentation and political control when we analyse the relationship between intermedia and Italian Fascism. By contrast, Chapter 5 examines intermedia border-crossing as a subversive practice by leftist critics of capitalism in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Through these different examples, and several others, our work explores both in-betweenness and boundaries, and recognizes, and questions, our own positioning as critics when facing intermedial art practices.

While we do not presume to add significantly to the taxonomic debate through our work in this book (for reasons expressed at the start of this section), we do hope that our volume will provide new insights into the rather wonderful ways in which intermedial art has emerged and developed in Italy. In other words, if Ágnes Pethő talks about three approaches to intermediality in the field — the classificatory; the tracking of the history of media relations; and a detailed analysis of intermediality in the text[41] — our emphasis in this book falls on the second of these approaches. We map a history of these relations, whilst also remaining interested in the way that shifts in arts and media, and the productive experimentation of intermedial art, continue to carry traces of meaning beyond the point in which they lose their previous identity and morph into something new.

1.3. Critical Scholarship on Intermedia in Italy

If we go back to the start of the twentieth century, it is the Futurists who we find there, standing as pioneers of an interdisciplinary approach to creativity, dismantling the barriers between the arts through their call for a 'Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe' in the eponymous manifesto of 1915. During the inter-war years, the movement's adherents would go on to apply its aesthetics to a range of disciplines, including architecture, cuisine, photography, and theatre. These ideas cast a long shadow over the way Italian artists, public intellectuals, and designers conceived of their work in the second half of the twentieth century. For example, in 1964, Umberto Eco highlighted both patterns of continuity and shifts in political orientation between the Futurists and the post-war neo-avant-garde when he

described the latter as a playfully subversive 'generazione di Nettuno' [generation of Neptune], in evident contrast with the alleged revolutionary heat of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's 'generazione di Vulcano' [generation of Vulcan].[42] However, the Futurists' ideas did not lead to shifts in disciplines within the academy. Futurism may have engaged with the concept of *opera d'arte totale* in both theory and practice,[43] but, as Günter Berghaus pointed out, even today the field of Futurism Studies continues to present a strong compartmentalization in terms of media boundaries,[44] which are still reinforced rather than expanded to accommodate the fundamental intermediality of Futurism.[45]

This means that there is a marked time-lag between intermedial artistic practice and critical work, the latter remaining defined by disciplinarity throughout the first half of the twentieth century. In other words, disciplines are, as Peter Weingart notes, not simply mirrors held up to reality.[46] Instead, they are modern, academic constructions which have acquired increasing solidity and rigidity since their birth in the early 1800s, when they arose as part of a shift towards greater specialization within the academies at that time. Weingart claims that disciplinary associations became the structuring principle of knowledge in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Through them scholars organized conferences and launched new disciplinary journals. For Weingart, disciplinary identities were forged through a discipline's ability to delineate its subject matter, identify a common set of problems and theories, and lobby for funding.[47] This identity was kept in place by mentoring and the necessity of achieving career milestones, and was policed by peer review. The academic study of Italy is not exempt from the processes that Weingart outlines.

Italian Studies, a discipline dedicated primarily to the study of literature at its birth, was still narrow at the start of the twentieth century. We can see this by looking back to Cecil Grayson's 1961 Index to *Italian Studies*, the journal of the Society of Italian Studies in the UK and Ireland. Grayson analysed the material from the journal's launch in 1935. As David Robey notes, most of these sixty-one articles are detailed, often minute treatments of topics in literary, cultural, and textual history.[48] Only nine focus on art history, while two tackle linguistics, and just one engages with music. The *Italian Studies* journal simply published no articles before 1961 on cinema, radio, television, dance or fashion. And more to the point, there is little, if any, sense of intermediality: where articles go beyond literature, they deal with architecture, or opera, or painting separately rather than together.[49]

It is in the 1960s that this watertight disciplinary essentiality first came into question. This was, after all, the decade in which theories of intermediality were born, as we saw in the previous section. In Italy, it was also the time of Umberto Eco's *Opera aperta* [The Open Work] (1962),[50] a watershed publication. Eco, as a public intellectual, challenged the boundaries of disciplines, with their ever-growing specialization and professionalism, in a way that chimed with Higgins and Fluxus. He was determined to speak not just to a narrow disciplinary field, but to a wide public, and found new ways to do this, from developing the concept of the 'open work' to his use of 'double coding', which sought to address a general reader and an elite one concurrently. Over the course of the 1960s, Eco pioneered the study

of mass culture and its cultural products and industries. We trace the beginnings of this trajectory in Chapter 4. It is interesting to note that Eco's influential *Apocalittici e integrati* [Apocalypse Postponed] (1964) was published in the same year in which Stuart Hall joined the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham, playing a key role in the establishment of the new discipline of Cultural Studies, which from its outset expanded both the objects of study and the methodological tools applied to the study of culture.[51] As David Robey points out, this was also a time of radical change in Italian Studies with 'the emergence of a host of new approaches and theories after the decades of dominance by Benedetto Croce's *critica estetica*'.[52] One only has to think of the foundation of the journal *Strumenti critici* [Critical Instruments] (1966), and the publication of works such as Umberto Eco's *La struttura assente* [The Absent Structure] (1968), Cesare Segre's *I segni e la critica* [Signs and Criticism] (1969), and, in 1970, d'Arco Silvio Avalle's *L'analisi letteraria in Italia* [Literary Analysis in Italy] and Maria Corti and Cesare Segre's *I metodi attuali della critica in Italia* [Current Methods in Italian Criticism].[53] What we see at the time is a gradual opening up to new critical tools alongside a less tightly conceived focus on the study of written texts.[54]

It is really only with the dawn of the new millennium that Italian Studies, in the Anglosphere, begins to produce what we might now call intermedial scholarship. This is also the period when, in Italy, the focus of disciplinary debates started to widen and to encompass experiences of creative practice that were not, until then, considered central to *italianistica*. The cultural legacy of postmodernism, in particular, entailed a challenging of canonical categories, coupled with the visual turn and the widening influence of cultural studies, and film and media studies. In Bologna, a distinguished scholar of postmodernism, Remo Ceserani, led a new generation of comparatists in their exploration of different artistic media, through a variety of thematic and multidisciplinary approaches.[55] The group's diverse outputs included, for example, analytic and introductory studies of the relation between different text-based media and genres, but also explorations of cultural geography and geocriticism, which were brought to bear on the study of real spaces of cultural encounter as well as fictional representations of space in literature and film.[56] Meanwhile, in Southern Italy, a different group of researchers, convened by Michele Cometa, pioneered the research methods of cultural and visual studies in Italy, through a range of single-author monographs and co-edited volumes.[57] Finally, at the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, scholars with an interest in the digital humanities — including art historians Paola Barocchi and Salvatore Settis, literary scholar Lina Bolzoni, and philosopher Michele Ciliberto — spearheaded new forms of collaborative inquiry, particularly with a focus on Classical Antiquity and the Early Modern period.[58]

The momentum initiated by these three diverse groups, and the dialogue between them, has since inspired a large number of collaborative research projects which, in recent years, have transformed the knowledge landscape of higher education in Italy. This includes, for example, the large, government-funded research project *Letteratura e Cultura Visuale* [Literary and Visual Culture] (PRIN

programmi di rilevante interesse nazionale 2009), led by Michele Cometa and comparatist Massimo Fusillo, and including Russianist Gian Piero Piretto and Silvia Albertazzi, a renowned scholar of postcolonial anglophone literature, among others. It also comprises the work of the journal *Arabeschi* [Arabesques], founded by Stefania Rimini and Maria Rizzarelli, and of comparative scholars such as Marina Guglielmi and Mauro Pala (Cagliari University), Sergia Adamo (University of Trieste), and Marco Belpoliti (Bergamo University), who in different ways have championed and developed the disciplinary methods of British and North American cultural studies. Intermedial monographs with a specific focus on contemporary Italian culture, in recent years, have included *Ecce video* [Ecce Video] (2018) by Costanza Melani and Monica Venturini, *Il racconto delle immagini* [The Story of Images] (2009) by Epifanio Ajello, and *Il pittore come personaggio* [The Painter as Literary Character] (2020) by Filippo Milani, to name but a few examples.[59] Parallel to the emergence of these new trends in literary studies, a seismic shift within art history, both in Italy and in the English-speaking world, similarly brought to the development of diverse and more eclectic approaches, which have been grouped under the label of 'new art history'.[60] The focal point of all these transformations remains Cultural Studies, an inter-discipline connecting a number of fields of enquiry and challenging canonicity.

In *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (1996), David Forgacs and Robert Lumley positioned the study of Italian visual and social culture centre stage: cinema, stardom, fashion and cultural consumption, cartoons, television and the press, imagined geographies and identities, were among the ways in which the volume helped to rethink our approach to the study of modern Italian culture.[61] The socio-historical and semiotic models that had still been prevalent in the 1980s and that had coexisted with philology, historical approaches rooted in archival research, and formalist analysis, gave way to discourses of psychoanalysis, gender, and race. Almost half a century after 'Cultural Studies' was first launched in the CCCS at the University of Birmingham, its belated and rather controversial arrival into Italian Studies and Modern Languages began to transform the field. In 2004, the journal *Studi Culturali* [Cultural Studies] was founded.[62] By 2010 the first annual Cultural Studies issue of *Italian Studies* had been launched. As we have argued elsewhere,[63] this was a pivotal moment in the transformation of the discipline of Italian Studies. In the editorial of its first issue, Derek Duncan pointed to Italian Cultural Studies as 'an admittedly ill-defined, and perhaps still controversial area', whose boundaries were still being questioned.[64] Despite this, the new field of enquiry lifted much of the discipline's attention away from written texts and placed it onto social questions applied to a wide range of cultural products. While the shift in focus did not lead necessarily to *inter*mediality per se, it certainly re-aligned, refreshed, and significantly widened the discipline's objects of study, as social questions were now applied to novels, letters, films, graphic novels, television programmes, performances, and so on.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, we can see the influence of two further, interrelated fields which would have a profound effect on the development

of intermedial scholarship: media studies and cinema studies. Like cultural studies, the rise of cinema and media studies at this time widened the field for those researching Italy's socio-political and cultural processes and products. The study of cinema, itself an intermedial form, encouraged scholars, who had been largely engaged in textual analysis prior to this, to approach a medium which was seen, initially at least, as primarily a visual one. As we have charted elsewhere, the rise of research on cinema quickly became normalized in journals like *Italian Studies*, *The Italianist*, *Modern Italy* and others, and this ultimately led to the establishment of specialist journals, especially the *Journal for Italian Cinema and Media* launched in the United States in 2013, as well as a vast corpus of publications that have analysed the work of producers and directors, the performance of stars, the responses of audiences, and questions of gender, race, religion and so on in the film industry.

Media studies developed less quickly as a result of several factors (not least that cinema was seen as more compatible at the time with 'serious' and 'elite' cultural forms), and so it has so far remained a rather niche pursuit within the field of Italian Studies. Forgacs's article, 'Scenarios for the Digital Age' (2001), was surprisingly prescient about the role of media in Italy and the convergence of digital technologies,[65] but the seminal work in Italian studies to deal with media remains Stephen Gundle and David Forgacs's *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to Cold War* (2008),[66] which mapped the impact of the mass media in modern Italy. After its publication, we see a greater interest in the study of mass culture, and a shift from the discipline's focus on elite cultural forms to an increasing scholarly interest in television, radio, digital media, fashion, social media, and other contemporary forms of cultural communication in Italy. The examples are too many to list here, but the following selection gives a flavour of those publications: Fabio Corsini's edited collection *Italian Pop Culture: Products, Imaginaries* (2018);[67] Paul Ginsburg's *Silvio Berlusconi* (2005);[68] Eugenia Paulicelli's *Italian Style* (2016);[69] Diego Verdegiglio's *La Tv di Mussolini* [Mussolini's TV] (2003);[70] Antonio Cirillo's *Radio libera* [Free Radio] (2021);[71] and the many monographs and articles on Italian television published over recent decades by Milly Buonanno.[72]

These rapid changes to the object of study, over little more than a decade, set in place the foundation for intermedial scholarship. In 2012, when we began this project, most of the work in our field that touched on more than one medium was still multidisciplinary rather than interdisciplinary. By the time of finalizing this Introduction (2022), genuine intermedial scholarly work has emerged. Numerous researchers in the field of Italian Studies have been working on intermedial forms like the graphic novel, visual poetry, videoart, performance art, the totalizing thrust of Futurism and Fascism, and the relationships between cinema and fashion, or between literature, art, and music, to mention just a few of the areas that we deal with in this volume.

Despite the rise in recent intermedial critical work, it is worth highlighting that there are still very few monographs that specifically treat the Italian context. Most of the books on intermediality written by researchers in Italy, for instance, deal in large part, or wholly, with intermedial cultural production outside the peninsula.

The focus is typically on mass commercial intermediality and on the United States which, especially since the publication of Jenkins's seminal work on convergence, has been seen as leading both contemporary intermedial and commercial cinematic practice. There are many good examples of this work, including, for instance, Luciano De Giusti's, *Immagini migranti* [Migrant Images] (2008);[73] Marco Senaldi's *Rapporto confidenziale* [Confidential Report] (2012);[74] Gabriella Taddeo's *Ipercinema* [Hypercinema] (2007);[75] *Cinema, arti elettroniche, intermedialità* [Film, Electronic Art, Intermediality] (2006), edited by Marco Maria Gazzano;[76] Miriam Cristaldi's *Materia Immateriale* [Immaterial Matter] (2003);[77] Fabio Vittorini's *Melodramma* [Melodrama] (2020);[78] and Marco Bittanti's *Intermedialità* [Intermediality] (2008).[79] Francesco Zucconi's *La sopravvivenza delle immagini nel cinema* [The Survival of Images in Film] (2013) is one of the few such publications to include several chapters dedicated to Italian artists. For the most part, Italian production is mentioned only in passing.[80]

Nonetheless, there are some recent monographs which do focus on aspects of intermediality within the Italian context. Aldo Grasso's *Storia della comunicazione e dello spettacolo in Italia* [A History of Communication and Drama in Italy] provides a detailed general introduction to the history of media in Italy, which takes media convergence as its overarching theme in the third volume (2017).[81] Transmediality, together with the study of narrative forms as they travel across arts and media more generally, has also seen some recent critical attention.[82] The volume edited by Clodagh Brook and Emanuela Patti, *Transmedia* (2014), was the first to centre on Italian transmediality.[83] It analyses the effect of digital culture on the production of transmedial narratives: narratives, in other words, that cross media boundaries. A number of other articles centring on the transmedial experience also appeared during the same period. These include 'Gomorra Remixed' (2015) by A. Napoli and M. Tirino,[84] and 'From Page to Screen/From Screen to Page' (2016) by Emanuela Patti.[85] The research on transmediality that emerged in the mid-2010s can be seen as in the context of a broader corpus of critical work, which focuses primarily on the narrative form as it travels from one medium to another. Emanuela Patti's most recent book, *Opera aperta* (2022), explores the transformation of narrative in Italy through its interaction with digital technologies and diverse platforms.[86] Emanuela Piga's recent work on narratives and television, in *Romanzo e serie TV* (2018), continues her research into transmedial narratology.[87] Analysis of the interplay of theatre and narrative can be found in *Staged Narrative/Narrative Stages* (2017),[88] and image–text relations, a more traditional scholarly field, continue to attract critical interest.[89]

There is now also critical work on established intermedial forms in Italy like videoart, including *REWINDItalia* (2015)[90] and Alessandro Amaducci's *Videoarte* [Videoart] (2016),[91] and especially on cinema. A number of critics have recently written on the relationship between cinema and other arts and technologies. Some examples are Alice Autelitano's *Il cinema infranto* [Fractured Cinema] (2011)[92] and Cosetta Saba's *Cinema, video, Internet* [Film, Video, Internet] (2006).[93] Stephen Jakobs's *Framing Pictures*, while analysing the international context, includes chapters

on Roberto Rossellini and Pier Paolo Pasolini.[94] A significant body of work on individual, polymorphous cultural figures concentrates on their intermediality, or at the very least is sensitive to their multimedial practices. So, for instance, *Bruno Munari: The Lightness of Art* (2019), edited by Pierpaolo Antonello and Matilde Nardelli, is open to Munari's many-faceted expressive forms.[95] Work on Pier Paolo Pasolini also attracts this kind of cross-medial and often intermedial research: Ara H. Merijan's *Against the Avant-garde* (2020),[96] is an example of this kind of work, as was Robert Gordon's pioneering *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Forms of Subjectivity* (1996).[97] What has also been emerging is a certain revisionism in relation to the canonical categorization of artists, whereby artists and writers known primarily for their work in a particular field have been recently explored from different angles. So, for instance, we have Gian-Paolo Biasin's monograph on the poet Montale, which explores his long relationship to music, *Montale, Debussy and Modernism* (2014),[98] or Giuseppe Cipolla's *Ai pochi felici* [For the Happy Few] (2020), on Leonardo Sciacia and the visual arts,[99] or the reprinting in English, for the centenary of Federico Fellini's birth, of his *Book of Dreams*, which now contains a critical introduction.[100]

With this rise of intermedial research, it is not entirely surprising that such research is also beginning to find dedicated outlets for publication, like the Italian peer-reviewed journal, *Between*, as well as *Arabeschi*, and indeed on our own project website. *Between*, the journal of the Italian Association for the Theory and Comparative History of Literature, provides space for intermedial scholarship alongside other forms of comparative or boundary-crossing scholarship. Its recent special issue, *Transmediality/Intermediality/Crossmediality: Problems of Definition* (2020),[101] for instance, has articles on intermediality in Dante's work as well as taking up the taxonomic debate. As already noted, the online journal, *Arabeschi*, is dedicated to the relationship between art and text, especially in the Italian context. Our own website, www.InterdisciplinaryItaly.org has been publishing peer-reviewed blog posts on intermedial theories and practices since 2015. These are all centred on Italy in the twentieth and twenty-first century and range from posts on Fascist architecture (Simona Storchi), to the cinematic mode in Italian literature (Marco Bellardi), and to Cathy Berberian's remarkable Stripsody, where the avant-garde singer blends her work with comic strips under the watchful eye of Umberto Eco (Eleonora Lima). The website also includes posts on intermedial theory by Henry Jenkins and Gabriele Rippl.

To conclude this rapid survey of research in the field, we might return to the special issue of 'Key Directions in Italian Studies' (2020), which includes a set of collaboratively produced articles that examine areas of research that the editors viewed as representative of the state of Italian Studies, in 2020, and its potential for future development.[102] The broad themes (mobilities, corporealities, the transnational and translational, digital, literary, material and visual cultures, and Italian Studies beyond the Academy) are not confined by traditional chronological divides and capture the rich variety of objects of study and multifocal methodological approaches that characterize research in Italian Studies on the eve of the third decade of the twenty-first century. It is to this richness and variety that our own

work here hopes to speak: opening fields, rather than closing them, focusing on fluidity and multiplicity over univocality, and continuing to question categories and canons. This is an area where the rich calendar of activities, workshops, and public events has punctuated the life of our two *Interdisciplinary Italy* projects, and has seen us move away from predominantly text-based critical approaches and towards explorations of new interactive pedagogy (in our work with schools and universities) and curatorial practice.[103] Diversifying the modalities of our scholarly enquiry and outputs has allowed us to move in new directions, which other Italian Studies scholars have also been exploring and that are reshaping the identity of our field of study.

To sum up, we can say that the relations between the arts and media (new and old) in Italy have been attracting scholarly attention since the 1960s, although it is only in the last decade that intermedial work has accelerated. Over the course of this project, we had the good fortune to work closely with many of the brilliant scholars who are cited in this introduction: researchers who have been deliberately crossing disciplinary and artistic boundaries. As a team, we also had the privilege of supervising a large number of postgraduate and doctoral dissertations on Italian intermediality, with topics including the cinematic mode in fiction (Marco Bellardi), the film poster (Maria del Buono), Italian kinetic and Programmed Art (Martina Borghi), disruptive visuality in Italian neo-avant-garde poetry (Barbara Pycinska-Taylor), the origins of Dario Fo's political theatre (Beatrice Tavecchio Blake), and the ethics of fictionality in literature, television and film (Emilano Zappalà). Just as importantly, we have sponsored the work of funded postdoctoral researchers Emanuela Patti (transmedia), Eleonora Lima (literature and technology), Cecilia Brioni (Italian YouTubers), Adele Bardazzi (poetry and textile art), and Francesca Medaglia (multi-authorship writing). What we hope is that this book will build on the current work in the field to provide a map for the creative archipelago of Italian intermedia, which our colleagues, and doctoral and postdoctoral researchers, will continue to use, to amend, and to challenge.

The shift in Italian studies that we have mapped here — from a fundamental focus on literature to a multiplicity of arts and media and finally to a new focus on the in-between of intermediality — is not, nor should it be, a linear progressive trajectory. We would also like to emphasize that we are not advocating that all scholarship should be intermedial, but only that our work has put the spotlight on the process of formation of critical and disciplinary barriers when intermedial art finds itself in between arts and media, and, through its own in-betweenness, challenges both the perception of what constitutes a central object of study in a given disciplinary field and what critical approaches are to be applied to its study.

1.4. Methodology, Key Questions and the Organization of this Book

This book is informed by a single critical research question: why has intermedial practice changed so markedly over the course of twentieth and twenty-first centuries in Italy? Our response will go beyond the narrow focus of monodisciplinary research to reveal a more comprehensive picture of intermedial encounters and new kinds of experimentation. We challenge and amend established ideas of cultural centres and peripheries, to focus attention on individuals and groups who are actively engaged in creative boundary-crossing and on institutions who fostered or hindered intermedial exchange.

Working with such a large body of material across a wide timeframe has been as exciting as it has been challenging. At times, we might say with poet W. B. Yeats, that we were drawn towards the 'Fascination of What's Difficult'. However, despite the obvious challenges, it has been exciting to work with a range of material that is various and interesting, to find corners of Italian culture which, because they lay between disciplinary perspectives, had been largely unexplored, and to work with some brilliant people from our own and other disciplines that we would not have had a chance to engage with fully if it weren't for this project. While three co-authors can never hope to cover the full range of arts which we treat in this book, we have come together from different parts of our field to cover a good number of them: Pieri provides much of the expertise on art, design, and fashion, Mussgnug on literature, and music, and Brook on cinema, video, and intermediality more widely. Nonetheless, we recognize the significant limits in our own expertise. In order to go some way to deal with these lacunae, not only have we embarked on wide-ranging research that has gone beyond what we had done previously, but we have worked closely with the members of the project's Advisory Board to protect the academic rigour of this book, especially during the final phases of the project. We are therefore most grateful to that Board, and especially to those who did the early reading of some chapters and provided invaluable feedback: Selena Daly, Stephen Gundle, and Massimo Riva. We fully acknowledge that we are indebted to their expertise here. We are also grateful to those who took part in the discussions in the seven project workshops that we held in London, Rome, and New York, and that were attended by approximately 150 people. We thank the attendees of the *Interdisciplinary Italy* Summer Schools in Dublin, and all those who provided the fortnightly blog posts on the *Interdisciplinary Italy* website, as well as to those who joined us on panels at conferences. Last but not least, we are grateful to our postgraduate, doctoral, and postdoctoral researchers whose explorations opened our eyes to new objects, processes and approaches. All these people inform our thinking in this volume.

Our working methods involved regular meetings, at which we discussed the underpinnings of our research and shared out responsibilities for individual chapters. Pieri therefore took ownership of Chapters 2 and 3, Mussgnug wrote Chapters 4 and 5, and Brook was responsible for Chapters 6 and 7. This introduction (Chapter 1) and Chapter 8 were jointly written by Brook, Mussgnug, and Pieri. Brook and Pieri took the lead on the introduction and Brook and Mussgnug prepared the first

draft of Chapter 8. While each of us is responsible, in the first instance, for the chapters we wrote, all parts of this book are nonetheless a product of our collective effort and a reflection of our ongoing discussions. In their final version, all eight chapters have had interventions from all of us.

It is clear from the process of writing and of collaboration that we outline here that co-writing holds a special significance for us. While co-writing was once situated at the very margins of Arts and Humanities disciplines, it has moved far closer to the centre in recent years. Some of the most important publicly funded projects in Italian Studies, over the past two decades, have been collaborative in nature, engaging with academics in other fields, as well as with creative practitioners and the wider public.[104] Moreover, in the past few years, the journal *Italian Studies* has seen an increasing number of co-written articles and collaborations — in the shape of clusters of short essays, roundtable discussions, and mini-special issues — which reflect new modes of engagement between scholars and a desire to stretch disciplinary expertise. If, as Stephen Greenblatt claimed, 'our great art forms are for the most part collaborative enterprises that depend upon creators with different areas of expertise talking and working with one another', it is long overdue, as Greenblatt claims, 'that scholars begin to do the same'.[105] Nonetheless, the collaborative writing that underpins this book is not without its challenges. In particular, it makes providing a unified and perfectly coherent approach almost impossible: however closely we might work together, we each have, after all, our personal methodologies, our frankly obsessive interests, and our own writing styles. Perhaps this is not entirely bad. It certainly creates critical tensions, and provides a glimpse of the roads taken, and not taken, in the complex, multifaceted, even kaleidoscopic nature of the interrelations between the arts in modern Italy.

We have endeavoured in all this to find a pragmatic solution to the question of scale and complexity which haunts interdisciplinary projects such as this one. In bringing together three scholars working in different parts of their field and supporting them with an Advisory Board, we are working within an interdisciplinary frame whose aim has been to root interdisciplinary practices in rigorous disciplinary expertise. Interdisciplinarity has often been, as Frodeman notes, 'accused of dilettantism and shoddy standards'.[106] We have worked to ensure that our methodological framework harnesses disciplinary expertise in order to avoid such accusations.

In the process of mapping change over time, we needed to find a way of organizing the vast material that we had collected. Our solution — which is, of course, only one of any number of possible organizational solutions — was to identify and explore single years across a long historical period (1900–2020).[107] We chose the years 1915, 1932, 1963, 1972, 1994, 2007, and 2020 as ones which we identify as pinpointing significant moments of change or consolidation for intermedial practice; rather than explain here the reasons for these choices, we will motivate those choices at the start of each chapter. As these are only snapshots in the coming-of-age story of intermediality, they cannot hope to represent all that came in the years before or after them, nor do they claim to do so. However, what we have found is that, when taken together, the years that we have selected provide

an interesting series of what we might call 'still photographs', or 'creative snapshots', which provide insight into the ongoing flow of change. These still snapshots are not, however, rigid: we do cast our eyes backwards and forwards to reference what came before and after them, contextualizing them. In choosing years to structure our map, we think here, too, of Zygmunt Bauman in his seminal text, *Liquid Modernity* (2002). For liquids, time matters. We may ignore time for solids, he says, 'but to leave time out of the account for fluids, would be a grievous mistake'.[108] For Bauman, fluids are like snapshots which need a date at the bottom of the picture. As our work has to do with the fluid, and unstable in-betweenness, Bauman's thoughts here are particularly apposite.

As a focus on a single year did not prove sufficient, however, for providing a robust structure and frame, we have centred each chapter not just on a year but on a single overarching concept, which we have identified as reflecting and guiding artistic practice in the selected years. One might say that we do not just date our snapshot, we title it too. In this, we are following the work of Mieke Bal and Alan Wilson who both successfully structure highly complex, interdisciplinary material through the use of guiding concepts.[109] Bal's well-known volume, *Travelling Concepts* (2002), is governed by concepts which travel across disciplines and which provide her with a 'rough guide' that 'maps a path' through her material. She tells us that, 'concepts are most useful when the critic has no disciplinary tradition to fall back on and the object no canonical or historical status',[110] a statement that chimes particularly well with our own work here. Wilson similarly attempts to map the structure of knowledge, a structure that defies canonical disciplinary shape, this time through what he calls 'superconcepts'. He believes that we need to identify these 'ideas that are applicable across disciplines' and understand the basis of 'transferability of concepts across disciplines' in order to 'meet the challenges of twenty-first-century knowledge'.[111]

In other words, if a single year provides the object of our research in each chapter, concepts have provided us with an interdisciplinary toolbox with which to approach that year. These overarching concepts enable us to assemble large frameworks which can confront a range of artistic disciplines and map their in-betweenness, avoiding the dangers of disciplinary compartmentalization. In each chapter, we explore how guiding concepts which dominate the chosen years were inscribed into the work of artists, encouraging them to think anew about the boundaries between the arts, and to choose new artistic processes and collaborators. The process of choosing these concepts was long and time-consuming: we had to test a variety of concepts for each chapter to find the one that seemed closest in fit to what was going on during that period. As simplifying tools, concepts can necessarily never be wholly adequate, but they do provide, we believe, an intriguing, if imperfect, lens. Alongside our attention to years and concepts, other influences on intermedial change are also foregrounded: economic, institutional, infrastructural, and technological factors, for instance, clearly play an important part in the developing relationships between the arts. We refer to these, as and when relevant, in our chapters.

The artists we have found to be at the forefront of shifts in intermedial change

are experimental, and even activist and avant-garde. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, intermedial practice has been palpable in periods of uncertainty and radical social change, frequently associated with the avant-garde. It also appears to have emerged most strongly where political and cultural conventions are challenged, especially by activists. The first area our project explores is the transgressive nature of intermedial creativity. The corpus of works in this book therefore reflects the experimentalism which led to intermedial changes. It also recognizes and notes how the ever-opening borders between one art and another, which may begin life as experiment, can become normalized, shifting into the mainstream, as intermedial experimentation increasingly becomes the new normal during the final decades of the twentieth century.

We have divided the remainder of this book into seven chapters. In the first of these (Chapter 2, 1915: Revolution), there is a focus on the broader development of Futurist intermedial aesthetics, from the foundational pre-war years to the 1915 manifesto, 'Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe', which was a crucial moment in the theoretical development of Futurism, and heralded an array of creative interventions in a huge variety of fields: architecture, urban planning, painting, sculpture, furniture design, set design, fashion and clothing, everyday objects, literature, typography, advertising and communication (especially mass communication), as well as in new hybrid forms such as plastic complexes, mural sculpture, and word-in-freedom boards (which are discussed in Chapter 2). The 1915 manifesto allows us to frame more clearly the birth and development of ideas about the fusion of the arts and their fundamental interconnectedness which remained of great import for post-war generations of Italian creative practitioners. The chapter discusses both Futurist theories and practices of intermedia, and tracks the development of Futurist interventions across and in between artistic boundaries and their challenge to the idea of boundary itself, via concepts such as simultaneity and universal dynamism.

In Chapter 3 (1932: *Gesamtkunstwerk*), we address the centrality of the concept of the 'Total Work of Art' in the history and theory of intermedial exchanges, and its rich legacy in European avant-garde art and culture. Addressing this, however, leads us also to questioning the often overly positive narrative that accompanies ideas of intermedia in twentieth-century creative practice. The programmatic link between 1932, the tenth anniversary of the Fascist Revolution, and the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, provides a space to reflect upon a more troubling example of the utopian idea of the unity of the arts, when framed in political and ideological terms. In this chapter we suggest that Fascism was able to integrate the arts into the regime more effortlessly because ideas and practices of collaboration across the arts, which were already deeply rooted in Italy and Europe at the time and in the previous century, were less likely to be seen as directly linked with the Fascist state and could thus prop up the rhetoric of the freedom of the arts and the artist under the regime. Ideas of collaboration between the arts and artists in relation to the Fascist state were in fact exploited and refashioned by the regime and can be seen as one of the many porous boundaries between Fascist ideology and concurrent cultural practices.

Chapter 4 (1963: Experiment), focuses on a turning point in the history of Italian experimental theory and practice: the early 1960s. We explore the origins of Italy's most influential neo-avant-garde movement, Gruppo 63, and assess the lasting significance of its programmatic endorsement of experimentalism and heterogeneity. In the first part of the chapter, we pay attention to the social context of what must be understood as a momentous transfiguration of cultural life. Since the advent of television, in 1954, Italy had undergone an unprecedented phase of modernization and had witnessed the birth of a vibrant culture industry, with innovative technologies of reproduction and fresh approaches to marketing and distribution. Urban sprawl and unprecedented wealth created a flourishing market for cheap consumer goods and stylish, mass-produced furniture and fashion. Encouraged by the wild consumerism of the boom years, publishing houses, magazines, newspapers, cinemas and radio stations competed for the attention of a newly affluent urban middle class. Against this background, our chapter focuses on the concept of 'experiment', outlining the significant differences between *avanguardia* [avant-garde] and *sperimentalismo* [experimentalism], in relation to our shared theme. Chapter 4 takes a close look at experimental poetry, theatre, and music in the working practice of artists and writers such as Luciano Berio, Edoardo Sanguineti, Umberto Eco, and so on, and tracks radical attempts to reconfigure the way in which these arts were conceived and how they manifested themselves through a range of media.

The focus of Chapter 5 (1972: Collapse) is the early 1970s. Here, we spotlight the darker and more violent mood that took hold of the country in the aftermath of the Piazza Fontana massacre: a sense of threat and of political urgency that came to dominate public debates but also the work of many writers and artists, for years to come. By 1972, many artists had lost faith in the positive role of public institutions: universities, museums, publishing houses, state theatres and, perhaps most importantly, national radio and television. Radical voices called for a complete abolition of all hierarchies of social and cultural privilege: a demand which is here expressed through the concept of 'collapse'. They also rejected the boundaries between media. During the fateful months of spring 1968, student protests and large occupations blocked activity at many Italian universities, from Trieste and Trento to Palermo and Catania. Tracing a variety of artistic responses — by artists including Italo Calvino, Enrico Baj, Giuliano Scabia, Mario Ricci, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and the Superstudio collective, among others — Chapter 5 sheds light on the crisis of institutions, but also sets out to describe the new forms of spontaneous creative encounter between the arts that emerged in the 1970s, especially through performance theatre and protest art.

After the experimentalism of the 1960s and early 1970s, we jump forward to the 1990s, to a point where intermediality had become very firmly established. In Chapter 6 (1994: Hybridity), intermedial forms which were still highly volatile and experimental in 1972 had, across the arc of the 1980s, solidified into recognizable and relatively stable new hybrid disciplines: performance art, video art, and installation. By the time we come to 1994, the high experimentalism that collapsed

artistic boundaries so radically in the 1960s and 1970s has ended. In this chapter, we explore its long tail and look at the process of its rapid consolidation and growing commercialization. This is a process which to some extent sees art forms slowly returning within a frame, a hybrid frame. There are signs, nonetheless, of the emergence of new experimental hybridities. 'Hybrid' is, we argue in this chapter, a defining term for this period, and not only for the arts: by 1994 discussions of hybridity in post-colonial discourse are. In this chapter, we explore the idea that the dialogue between the arts and artists is in the process of coming into the mainstream. This chapter is set against the absolute dominance of television, the most mainstream of all the new hybrid forms in the wake of Silvio Berlusconi's nomination as Prime Minister, seen widely as the triumph of *videocrazia*. As this is a chapter that discusses the way artistic hybridity was institutionalized in Italy, it concentrates less on specific examples or individual artistic pieces and more on the platforms and processes which enable them to flourish, although the early *Cannibali* writers, like Enrico Brizzi, as well as fashion designer, Gianni Versace, and others are discussed.

Chapter 7 (2007: Convergence) sees the return to intermedial experimentation by activists and artists enabled by the new digital technologies. This is the year in which the translation of Jenkins's highly influential *Convergence Culture* was first published in Italy, and the concept of convergence lies at the heart of this chapter. The examples we explore here include filmmaker Carlo Lizzani's *Global stage*, Wu Ming's *Manituana* website, and The Brera Virtual Lab on the Second Life digital platform. Using the spatial and directional metaphors inherent in the word 'convergence', our aim is to explain the significance of the concept of convergence in Italy at the start of the twenty-first century. The Wu Ming *Manituana* website, which is an almost textbook example of how convergence was reconceived in Italy, is particularly relevant, and illustrates the utopian drive that resurfaces wherever the concept of the unity of the arts emerges. Lizzani's *Global stage* draws together onto a single stage cotemporaneous performances in Burkina Faso and Rome through satellite link. The Brera Virtual lab brings architecture into virtual space, narrativizing it. Exploring convergence allows us to glimpse how the role of the arts evolved as they collided with digital technologies which dissolve their material differences into a series of signals. It signals, too, the ever-increasing importance of participatory culture in experimental artistic practice in Italy. The Italian model deserves debate because it demonstrates how a concept with its roots in a capitalist mass-media model can be overturned and used to subvert communicative norms.

We conclude this book with a chapter focused on the year 2020 (Contagion: 2020). What was meant to be a simple post-script, referencing our writing present, was turned by the experience of COVID-19 into a full-blown chapter which takes as its focus the experience of contagion, and provides some initial comments on what that may have meant to intermedial practices, as contagion forced us into our houses, and online. 2020 is a peculiarly curious year to sketch, given the migration of all forms of art to digital platforms during the extraordinary pandemic which has shaped and shaken our experiences. This chapter considers where the intermedial

journey might be taking us now, whether any trends might be marked, or changes observed, and what changes to intermediality might be wrought by the interruption to the materiality of the arts. It provides an open-ended and speculative set of conclusions, aiming to shed light on some of the changes we have traced in this book, and to open questions for further analysis and research, rather than closing the debate down. After all, the journey of intermedia in Italy and elsewhere in the world will continue to twist, to coil and to mutate, long after we put down this book.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. Robert Frodeman, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, ed. by Robert Frodeman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. xxix–xxxv (p. xxx).
2. Ricciotto Canudo, 'The Birth of the Sixth Art (1911)', *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 13 (1980), 3–7.
3. Werner Wolf, 'Intermediality', in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. by David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 252–56.
4. William Condee, 'The Interdisciplinary Turn in the Arts and Humanities', *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies*, 34 (2016), 12–29.
5. In our article for *Italian Studies*, we argued that we were at a unique juncture in the history of academic pursuit due to three key changes: first, the renewed desire to grasp totality due especially to the current impact agenda in universities which encourages academics to eschew disciplinary constraints in order to demonstrate relevance and benefits to the wider world; second, a 'postmodern challenge to authority, hierarchy and canon, representing a "sacred edge in the reopened battle over inclusion and exclusion" '; and finally, because the objects of study have themselves become more hybrid over the course of the twentieth century. Clodagh Brook, Giuliana Pieri, and Florian Mussgnug, 'Italian Studies: An Interdisciplinarity Perspective', *Italian Studies*, 72.4 (2017), 380–92.
6. Dick Higgins and Hannah Higgins, 'Intermedia', *Leonardo*, 34.1 (2001), 49–54. See <https://www.fondazionebonotto.org/en/collection/fluxus/higginsdick/983.html>.
7. AHRC networking grant 2012–2014 (PI: Brook; Co-I: Pieri); AHRC standard grant 2015–2020 (PI: Brook; Co-Is, Pieri and Mussgnug; from 2017, when Brook moved to Ireland, PI Pieri).
8. On Lessing, see Meir Sternberg, 'The *Laokoon* Today: Interart Relations, Modern Projects and Projections', *Poetics Today*, 20 (1999), 291–379.
9. Despite these imperfections, 'intermediality' better reflects the work we have done in this book than other cognate words, such as remediation (Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998)); convergence (Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006)); intertextuality (Julia Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue and Novel' [1966], in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. by Leon S. Roudiez, trans. by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 64–91); translation (Gunther Kress, 'Transposing Meaning: Translation in a Multimodal Semiotic Landscape', in *Translation and Multimodality: Beyond Words*, ed. by Monica Boria and others (New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 24–48); heteromediality (Jørgen Bruhn, 'Heteromediality', in *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, ed. by Lars Elleström (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 225–36)); plurimediality; multimediality; multimodality (Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication* (London: Arnold, 2001)); transmediality; or any number of other terms used for describing the crossing of boundaries between arts and media.
10. Irina O. Rajewsky, 'Border Talks: The Problematic Status of Media Borders in the Current Debate about Intermediality', in *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, ed. by Elleström, pp. 51–68 (p. 51).

11. Rajewsky, p. 51.
12. Higgins and Higgins, 'Intermedia', p. 53.
13. For Jenkins, it was through transmedial participation that people became everyday artists. He saw the transformation of users from passive to active participants in culture as a dramatic shift in creativity, a shift he claimed was as momentous as that seen during the Renaissance. Using the idea of 'collective intelligence', coined by French theorist Pierre Lévy, Jenkins argued that twenty-first-century culture had to be approached collaboratively, citing Lévy's point that, 'none of us can know everything; each of us knows something; and we can put the pieces together if we pool our resources'. Jenkins, p. 10.
14. Higgins and Higgins, 'Intermedia', p. 53.
15. Stephen Greenblatt, 'The Interart Movement', in *Interart Poetics: Essays on the Interrelations of the Arts and Media*, ed. by Ulla-Britta Lagerroth, Hans Lund, and Erik Hedling (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), pp. 13–18 (p. 15).
16. Bernd Herzogenrath, 'Travels in Intermedia[lity]: An Introduction', in *Travels in Intermediality: ReBlurring the Boundaries*, ed. by Bernd Herzogenrath (Dartmouth, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2012), pp. 1–14 (p. 2), emphasis ours.
17. Roland Barthes, *Image-music-text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977); Julie Thompson Klein, *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory and Practice* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1990), p. 10.
18. Interdisciplinary Italy <www.interdisciplinaryitaly.org> [accessed 8 April 2022].
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53. Umberto Eco, *La struttura assente: introduzione alla ricerca semiologica* (Milan: Bompiani, 1968); Cesare Segre, *I segni e la critica* (Turin: Einaudi, 1969); D'Arco Silvio Avalle, *L'analisi letteraria in Italia: formalismo, strutturalismo, semiologia* (Naples: Ricciardi, 1970); *I metodi attuali della critica in Italia*, ed. by Maria Corti and Cesare Segre (Turin: ERI, 1970).

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102. 'Key Directions in Italian Studies', ed. by Ruth Glynn, Catherine Keen, and Giuliana Pieri, *Italian Studies*, 75.2 (2020), 121–24.
103. In 2019, Pieri curated the exhibition titled 'The Making of Modern Italy: Art and Design in the Early 1960s' (London: Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, 2019).
104. The project *Italian Cinema Audiences 1945–60*, funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) (2013–16), blended oral history with archival material on film distribution and exhibition; See 'Italian Cinema Audiences: A Collaborative Research Project on Cinema-Going in 1950s Italy' <www.italiancinemaaudiences.org> [accessed 8 April 2022]. Another UK AHRC-funded project, *Transnationalizing Modern Languages* project (2014–17), has shown how issues of the transnational and the transcultural are at the heart of the discipline of Italian Studies and have challenged the notion of national boundary as depositary of national culture; see 'Transnationalizing Modern Languages: Mobility, Identity and Translation in Modern Italian Cultures' <https://www.transnationalmodernlanguages.ac.uk/> [accessed 8 April 2022]. We should also note that the AHRC 2019 Delivery Plan sees interdisciplinarity as key for tackling contemporary challenges: 'Delivery Plan 2019' <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20220204133857/http://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/strategy/ahrc-delivery-plan-2019/> [accessed 9 April 2022].
105. Greenblatt, p. 15. The essays stem from a 1995 conference in Lund and it is an example of the birth of this field in the 1990s.
106. Frodeman, p. xxiv.
107. This choice was inspired by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *In 1926: Living at the Edge of Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).
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109. Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Alan Wilson, *Knowledge Power: Interdisciplinary Education for a Complex World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).
110. Bal, p. 23.
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CHAPTER 2

❖

1915: Revolution

2.1. Introduction

On 23 May 1915, Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary, opening up a new front in World War I, stretching 600 kilometres along Italy's border with Austria-Hungary. During the preceding months, the Italian Liberal government had come under repeated pressure from different quarters to join the war. The political consequences of Italy's declaration of war would be far-reaching, weakening the Liberal state and paving the way for the rise of Fascism in the 1920s. On 11 March 1915, in the heady days of Italy's intervention crisis, Giacomo Balla (1871–1958) and Fortunato Depero (1892–1960) published the manifesto *Ricostruzione Futurista dell'Universo* [Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe], which was pivotal for the interwar evolution of Futurism and remains of particular import for the analysis of Futurist theory and practice in relation to intermedia experimentation. Synthesis, simultaneity, interpenetration, polyphony, fusion, and amalgam, with their semantic association with ideas of interconnection and merging, formed the terminological backbone of the Futurist revolution of the arts. The breaking down of traditional barriers between arts and media, as we shall see, would lead to a rethinking of the arts both from within and also in relation to one another, which resulted in the creation of new artistic media and new art forms, laying the foundations for the Futurist reconstruction of the universe.

The 1909 *Fondazione e Manifesto del Futurismo* [Founding and Manifesto of Futurism], with its uncompromising call for radical change, its aggressive character, and urgency of revolt against fossilized institutions, remains one of the first modern attempts to reconsider the arts and media in order to challenge traditional disciplinary and artistic boundaries. Given the movement's undoubted influence on the European Avant-Garde and its enduring influence on experimentation and avant-gardism in twentieth-century Italy, Futurism occupies a foundational position in intermedia theory and practice in Italy. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944) projected Futurism against a thoroughly modern backdrop: 'le maree multicolori o polifoniche delle rivoluzioni nelle capitali moderne' [the multicoloured and polyphonic tidal waves of revolution in the modern metropolis] were as worthy a subject for the artist as factories, shipyards 'incendiati da violente lune elettriche' [burning under violent electrical moons], railway stations, factories, bridges, steamers, locomotives, and planes.[1] The enthusiasm for modern technology and the

beauty of the machine is palpable, but so also is the need to break away from the immobility, ecstasy, and sleep of the past, enacting a violent overturning of the old order exemplified by the city of Paralysis in Marinetti's second manifesto *Uccidiamo il Chiaro di Luna!* [Let's Murder the Moonshine!] (11 April 1909).[2] As we shall see, this call for radical change was directed at the entire arts system in one of the most coherent re-conceptualizations of arts and media as aesthetic totality.

Vivien Greene views Italian Futurism not simply as an artistic movement but 'a way of life', associated with youth, modernity, and a rebellious and belligerent attitude which celebrated the markers of modernity.[3] The exhibition she curated in 2014 at the Guggenheim Museum in New York endeavoured to convey the complexity of Futurism and its 'multidisciplinary idiom' by centring on the Futurist idea of *opera d'arte totale* [total work of art]. This was not the first exhibition to cast its net wide in terms of both breadth of items and media displayed and the positioning of the movement as a quintessentially multi- and interdisciplinary one. Enrico Crispolti, in the 2001 exhibition in the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome, aimed to present the totality of the Futurist movement both in chronological terms (1909–44) and in terms of disciplines and arts.[4] This show built on two previous exhibitions which shared a similar aim: one curated by Crispolti in 1980 (Mole Antonelliana, Turin), programmatically titled 'Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo' [Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe], and Pontus Hulten's 1986 landmark exhibition 'Futurismo & Futurismi' [Futurism & Futurisms] (Palazzo Grassi, Venice). The latter gave renewed impetus to comparative readings between the historic Avant-Garde and the radical and experimental neoavanguardia of the 1960s, reinforcing a narrative of Italian experimentalism rooted in the early part of the twentieth century.[5]

In the 1909 *Founding Manifesto*, Marinetti had famously declared:

> Noi affermiamo che la magnificenza del mondo si è arricchita di una bellezza nuova: la bellezza della velocità. Un automobile da corsa col suo cofano adorno di grossi tubi simili a serpenti dall'alito esplosivo [...] un automobile ruggente, che sembra correre sulla mitraglia, è più bello della *Vittoria di Samotracia*.[6]
>
> [We affirm that the beauty of the world has been enriched by a new form of beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing car with a hood that glistens with large pipes resembling a serpent with explosive breath [...] a roaring automobile, that seems to ride on grapeshot, is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace*.]

Balla would later state:

> un elettrico ferro da stiro bianco metallico, liscio trilucente, pulitissimo, delizia gli occhi meglio della statuetta nudino poggiata su di un piedestallo [...]. La macchinetta per scrivere è più architettonica dei progetti edilizi premiati nelle accademie o nei concorsi.[7]
>
> [a white metallic electric iron, smooth, gleaming, and polished, delights the eye more than a small nude statuette on a pedestal [...]. A typewriter is more architectural than the building projects that are awarded prizes by the academies and in competitions.]

Both statements point to the programmatic rupture with the status quo, the

controversy-courting critique of the art establishment and bourgeois taste, the impetus towards a radical redefinition of aesthetics, and the new beauty of the machine and its associated uncompromising modernity. Importantly, they also shift the focus from the traditional fine arts to design, and industrial design in particular, and unmask the fundamentally obsolete contraposition between the arts and technology. This is significant because it is within this broader field that Futurism endeavoured to position its theory and practice.

Futurist interventions can be found in a huge variety of fields: architecture, urban planning, painting, sculpture, furniture design, set design, fashion and clothing, everyday objects, literature, typography, advertising and communication (especially mass communication), cinema, photography, and performance, which brought many of these art forms together on the stage. The Futurists were also among the very first to focus their creative attention on new hybrid forms such as *complessi plastici* [plastic complexes], *plastica murale* [plastic murals], *tavole parolibere* [word-in-freedom boards], and book-objects. What is particularly important to note is that these were all interartistic and intermedial experimentations; Futurist interventions did not happen simply within the confines of individual arts but across and in-between artistic boundaries. Indeed, as we shall see, concepts such as simultaneity and universal dynamism dismissed the idea of boundary itself.

Yet, as Günter Berghaus pointed out, in the field of Futurism Studies there is still a strong compartmentalization in terms of media and national boundaries.[8] Overall scholarly interest tends to fall within the confines of media borders.[9] This may be simply an accident of Futurist historiography and a result of exhibition display practices and constraints. The acknowledgement of the interdisciplinary nature of the movement ebbs and flows in the literature on Futurism. Analysis of the pre-war years has tended to focus on the re-invention of individual artistic disciplines, in line with the manifestos published at that time, and tends to be dominated by the traditional arts, especially painting, sculpture, drama, and, to a lesser extent, poetry.[10] A more open acknowledgement of the intermedia import of Futurism is often found in studies that focus on the interwar years, although the latter still suffer from the critical bias which surrounds Italian interwar art and Futurism's uncomfortable link with Fascism.[11] Even in those exhibitions which endeavoured to present Futurism as a complex movement, we still find a tendency to group together the fine arts (painting and sculpture), followed by technological media (photography and cinema), then architecture, and lastly design and fashion. The old categories and media boundaries still guide exhibition and display practices, and established categorizations and taxonomies continue to prevail. What one can observe in past and current curatorial practices is the manifestation of an oversight in many studies on Futurism around the scope of the intermedia focus of the movement, which sits alongside the need to discard old chronologies. Futurism is all too often labelled as Italy's 'Avanguardia storica' — the so-called 'heroic' phase of pre-war Futurism — placing excessive importance on the earlier founding years of the movement and upholding a narrative of discontinuity with the interwar years, leading to unhelpful categorizations such as 'primo' and 'secondo futurismo', with the implicit lesser regard for the latter. Such historical and critical accounts

have created critical barriers to the reading of Futurist theoretical and creative interventions across the lifespan of the movement, which, following Crispolti, we equate to the period 1909–44 — bearing in mind that many Futurists continued to be active in the post-war period.[12]

This broad chronology allows us to reframe the Futurist formative years, 1909 to 1915, with their focus on the development of Futurist aesthetics in relations to individual arts and artistic disciplines. It also enables us to track the broader development of Futurist intermedia aesthetics, acknowledging the foundational pre-war years, but moving away from the tendency to see the death of Umberto Boccioni (1882–1916) as a moment of irrevocable rupture between early theorizations and creative outputs, and later developments. Our focus in this chapter is thus both specifically on 1915, viewed as a crucial moment in the theoretical development of Futurism, and on the *longue durée* of Futurist intermedial and interartistic experimentation. As we shall see, 1915 was pivotal in more than one way and the focus on this year allows us to frame more clearly the birth and development of ideas about the fusion of the arts and their fundamental interconnectedness which remained of great import for interwar and post-war generations of Italian creative practitioners.

2.2. Towards a Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe

In March 1915, Balla and Depero published the manifesto *Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe*. This text was undoubtedly the starting point for the development of a new Futurist aesthetics applied to all aspects of everyday life. Gabriella Belli calls it a 'nuova estetica del quotidiano' [new every-day aesthetic].[13] Crispolti noted that the manifesto 'programmaticamente rompe definitivamente le pertinenze settoriali del rinnovamento futurista' [programmatically and definitively breaks down the sectoral jurisdictions of the futurist renewal],[14] going beyond previous critical interventions that focused on change within specific disciplines. Maria Drudi Gambillo, in 1958, in the first volume of *Archivi del Futurismo*, was the first to read the March 1915 manifesto as central for the entire movement and for Futurist creative interventions which went beyond the traditional fine arts.[15] Both Drudi Gambillo and Crispolti worked together on the influential 1963 exhibition on Balla in Turin in which the idea of the Futurist reconstruction of the universe was key to both the interpretation and exhibition display of Balla's activities, which ranged from painting, interior design, fashion, architecture, graphic design, advertising, set and theatre design, and *complessi plastici* [plastic complexes].[16] Such plastic complexes, as we shall see, are the cornerstone of the 1915 manifesto and a crucial interpretive key to the new direction of the movement.

Balla and Depero positioned their manifesto in a particular Futurist lineage, building on specific foundational concepts that had been developed in the previous six years in a number of manifestos and texts acknowledged in the preamble. They include: *La pittura futurista: Manifesto tecnico* [Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto] (1910; signed by Boccioni, Carlo Carrà (1881–1966), Balla, and Gino Severini

(1883–1966)); the preface of the Futurist exhibition in Paris, 'The Exhibitors to the Public' (1912) by Boccioni, Carrà, Luigi Russolo (1885–1947), Balla, and Severini; Boccioni's *Manifesto della scultura futurista* [Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture] (1912); Carrà's 1913 manifesto *La pittura dei suoni, rumori e odori* [The Painting of Sounds, Noises and Smells]; Boccioni's 1914 volume *Pittura e scultura futuriste*; and Carrà's 1915 volume *Guerrapittura*.[17] Additionally, Balla and Depero pay special tribute to Marinetti's notion of *parole in libertà* [words in freedom],[18] and Russolo's ground-breaking manifesto *L'arte dei rumori* [The Art of Noises] (1913).

The 1910 *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting* was the first detailed theoretical analysis of Futurist principles as applied to a specific artistic discipline. It was a call for the renovation of painting, aimed at overcoming its traditional conception as form and colour. If a traditionally conceived painting was only able to secure on canvas '*un momento fermato* nel dinamismo universale' [a *moment* in the universal dynamism *which has been stopped*],[19] capturing the universal flow and freezing it in time and space, Futurist painting wanted to capture the '*sensazione dinamica*' [*dynamic sensation* itself],[20] but, importantly, leaving it, as it were, unmoored, retaining its ever-changing nature. The manifesto was the first conceptualization of the idea of interpenetration, a key feature of Boccioni's later theoretical work.[21] The philosophical principle of the fundamental interconnected nature of the universe, which would also be central in the March 1915 manifesto, is already present in 1910. Our bodies penetrate the objects surroundings us, and objects penetrate us; the bustling city around us blends with our houses which in turn 'si scaraventano' [throw themselves][22] upon their surroundings, ultimately connecting a single body/object, in ever-expanding waves, with the city and the entire universe.[23] The word used to convey this merging and combining of bodies, sensations, and the environment is 'amalgamare'; a mixing and blending, that, as we shall see in the March 1915 manifesto, would become 'fusione' [fusion],[24] signalling a semantic shift more specifically linked with the world of science and technology.

The first exhibition of Italian Futurist painting in Paris in 1912 was a major stylistic turning point for the Italian artists who, under the influence of the Parisian avant-garde and Cubism in particular, increasingly moved away from their trademark early Divisionist technique, and its concern with visual perception, towards abstraction. The flickering vibrations of light, which are captured in the filaments of paint characteristic of Italian Divisionismo, had already resulted in an instability of the surface of the canvas, which seemed to move with the moving of the spectator, suggesting a shifting of perspective and the end of the traditional fixed perspectival view rooted in Renaissance art theories.[25] The new art of the Futurists rejected traditional painting even more boldly in its worship of the static, motionless object/figure. They explicitly called for 'uno stile del movimento' [a style of motion].[26]

Whilst the preface to the Paris exhibition is necessarily focused on painting and is concerned with matters of style and form, this text also clarifies the position of painting within a much broader spectrum of Futurist interventions: 'se i nostri quadri sono futuristi, è perchè essi rappresentano il risultato di concezioni etiche,

estetiche, politiche, e sociali, assolutamente futuriste' [if our pictures are Futurist, it is because they are the result of absolutely Futurist conceptions, ethical, aesthetic, political, and social].[27] Futurism, whilst focused on the renewal of artistic disciplines from within, was conceived in a wider social, political and ethical dimension. The militancy of the movement is patent. Art ceases to be solely concerned with aesthetics and its revolutionary significance is linked to a much wider sphere of intervention. As the 1910 manifesto had made plain, the aim of Futurism was to place the spectator 'nel centro del quadro' [in the centre of the picture],[28] moving away from the idea of the detached observer towards one of active participation which signalled a new militant position of the artist and the arts.[29]

Another crucial concept, which would resurface in the March 1915 manifesto, is that of *linee-forza* [force-lines]: 'intendendo con ciò le direzioni delle forme-colore' [by which we mean the directions of colour-shapes].[30] These are the invisible forces that characterize each object and the objects' interrelation with the surrounding environment. As Fabio Benzi has argued, especially in relation to the experimentation of Balla at this time, *linee-forza* were an important conceptual step which showed the coexistence of the natural and the supernatural.[31] *Linee-forza* appear in the canvases of Balla and Boccioni in the period 1912 to 1915, and were instrumental in the Futurist move towards abstraction. They were the means through which the Futurists tried to capture what lay in-between, the invisible interconnections between us and not-us, what they called the dynamic sensation of being in the world: 'Nel nostro manifesto, abbiamo dichiarato che bisogna dare la *sensazione dinamica*, cioè il ritmo particolare di ogni oggetto, la sua tendenza, il suo movimento, per dir meglio la sua forza interna' [In our manifesto, we have declared that it is necessary to give *dynamic sensation*, that is to say, the particular rhythm of each object, its inclination, its movement, or, to put it more exactly, its interior force].[32]

Boccioni would further refine this concept in his *Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture* (11 April 1912), which reiterated the fundamental interconnection of the universe and the need for the artist to investigate and translate into art the ways in which all objects are interlinked, not simply in an exterior way via the intersection of their planes, but also in their invisible, interior and transcendental links (this is what he calls 'trascendentalismo fisico' [physical transcendentalism]).[33] The language used by Boccioni in the *Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture* is suggestive: *linee-forza* are a means to capture, in plastic form, impalpable 'simpatie' [sympathetic effects], 'affinità misteriose' [mysterious affinities], 'emozione' [inspiration], 'piani atmosferici' [atmospheric planes].[34] Affect and emotion guide the way the artist makes sense of the world, despite Marinetti's frequent declarations that emotion and human psychology are of no interest to the Futurist.[35] The focus is both on the visible and the invisible, the material and the immaterial, and on the interconnections which take places in the dynamic in-between space where the force-lines intersect. Conceptually this is a shift from the object to the field in which the object is (and interacts with) the world. A further conceptual leap will lead to the idea of the arts themselves as existing and acting in this same in-between space.

The Italian Impressionist sculptor Medardo Rosso (1858–1928) provides for Boccioni a forceful example of the birth of the shift from object to environment. Boccioni paid tribute to him and defined him as the 'solo grande scultore moderno che abbia tentato di aprire alla scultura un campo più vasto, di rendere con la plastica le influenze d'un ambiente e i legami atmosferici che lo avvincono al soggetto' [the only great modern sculptor who attempted to open up sculpture to a wider field, and who tried to capture in plastic form the influences of an environment and the atmospheric links which tie it to the subject].[36] Rosso's work is seen as pointing towards a liberation of the subject from its material shackles, 'una liberazione verso lo spazio' [freedom towards space],[37] breaking the isolation of the object/figure and focusing on the 'spazio avviluppante invisibile' [invisible enveloping space].[38] Reconceiving sculpture as space leads Boccioni to consider its architectural nature, in a context in which architecture is not concerned with buildings as objects, but with the creation of 'ambienti' [environments], an idea that would have crucial reverberations in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s in the birth of Spazialismo and Art informel.[39] Boccioni refers to sculpture as 'ambiente scultoreo' [sculptural environment].[40] The reconceptualization of sculpture as a 'plastically designed space' pointed to the fundamental philosophical import of space as the field in which the interconnections between things happen, and the spatial and temporal relativism already predicated by Marinetti in the 1909 manifesto when he declared 'Il Tempo e lo Spazio morirono ieri' [Time and Space died yesterday].[41] The revolutionary principle of opening up the object/figure to its surrounding environment in a reciprocal exchange between object and space — '**spalanchiamo la figura e chiudiamo in essa l'ambiente**' [**let's open up the figure and let it enclose the environment**][42] — would later take on a wider meaning when the theoretical focus shifted to the way in which the arts interact with one other, leading to the creation of entirely new arts and intermedia artistic objects.

Carrà's *The Painting of Sounds, Noises and Smells*, published on 11 August 1913,[43] whilst still positioning painting in a privileged position, articulated its synesthetic potential: 'le nostre tele esprimeranno quindi anche le equivalenze plastiche dei suoni, rumori e odori del Teatro, del Music-Hall, del cinematografo, del postribolo, delle stazioni ferroviarie, dei porti, dei garages, delle cliniche, delle officine' [Our canvases, in that event, will express the plastic equivalent of the sounds, noises, and smells found in theatres, music-halls, cinemas, brothels, railroad stations, ports, garages, hospitals, factories].[44] Marinetti's *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature* (11 May 1912) had also called for the introduction of noise, weight, and smell in literature, capturing the chain of analogies and the web that connects all matter in the universe: 'solo per mezzo di analogie vastissime uno stile orchestrale, ad un tempo policromo, polifonico, e poliformo, può abbracciare la vita della materia' [the life of matter can be embraced only by an orchestral style, at once polychromatic, polyphonic, and polymorphous, by means of the most extensive analogies].[45] Painting for Carrà had a similar totalizing potential: 'questa **pittura totale**, che esige la cooperazione attiva di tutti i sensi, **pittura-stato d'animo plastico dell'universale**' [this **total painting**, which demands the active cooperation of all the senses, **a painting which is a plastic state of mind of the universal**].[46]

Fig. 2.1. Luigi Russolo, *Music*, 1911, oil on canvas, 224 × 145 cm,
© Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, London.

In an attempt to overcome the confines of the visual and tactile senses which are associated with painting, Carrà called for the creation of 'insiemi plastici astratti' [plastic abstract wholes] 'rispondenti non alle visioni ma alle sensazioni nate dai suoni, dai rumori, dagli odori e da tutte le forze sconosciute che ci avvolgono' [that is, those which correspond not to sight, but to sensations which are generated by sounds, noises, and smells, and all the unknown forces involved in these].[47] The idea of sound as shape and colour was further developed in Enrico Prampolini's cromophony.[48] It was also the focus of Luigi Russolo's painting *La musica* [The Music] (Fig. 2.1) which was first exhibited in Milan in 1911, two years before the publication of Russolo's ground-breaking manifesto *The Art of Noises* (Milan, 11 March 1913).[49] A dark blue band swirls around the pianist, a graphic mark of the trajectory of the music from the piano keys to the enthralled audience. The band captures the unwinding of the melodic line in time. As the size of the curves created by the ribbon-like band increases, so does its thickness, visually communicating to us ideas of rhythm and tempo. The association between colour and music is linked to theories of colour and emotion that were much discussed in avant-garde circles at the time.[50]

Russolo's *Music*, to use Russolo's term, was conceived as an act of translation. In 1920, in the Futurist journal *Poesia*, Russolo described the painting as 'a kind of pictorial translation of the melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, polyphonic, and chromatic impressions forming the complex musical emotion'.[51] Russolo focuses on the boundary between the aural and the visual by exploring the commonalities between music and painting.[52] Interestingly he also uses the concept of translation as a metaphor for the encounters between the arts and intermedia exchange. Music for Russolo is rhythm and harmony but it is also pattern and colour, and so it is closely linked to painting. *The Music* captures the embodied experience of both music and painting. Russolo describes in this canvas the impression music leaves on the body as fundamentally chromatic, a moment of dissolution of the boundary between the two arts. What Russolo seems to suggest is that if music is experienced by our bodies as colour, in turn colour and pattern in painting are essentially linked to rhythm and sound, hence they are sonic as well as visual. Sound and colour (and smell) are embodied experiences and as such the separation between them is artificially constructed. In 1913, Russolo's theories developed further, when music was replaced by the *Art of Noises*. The concept of 'noise-sound', in its intrinsic anti-imitative nature, was an attempt to go beyond the limitations of music and traditional musical training, recapturing the primordial and essential power of sound, and embracing urban and industrial sounds. It was also the first attempt to conceptualize an entirely new art born at the intersection of music, sound, and the changed visual and sonic landscape of the modern city.[53]

The foundational writings analysed so far, and openly acknowledged by Balla and Depero in March 1915, developed the idea of the fundamental interconnected nature of matter and the universe with great nuance, as well as the need for the artist to go beyond the received and perceived constraints of their specific artistic disciplines and media. Carrà, in an essay in the 1915 volume *Guerrapittura*, openly

addressed the limiting boundary imposed by specialization in art and science. If sensations are necessarily complex and multifaceted, 'poliedriche' [polyhedral],[54] then it is only by rejecting categorizations and specialism that one is able to create art that taps into the complexity of the world surrounding us. Specialism 'limita e circoscrive artificialmente l'attività dello spirito' [artificially limits and circumscribes the activity of the spirit].[55] Carrà speaks openly about the 'abolizione delle categorie (pittura, scultura, architettura, poesia, musica)' [abolition of categories (painting, sculpture, architecture, poetry, music)],[56] given the fundamental equivalence between the arts which he expresses in the following equation: 'Ricerche di deformazione dinamico-plastica nella pittura = Ricerche nella musica pluritonale senza quadratura = Ricerche dell'Arte dei Rumori = Ricerche delle Parole in Libertà' [Research of dynamic-plastic deformation in painting = Research in pluritonal music without phrasing = Research into the Art of Noises = Research of Words in Freedom].[57]

2.3. The 11 March 1915 Manifesto

Crispolti considered the manifesto *Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe* a watershed for the Futurist movement, a key moment in the opening up of practice (rather than simply theory) towards interdisciplinarity. The key protagonists in this new phase of the movement were Balla and Depero, who signed the manifesto. At the time, Balla was already in his mid-forties whilst Depero was twenty-three. The manifesto thus signals in more than one way a new phase of the Futurist movement and the enthusiasm for its radical call for modernization in a new generation of Italian artists.

After paying homage to the major theories developed by the Futurist movement in the previous five years, *Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe* refocused attention on the fundamentally interconnected nature of the world and how we experience it: 'l'espressione dinamica, simultanea, plastica, rumoristica della vibrazione universale' [a dynamic, simultaneous, plastic noise-ist expression of universal vibrations].[58] The idea of vibration is important in the way it connects in complex ways the interest in the natural and the supernatural. Scientific discoveries in optics and electromagnetic waves combined at the time with an interest in those phenomena that science could not explain. As Benzi has noted, Balla's interest in theosophy predated the publication of the manifesto and developed after 1916 in an increasing interest in spiritualism and mysticism.[59] Theosophy and other esoteric philosophies coexisted with an interest in natural phenomena and contemporary scientific thought.[60] The physical phenomenon of vibration — an oscillation or repetitive motion, but also a wave of pressure and motion in a gas, liquid, or solid — shows an attempt to understand and conceptualize the interconnection of all elements in the universe, both visible and invisible, and to position art and the artist not only as part of this fundamentally interconnected universal dynamism, but also as able to intervene directly in it. The arts are conferred a crucial facilitating and active function in this universal interconnection. This may still echo Symbolist ideas of the mediating role of the artist: the Symbolist seer who is able to lift Maya's veil and

restore the lost connection between humans and nature. Yet the nature and extent of the potential of artistic interventions in the world is radically different, because the Futurist artist is not any more the sole repository of a secret knowledge but, as we shall see, a modern advertising agent who reaches out to the masses and aims to effect change on a large scale.

The central focus of the manifesto is the fusion of the arts in order to enact the reconstruction of the universe: 'noi futuristi, Balla e Depero, vogliamo realizzare questa fusione totale per ricostruire l'universo rallegrandolo, cioè ricreandolo integralmente' [we Futurists, Balla and Depero, want to realize this complete fusion in order to reconstruct the universe, cheering it up, i.e., recreating it entirely].[61] This is a call for a complete overhaul of the arts system, setting aside the boundaries of arts and media, moving from the philosophical idea of interpenetration and plastic dynamism, enacted within a particular artistic discipline, to a programme of intermedia collaboration overcoming media boundaries, as exemplified in Balla's 'dynamic plastic complexes' (now lost) which were reproduced in the manifesto.

The manifesto reconstructs the genesis of the 'plastic complex', starting from Balla's early interest in speed and movement as depicted in iconic works such as *Girl x Balcony* (Museo del Novecento, Milan, 1912) and *Le mani del violinista* [The Hand of the Violinist, Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, 1912]. This led to a progressive interest in the abstract representation of movement and universal dynamism, in a number of canvases which focus on the force-lines as exemplified in *Abstract Speed* (Pinacoteca Giovanni e Marella Agnelli, Turin, 1913). The study of abstract speed, however, soon led to exhausting the possibilities of the two-dimensional plane of the canvas and encouraged new experimentations in three dimensions. Balla began to work with metal wire, cardboard, fabric, transparent paper, and created what he called the first 'dynamic plastic complex', which allowed him to explore depth and the dynamic volume of speed.[62]

In typical Futurist fashion and following a common pattern, the manifesto includes eleven principles which are said to characterize the dynamic plastic complexes: abstract; dynamic; transparent; strongly coloured and luminous; autonomous; transformable; dramatic; volatile; fragrant; noise-making; exploding. Some of these terms were already part of the Futurist vocabulary (noise/sound; smell; colour); others add new layers of meaning and creative potential. Transparency, for instance, has an important function in the way we perceive volume and depth as well as in helping us to perceive the interconnection of different elements. The transformable and convertible character of the plastic complexes points towards the haptic and interactivity in art. Volatility is linked with the idea of flight, which would become central in later years in the development of Futurist Aeropainting,[63] and the need for visual lightness as a means of stimulating a perception of dynamic change. In the 1912 *Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture*, Boccioni had already envisaged that abstract motion, represented by the dynamic force-lines, could be taken a step forward by mechanic means:

> Non possiamo dimenticare che il tic-tac e le sfere in moto di un orologio, che l'entrata o l'uscita di uno stantuffo in un cilindro, che l'aprirsi e il chiudersi di

> due ruote dentate con l'apparire e lo scomparire continuo dei loro rettangoletti d'acciaio, che la furia di un volante o il turbine di un'elica, sono tutti elementi plastici e pittorici, di cui un'opera scultoria futurista deve valersi. L'aprirsi e il richiudersi di una valvola crea un ritmo altrettanto bello ma infinitamente più nuovo di quello d'una palpebra animale![64]
>
> [we cannot forget that the swing of a pendulum or the moving hands of a clock, the in-and-out motion of a piston inside a cylinder, the engaging and disengaging of two cogwheels, the fury of a flywheel or the whirling of a propeller, are all plastic and pictorial elements which any Futurist work of sculpture should take advantage of. The opening and closing of a valve creates a rhythm which is just as beautiful to look at as the movement of an eyelid, but it is also infinitely more modern.][65]

Valves, pistons, cogs, turbines, and propellers are of course part of the Futurist aesthetics of the machine but, in terms of creative practice, they also anticipate post-war experimentation within the Kinetic and Programmed Art Movement since the plastic complexes can rotate, change shape, and even appear and disappear, by for instance incorporating fire, water, smoke, and fireworks.[66]

The list of the necessary materials needed for the creation of the plastic complexes is also revealing. They list:

> Fili metallici, di cotone, lana, seta, d'ogni spessore, colorati. Vetri colorati, carteveline, celluloidi, reti metalliche, trasparenti d'ogni genere, coloratissimi. Tessuti, specchi, lamine metalliche, stagnole colorate, e tutte le sostanze sgargiantissime. Congegni meccanici, elettrotecnici; musicali e rumoristi; liquidi chimicamente luminosi di colorazione variabile; molle; leve; tubi, ecc.[67]
>
> [metal wires, strings of cotton, wool, silk, of every possible thickness and colour. Coloured glass, tissue papers, celluloids, metal screens, transparencies of every sort, coloured ones too. Fabrics, mirrors, metallic foils, coloured tin-foil, and everything gaudy or garish. Mechanical, electrical, musical, noise-ist devices; chemically luminous liquids with variable colours; springs, levers; pipes; etc.][68]

These are not the traditional materials of an artist's workshop; they are linked with industry, engineering, chemistry, and the cutting-edge field of electro-technical engineering, but also with craft, creating thus an important continuum between art, craft, design, and technology which cut across disciplinary boundaries and artistic hierarchies.

Carrà in *Guerrapittura* had already extended his critique of the art mainstream to the use of traditional artist materials: the tendency of sculpture, for instance, to concentrate on a single material (traditionally marble, bronze, wood) for Carrà went fundamentally against the ability of the artist to capture complexity which was better expressed in an equally complex use of diverse materials — the lack of colour in sculpture was a case in point in his view. The new materials listed by Carrà at the time included: 'legno, carta, stoffa, pelli, vetro, corda, tela cerata, maiolica, metalli, colori, mastici, parole (consonanti, vocali, numeri) in libertà [...] entrano come materiali legittimissimi nelle nostre costruzioni artistiche' [wood, paper, fabric, leather, glass, rope, waxed canvas, majolica, metals, colour, mastics, words (consonants, vowels, numbers) in freedom [...] enter into our artistic

constructions as highly appropriate materials].[69] Whilst less exhaustive than the list in the March 1915 manifesto, Carrà's inclusion of 'words in freedom' points to the rich field of Futurist verbo-vocal-visual experimentation, that from Marinetti's sound and concrete poem *Zang Tumb Tuuum* (1914) will lead, as we shall see below, to Depero's bolted book, *Depero Futurista* (1927), and other artist's books and book-objects.[70] Words in their verbal, visual, and performative/sonic dimension are simply part of the range of materials which encourage an active crossing of artistic and medial boundaries. This goes beyond the concept of mixed-media (which in art-historical terms is the mixing of more than one media or material such as in the case of collage); it is a much richer field of experimentation where the traditional materials of painters, sculptors, craftspeople, and writers can all coexist, and where experimentation in theory and practice reaches out to old and new media.

2.4. Old Arts and New Media: Futurist Cinema

The 1916 manifesto of *La cinematografia futurista* [Futurist Cinematography] contains the following equation: 'Pittura + scultura + dinamismo plastico + parole in libertà + intonarumori + architettura + teatro sintetico = Cinematografia futurista' [Painting + sculpture + plastic dynamism + words-in-freedom + noise-tuners + architecture + Synthetic theater = Futurist cinema].[71] This positions film as the new Futurist medium *par excellence*, which stands, alongside Futurist theatre, at the end of a long chain of interconnected arts and media, some old, some new. The new Futurist cinema, we read, will be: 'deformazione gioconda dell'universo, sintesi alogica e fuggente della vita mondiale' [a joyful deformation of the universe, an alogical and momentary synthesis of everyday life], and it 'velocizzerà l'immaginazione creatrice, darà all'intelligenza un prodigioso senso di simultaneità e di onnipresenza' [will accelerate creative imagination, endow intelligence with a prodigious sense of simultaneity and omnipresence].[72]

Cinema seemed to fulfil the promise of a Futurist reconstruction of the universe better than any of the other arts. In the manifesto, film was set against the book, presented as a symbol of nostalgia, passéism, and neutrality. A relatively new medium (only about two decades old at the time of the publication of the manifesto), cinema seemed best placed to replace other outmoded media. As Millicent Marcus notes: 'As the art form whose identity and specificity are predicated on the etymologically privileged *kine* or movement, the cinema's very material condition served to promote the velocity-based aesthetics of the Futurists'.[73] Cinema was also the proof that breaking down the barriers between art and technology was possible, though many early commentators were still sceptical about the status of cinema as art because of its very reliance on the machine, a prejudice which echoed early debates over photography. As Robert Delaunay had noted, after the 1912 show of Futurist painting in Paris, the Futurists had a cinematographic imagination: 'votre art a pour expressions la vitesse et pour moyen le cinematographe!' [Your art has speed as expressions and cinematography as its means!].[74] Whilst this was not intended as a compliment — it was evidence for Delaunay that their art was too 'mechanical' — cinema seemed the art that above all others could fulfil the idea of the aesthetic

totality of Futurism: 'noi vediamo in esso la possibilità di un'arte eminentemente futurista e *il mezzo di espressione più adatto alla plurisensibilità di un artista futurista*' [we see in film the possibility of an eminently Futurist art and *the expressive medium most adapted to the complex sensibility of a Futurist artist*].[75]

The manifesto argues forcefully in favour of the autonomy of film as an art form, whose artistic potential is seen as untapped and 'immense' [immense].[76] As a visual medium, film must follow a path inaugurated by painting and 'distaccarsi dalla realtà, dalla fotografia, dal grazioso e dal solenne. Diventare antigrazioso, deformatore, impressionista, sintetico, dinamico, parolibero' [detach itself from reality, from photography, from the graceful and solemn. It must become antigraceful, deforming, impressionistic, synthetic, dynamic, free-wordist].[77] This liberation from its passéist shackles will be an expressive liberation of the medium which will allow it to fulfil its potential of *poliespressività* [polyexpressiveness].[78] Some of the most interesting propositions in the manifesto concern cinematic simultaneity and the interpenetration of different times and places.[79] Yet, as it was often the case with Futurist manifestos, intuitions about the future and theoretical innovation, did fall somewhat short in practice. The lure of the old techniques proved in many cases too strong and, in the case of avant-garde cinema, experimentation had to contend with the film industry for its distribution, and, to a large extent, also for its filming and production.[80]

Little is known about Futurist cinema. There are very few Futurist films; the only extant feature film is Anton Giulio Bragaglia's (1890–1960) *Thais* (1917) which contains a four-minute final sequence with scenography by Prampolini which is seen by many as ground-breaking in early avant-garde cinema. *Vita futurista* (1916), now lost and the only official film of the movement, was filmed by Arnaldo Ginna and it is to Ginna's writings that we owe the most authoritative information about the film.[81] We know that between 1910 and 1912 Ginna and Bruno Corra had already done a series of abstract shorts in which they gave a visual interpretation of musical motifs through colours. The titles of these shorts point to the idea of chromatic symphonies*: Accordi di colore*, *Studio di effetti tra quattro colori*, *Canto di primavera*, *Arcobaleno*, *Les Fleurs*, and *La danza*. The latter was an art form that seemed to occupy a special place in the cinematic imagination of the Futurists.[82] Carlo Belloli describes one of the sequences in *Vita futurista*, entitled 'Danza dello splendore geometrico', as creating:

> un'atmosfera onirica, totalmente visiva, per mezzo di soluzioni tecniche impreviste e cinematograficamente nuove. [Ginna] Creerà infatti un tessuto di dissolvenze estremamente suggestive per evidenziare la compenetrazione della danza con l'ambiente in cui si svolge e con i personaggi che vi assistono[83]
>
> [an oneiric atmosphere, entirely visual, via new and unexpected technical and cinematographic solutions. [Ginna] created a web of highly evocative fades which highlighted the interpenetration of dance with the setting in which it is taking place and the surrounding characters]

Balla's body dissolved, through a fade, as the vibrations produced by the dance travelled through the surrounding space in which his body was immersed.

The 1916 manifesto had boldly predicted the primacy of the medium: 'Siamo convinti che solo per mezzo di esso si potrà raggiungere quella *poliespressività* verso la quale tendono tutte le più moderne ricerche artistiche' [we are convinced that only thus can it attain the *polyexpressiveness* towards which all the most modern artistic research is moving].[84] Whilst it never became the medium of choice, this statement confirms the unshakeable conviction of the Futurists that the most advanced and daring artistic experimentations aspired towards a condition of '**sinfonia poliespressiva**' [polyexpressive symphony],[85] a coming together of arts and media, both old and new, in order to transcend the expressive possibilities of individual ones.

2.5. Concrete Poetry, Architectural Typography, and Book-Object

Whilst the potential of Futurist cinema was to remain largely unrealized, the opening statement of the 1916 manifesto of Futurist Cinematography seemed to suggest a point of no return for an old medium, the book:

> Il libro, mezzo assolutamente passatista di conservare e comunicare il pensiero, era da molto tempo destinato a scomparire [...] statico compagno dei sedentari, dei nostalgici e dei neutralisti, non può divertire né esaltare le nuove generazioni futuriste ebbre di dinamismo rivoluzionario e bellicoso.[86]
>
> [For a long time, the book, an utterly passéist means of preserving and communicating thought, has been fated to disappear [...] a static companion to those who are sedentary, nostalgic, and neutralist, the book cannot entertain or exalt the new Futurist generation intoxicated with revolutionary and bellicose dynamism].[87]

Yet the lure of the book and its potential for typographical, poetic and, as we shall see, plastic experimentation ensured its prominent place in Futurist practice. The Futurist reconstruction of the universe was a (radical) broad church. The polemical verve above was not directed at the medium per se; after all Marinetti choose the book form for his onomatopoeically titled *Zang Tumb Tuuum* (1914), his concrete poem on the Battle of Adrianople.[88] The Futurist book was reconfigured and through it we see the birth of new artistic practices, especially in the field of concrete poetry and book-objects, with their sonic and sculptural qualities, and we are also able to explore the spatial-architectural potential of typography.

In 1914, aged twenty-two and a refugee from Italian-speaking Austria-Hungary, Depero joined the circle of Futurists which, at the time, was dominated by Marinetti, Boccioni, Severini, Antonio Sant'Elia (1888–1916), Bragaglia, and Balla, who would become Depero's mentor. Depero's Futurist output can only be described as prodigious and signals a dynamic creative zest which included a huge array of disciplines: painting, sculpture, toys, tapestry, posters, theatre sets, costumes, graphic design and advertising, furniture, typography, and architecture, as well as Futurist polemical writings.[89] One of the most striking creations in the 1920s is *Depero Futurista* (32 × 24.2 × 4.4 cm), Depero's famous *libro imbullonato* [bolted book].[90] The bolted book, in album format, was packed with Futurist

innovations: creative typography, colour printing, foldouts, decorated papers, and verbo-visual experimentations.

The arresting novelty of the book began with the cover with its dynamo binding made by Depero's publisher, Fedele Azari (1895–1930), an aeropainter and theorist of aerotheatre.[91] Two aluminium bolts with nuts go through the thick cardboard covers which hold the pages together, an ingeniously practical solution but also a statement about the line that continued to divide the arts from modern technology. The nuts and bolts are straight from the aeronautical workshop; they belong to the Futurist cult of the machine and their fascination for cogs, pistons, propellers, and dynamic mechanical devices which were celebrated in Futurist writings and became part of the artists' toolbox in the interwar period. The bolts are also an implicit invitation to the reader to unscrew the binding and rearrange the book, which does not follow a linear narrative but resembles a trade catalogue with samples of the artist's typography, visual poems, and projects offered for our perusal.

One such project was the Pavilion of the Book designed by Depero in 1927 for publishers Treves and Bestetti-Tumminelli for the Decorative Arts Biennial in Monza.[92] The publisher's names are incorporated into the structure of the pavilion: TREVES stands totem-like next to the pavilion's compact structure, and BESTETTI and TUMMINELLI form the double-door entrance. One of the letter-totems reads 'Il libro' [The book], exemplifying what Depero called his typographical architecture. Depero introduced the project, on the page preceding the photographs of the pavilion, as a departure from the *stonato* [out-of-tune] style of fair pavilions, in which motorcars and aeroplanes often found themselves housed in structures designed in mock classical style. This is how he describes his pavilion: 'lettere gigantesche, compenetrate, impacchettate, sovrapposte; lettere tolte ai nomi BESTETTI-TUMMINELLI-TREVES formano il blocco principale dell'edificio e i plastici laterali esterni [...] L'interno è un continuo sviluppo dell'esterno' [gigantic letters, interpenetrating, stacked-up and wrapped; letters taken from the words BESTETTI-TUMMINELLI-TREVES make up the principal block of the building and the external side walls [...] the interior is a continuation of the exterior rendering].[93] The seats inside are giant capital 'E's and 'R's, and bookshelves and niches also continue the lettering theme. Giant lettering and plain walls alternate on the outside and inside; they resemble giant typefaces in a typesetter's workshop and playfully recall giant piles of books.[94]

In the description of the project, Depero builds text and image around three blocks of three: three boxes of text which describe the project in detail; the bold titles 'Architettura tipografica' [typographic architecture] and 'Padiglione del libro' [book pavilion], the latter repeated twice in large capitals moving from the top left-hand corner horizontally towards the right, and vertically down along the spine of the page; and three giant red letters (two 'A's and a 'T') which recall the type of the giant lettering of the pavilion. The positioning of these compositional and textual elements is interesting as it disrupts the traditional left to right, top to bottom running script. In order to read the page, the book needs to rotate, recalling the principles of movement and interactivity developed by the Futurists around 1915.

Fig. 2.2. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti; Tullio d'Albisola, *Parole in libertà futuriste, tattili-termiche olfattive* [Futurist Tactile, Thermic, and Olfactory Words in Freedom], 1932, 23.5 × 24.7 cm, © The British Library.

The book is thus on a trajectory that will lead to the book object; Depero reminds his readers, on the first page of the volume, that this is a dangerous book that could be used as 'arma-proiettile' [weapon-bullet], a veritable moving weapon in keeping with its aggressive character. The book's belligerent nature is however more likely to be aimed at household furniture — 'non sta bene in libreria e neppure sugli altri mobili che potrebbe scalfire' [it is not suitable for bookshelves or other types of furniture because it could scratch it] — and the reader is encouraged to buy a special cushion designed by Depero on which the book can rest. With characteristic tongue-in-cheek humour, Depero plays with ideas of the power of art to disrupt as well with the multi-layered functioning and significance of art. A book can be aggressive in content and form; its disruptive power exemplified in its physical construction as well as in its verbo-visual content. In a manner which recalls the reconceptualization of sculpture as 'plastically designed space', the book becomes a polymorphous object which encourages an expanded interaction with it which goes beyond the act of reading.

Depero's book is a perfect exemplification of Marinetti's typographical revolution as put forward in Distruzione della sintassi. *Immaginazione senza fili. Parole in libertà* [Destruction of Syntax — Radio Imagination — Words-in-Freedom] (1913):

> La mia rivoluzione è diretta contro la così detta armonia tipografica della pagina, che è contraria al flusso e riflusso, ai sobbalzi e agli scoppi dello stile che scorre nella pagina stessa. Noi useremo perciò in una medesima pagina, *tre o quattro colori diversi d'inchiostro*, e anche 20 caratteri tipografici diversi, se occorra. Per esempio: *corsivo* per una serie di sensazioni simili o veloci, *grassetto tondo* per le onomatopee violente, ecc. Con questa rivoluzione tipografica e questa varietà multicolore di caratteri io mi propongo di raddoppiare la forza espressiva delle parole.[95]
>
> [My revolution is directed against the so-called typographical harmony of the page, which is contrary to the flux and reflux, the leaps and bursts of style that run through the page itself. For that reason, we will use, in the very same page, *three or four different colours of ink*, and as many as twenty different typographical fonts if necessary. For example: *italics* for a series of swift or similar sensations, *boldface* for violent onomatopoeias, etc. The typographical revolution and the multicoloured variety in the letters will mean that I can double the expressive force of words.][96]

Mirella Bentivoglio attributes to Tullio Mazzotti, known as Tullio d'Albisola (1899–1971), the construction of 'the first totally objectified books' of the twentieth century: the Futurist tin books, using the technique of lithography on tin, *Lito-Latta*.[97] The tin books took an industrial material and turned it literally into poetry, fusing art and industry.[98] The first tin book was manufactured in 1932 and was titled *Parole in libertà futuriste, tattili-termiche olfattive* [Futurist Tactile, Thermic, and Olfactory Words in Freedom] (Fig. 2.2). Its fifteen tin sheets, lithographed on both sides and forming twenty-six pages, had a collection of Marinetti's writings on the front of the tin leaf and on the back 'a chromatic-poetic' Futurist synthesis by Tullio d'Albisola, based on some texts by Marinetti.[99]

The tin book invites an expanded multi-sensorial reading. The act of opening

the book and turning the pages is first and foremost an acoustic experience.[100] The metallic sound recalls the 'infinite variety of noises' of modern life in Russolo's *Art of Noises*. The material and its sonic qualities de-familiarize the reader with the traditional sensorial experience of reading a paper book. The association with industrial sounds turns the book into a machine and, on a more mundane level, reminds the reader of the colourful packaging of tin boxes and glossy advertising metal plates.

The smooth and rough surfaces of the pages find their visual equivalent in shiny and duller areas, blurring the boundary between text, image, and object, pushing the process of signification to the surface of the book focusing on multi-sensorial perception.[101] The process recalls the principles of the *tavole tattili* [tactile boards] which Marinetti had composed in the later 1910s, especially during the war. In the 1921 manifesto of *Tattilismo* [Tactilism], Marinetti presented the new art of touch, which he named tactilism, as the antidote to the *rappel à l'ordre* in art and the post-war malaise. Tactilism was a way to reconnect to the sense of touch and to use it as another important channel of communication.[102] Pierpaolo Antonello has noted that the Manifesto of Tactilism 'genuinely aimed to fill a gap in the aesthetic consideration of the haptic in its attempt to compensate for the lack of a principle of order in the experience of tactile sensations' and that the Futurist emphasis on the haptic had 'wider theoretical relevance for the understanding of Futurism and its scope and activity'.[103]

Marinetti describes four categories of touch and their different 'volumi' [volumes].[104] His lexicon of touch challenges and expands our logo- and ocular-centric idea of perception, criticizing the arbitrariness of classifying sensation only via the five senses: 'la distinzione dei cinque sensi è arbitraria e un giorno si potranno certamente scoprire e catalogare numerosi altri sensi' [the distinction between the five senses is arbitrary; many other senses will soon be discovered and catalogued], he claimed.[105] Martin Jay's analysis of the emergence of a general anti-ocular discourse in French thought in the early twentieth century shows the reach of the Futurist critique of separation between arts and disciplines, but also between art and life.[106] From the *tavole tattili* this new art would extend to furnishings, interiors, clothing, and tactile rooms and theatres.

As David Lomas noted: 'the introduction of words into the visual field is one of the dramatic ways that artistic production is transformed in the twentieth century, and among the most far-reaching in its consequences. Words participate in the interrogation of the nature of pictorial representation and contribute to the wholesale revision of the concept of art'.[107] One could say that the introduction of concrete elements into poetry caused an equally seismic shift in the concept of literature: the fundamental imbrication between word and image (and their connection to sound and space) opened up new pathways to explore the boundaries between the arts, debunking the artificial separation between arts and media. The Futurist books, by playing with the sonic qualities of the book as object, took literature into the realms of sculpture, design, and modern technology.

2.6. Re-Fashioning the Futurist Universe

In the year preceding the publication of *Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe*, Balla published three manifestos that pushed forward the Futurist project of reconfiguring all aspects of life: *Le vêtement masculin futuriste. Manifeste*, 20 May 1914; the slightly altered Italian version, *Futurist Men's Clothing: A Manifesto* (11 September 1914); and *Il vestito antineutrale* [The Antineutral Suit], also published in September 1914.[108] All texts point to dress in its political nature, its power to shape social identities, and its creative transformative potential.

In *The Antineutral Suit*, the political reading of dress was explicitly linked to the campaign for Italy's intervention but later manifestos also placed emphasis on the aesthetic and ideological import of fashion. Experimentation in textile design married new design solutions, resulting in the close proximity between the fields of fashion, architecture, design, and performance; fashion had, for the Futurists, the potential to transform the body into the ultimate performative site: a dynamic plastic complex, turning the wearer into a living piece of art, displaying an extraordinary synergy between textile design, painting, sculpture, and architecture.[109] Balla's textile designs or Tullio Crali's designs for womenswear, which he sent to Benedetta Cappa Marinetti (1897–1977) and to Balla's daughters, Luce Balla (1904–94) and Elica Balla (1914–95), in the early 1930s, are striking examples of the way in which the static quality of painting found, in the physical flexibility of fabric, a truer embodiment of the principle of dynamism which underpinned Futurist theory and practice.

For Francesco Leone, Balla's experiments with clothing represent 'the most daring conceptual conclusions and the most extreme development of the analogous "plastic complex"'.[110] As we have seen, the Futurists had set in motion a new relationship between art and the spectator when they declared that Futurism would place the spectator 'in the centre of the picture'. Fashion and clothing were the means to enact another paradigm shift: the spectator, turned into a wearer of art, would become a living part of Futurism, a dynamic vector performing Futurism in daily life. The identification of art and life was most powerfully expressed by a clothing revolution. The Futurists noted perceptively that the banal conventions of passéism were supported by clothing; men's clothes in particular encouraged the performance of bourgeois respectability. Women's clothing was already more in tune with new trends; the idea of continuous change in fashion was much more acceptable than in men's clothing which was dominated by the suit, the armour of conformist masculinity.

Clothing for Balla in the 1910s and 1920s became a way to translate the pictorial innovations that he was pursuing around 1915. The power of clothing was such that it could bestow motion to the two-dimensional force-lines of the fabric/canvas, turning the body in motion into a living plastic complex, a further enactment of Boccioni's idea of sculpture as 'plastically designed space'. The other fundamental intuition is that this human dynamic plastic complex could perform in public spaces and hence contribute to the reconfiguration of such spaces by its mere presence, and support the diffusion of Futurist art and aesthetics.

Sev. VII. 20

IL VESTITO ANTINEUTRALE

Manifesto futurista

Glorifichiamo la guerra, sola igiene del mondo.
MARINETTI.
(1° Manifesto del Futurismo - 20 Febbraio 1909)

Viva Asinari di Bernezzo!
MARINETTI.
(1ª Serata futurista - Teatro Lirico, Milano, Febbraio 1910)

L'umanità si vestì sempre di **quiete,** di **paura,** di **cautela** o d'**indecisione,** portò sempre il lutto, o il piviale, o il mantello. Il corpo dell'uomo fu sempre diminuito da sfumature e da tinte **neutre,** avvilito dal nero, soffocato da cinture, imprigionato da panneggiamenti.

Fino ad oggi gli uomini usarono abiti di colori e forme statiche, cioè drappeggiati, solenni, gravi, incomodi e sacerdotali. Erano espressioni di timidezza, di malinconia e di **schiavitù,** negazione della vita muscolare, che soffocava in un passatismo anti-igienico di stoffe troppo pesanti e di mezze tinte tediose, effeminate o decadenti. Tonalità e ritmi di **pace desolante,** funeraria e deprimente.

OGGI vogliamo abolire:

1. — Tutte le tinte **neutre,** « carine », sbiadite, *fantasia*, semioscure e umilianti.

2. — Tutte le tinte e le foggie pedanti, professorali e teutoniche. I disegni a righe, a quadretti, a **puntini diplomatici.**

3. — I vestiti da lutto, nemmeno adatti per i becchini. Le morti eroiche non devono essere compiante, ma ricordate con vestiti rossi.

4. — L'equilibrio **mediocrista,** il cosidetto buon gusto e la cosidetta armonia di tinte e di forme, che frenano gli entusiasmi e rallentano il passo.

5. — La simmetria nel taglio, le linee **statiche,** che stancano, deprimono, contristano, legano i muscoli; l'uniformità di goffi risvolti e tutte le cincischiature. I bottoni inutili. I colletti e i polsini inamidati.

Noi futuristi vogliamo liberare la nostra razza da ogni **neutralità,** dall'indecisione paurosa e quietista, dal pessimismo negatore e dall'inerzia

Vestito bianco - rosso - verde del parolibero futurista Marinetti. *(Mattino)*

Fig. 2.3. Giacomo Balla, *Il Vestito antineutrale: Manifesto futurista* [The Antineutral Suit: Futurist Manifesto], Milan, Direzione del movimento futurista, 11 September 1914, © Museo di arte moderna e contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto.

Leone, in his detailed analysis of the development of ideas about men's fashion in Futurist circles, dates Balla's very first experimentation with clothing design to 1912. In a letter sent to his family in Rome on 18 July 1912, Balla spoke of the furore caused by the Futurist clothing he was wearing. At the time he was in Düsseldorf working on a scheme for a room in the new house of the violinist Arthur Löwenstein.[111] The subversive power of his art and clothing became apparent to him: clothes could be the visible manifesto of Futurist art and aesthetics in the public arena. Balla fully understood the performative power of the artist's body, anticipating later developments in twentieth-century art.

Balla's designs for fabric, suits, and accessories made extensive use of the dynamic, synthetic, and abstract lines which one can find in his painting in the 1910s. For instance, the triangular wedge shapes which form the pattern of a suit in the illustration of the manifesto *The Antineutral Suit* are not intended as a mere decorative pattern (Fig. 2.3). They aid a reading of the body which emphasizes the directional force-lines of the wearer; the lack of symmetry is not a mere fashionable restyling of the traditional lines and shapes of menswear, but rather a means to accentuate the dynamic centrifugal force that links the individual (wearer) and the surrounding space. *The Antineutral Suit* calls for clothes to be aggressive (stressing the interventionist nature of Futurism), agile, dynamic, simple and comfortable, hygienic, joyful, illuminating, strong-willed, asymmetrical, short-lived, variable.[112] The last quality was of particular interest to Balla who in the 1920s made extensive use in his designs of 'modifiers', removable, changeable and changing parts. In the March 1915 manifesto one of the characteristics of the dynamic plastic complex was its transformable nature. The idea of the interactive in art was taking shape in these years and was an active component of the Futurist push against a passive and static relationship between art and its viewers.

Volt, in the *Manifesto della moda femminile futurista* [Manifesto of Futurist Women's Fashion], published in the magazine *Roma Futurista* on 29 February 1920, argues against the artificial difference between art and fashion: 'La moda è un'arte come l'architettura e come la musica. Una veste femminile genialmente ideata e ben portata ha lo stesso valore di un affresco di Michelangiolo o di una Madonna del Tiziano' [Fashion is an art, like architecture and music. A dress that is ingeniously conceived and well executed has the same value as a fresco by Michelangelo or a *Madonna* by Titian].[113] The Futurists ultimately saw fashion and clothing as key artistic forms in the fusion of the arts. Balla understood the power of clothing to shape identity, the performative nature of clothing in everyday life, and the potential of Futurist-clad bodies to speed up the Futurist revolution, making Futurist aesthetics and its ideology visible in the streets (Fig. 2.4). Given the anthropological significance of dress and the decoration of the body, as well as the political and social function of dress, it is not surprising that once the Futurist reconstruction of the universe was well under way, fashion and clothing came to have a privileged place in Futurism. Their intimate connection with the body, their tactile expressive potential and performative nature made them into ideal vehicles for the Futurist revolution of the universe.

Fig. 2.4. Silvio Ottolenghi, *Fortunato Depero e Filippo Tommaso Marinetti con i panciotti futuristi* [Fortunato Depero and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti with the Futurist waistcoats], black and white photograph, 1925, 220 × 175 mm, © Museo di arte moderna e contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto.

2.7. Conclusions

The Futurists expanded the boundaries of what could be termed art. They aimed at revitalizing the traditional arts of painting, sculpture, poetry, music, and architecture; they were committed in theory and practice to challenging traditional artistic and media boundaries and in doing so they also created a new dimension of language to express the range of experiences in the century of speed, mobility, and unprecedented scientific advance. In their manifestos, they commented on the momentous changes in people's mental processes which were potentially linked to new technology and media. The concepts that we have explored in this chapter pointed semantically and epistemologically to a new convergence between the arts, a total art, which had some links with the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* (or total work of art) that we will explore in the next chapter. The fusion of the arts, made possible by simultaneity and the dynamic sensation, resulted in *poliespressività*, an attempt to further break down the barrier between different art forms which did not simply result in a multi-artistic approach but in an optimistic, irreverent, and inventive intermedia Futurist universe.

Italian Futurism was also the first cultural movement of the twentieth century to aim directly and deliberately at a mass audience.[114] The promotional aspect of the movement can be linked to one of the central tenets of Futurism, the breaking down of the barriers between art and life and between the artist and society, when art aims to influence not only art but life and society at large.[115] As Luciano de Maria has noted: 'il futurismo va definito come il primo movimento di avanguardia provvisto di un'ideologia globale, artistica ed extrartistica' [Futurism can be defined as the first avant-garde movement with a global ideology, both in artistic and non-artistic terms].[116] Literature, the visual arts, music, theatre, cinema, politics, but also everyday customs and public morality all come under attack and were redesigned by the Futurists. When the pre-war global vision of the future became allied with the politics and culture of Fascism the 'totalitarian impulse'[117] of the movement became allied with the regime and fed a much more troubling view of the imbrication between art and life.

Notes to Chapter 2

1. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism (1909)', in *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. by Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 49–53 (p. 51) and *Marinetti e i futuristi*, ed. by Luciano de Maria (Milan: Garzanti, 1994), p. 6, which will be used for the extracts from the Italian. Other extracts in English are from the following volumes: Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Critical Writings*, ed. by Günter Berghaus, trans. by Doug Thompson (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006); and *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. by Umbro Apollonio (London: Tate Publishing, 2009).
2. In *Noi rinneghiamo i nostri maestri simbolisti ultimi amanti della luna* [We Abjure Our Symbolist Masters, the Last Lovers of the Moon], from *Le Futurisme* (1911) translated as *Guerra sola igiene del mondo* [War, the Only Hygiene of the World] (Milan: Edizioni futuriste di Poesia, 1915), Marinetti casts off associations with nature, solitude, sentimentalism, and the past in favour of the modern world. See *Marinetti e i futuristi*, pp. 220–23, and *Futurism: An Anthology*, pp. 93–95.
3. Vivien Greene, 'Introduction', in *Italian Futurism, 1909–1944: Reconstructing the Universe*, ed. by

Vivien Greene, cat. of the exhibition (New York: Guggenheim Museum, Exhibition Catalogue, 2014), p. 21.

4. *Futurismo, 1909–1944: arte, architettura, spettacolo, grafica, letterature*, ed. by Enrico Crispolti, cat. of the exhibition (Milan: Mazzotta, 2001).
5. This comparative reading had some illustrious precedents. See for instance Maurizio Calvesi, *Le due avanguardie: dal futurismo alla pop art* (Milan: Lerici, 1966). This was reissued by Laterza in 1971 and continues to be in print, having become a reference point.
6. *Marinetti e i Futuristi*, p. 6; *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 51.
7. Cited in *Futurismo, 1909–1944*, p. 38. See also *Casa Balla e il Futurismo a Roma*, ed. by Enrico Crispolti, cat. of the exhibition (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1989).
8. Günter Berghaus, 'Editorial: Aims and Functions of the International Yearbook of Futurism Studies', *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies*, 1 (2011), pp. ix–xiii (p. ix). On the veritable explosion of texts on Futurism in the new millennium see Elza Adamowicz and Simona Storchi, 'Introduction', in *Back to the Futurists: The Avant-Garde and its Legacy*, ed. by Elsa Adamowicz and Simona Storchi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 1–13.
9. It is more common to find a focus away from stricter disciplinary and media boundaries in studies which do not focus solely on Futurism but frame the movement in term of the early history of multimediality. See for instance Germano Celant and Gianfranco Maraniello, *Vertigo: A Century of Multimedia Art from Futurism to the Web* (Milan: Skira, 2008).
10. Drama has been important, in the earlier scholarship on Futurism, in framing an understanding of the intermediality of the movement. See Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Teatro*, ed. by Giovanni Calendoli, 3 vols (Rome: V. Bianco, 1960); Mario Verdone, *Teatro del tempo futurista* (Rome: Lerici, 1969); Giovanni Antonucci, *Lo spettacolo futurista in Italia* (Rome: Studium, 1974).
11. George L. Mosse, 'The Political Culture of Italian Futurism: A General Perspective', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 25.2/3 (1990), 253–68; Giorgio Di Genova 'The Centenary of Futurism: Lame Duck or Political Revisionism?', *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies*, 1 (2011), 3–19; Walter L. Adamson, 'Fascinating Futurism: The Historiographical Politics of an Historical Avant-Garde', *Modern Italy*, 13.1 (2008), 69–85.
12. Whilst 1909 is the undisputed start of the movement, marked by the publication of the founding manifesto, the tail end of the movement is still contested. Artists and writers began and ended their association with the movement at different points in time. The death of Marinetti in 1944 is a helpful marker of the end of the organized movement. See Walter L. Adamson, 'How Avant-Gardes End — and Begin: Italian Futurism in Historical Perspective', *New Literary History*, 41.4 (2010), 855–74 and Walter L. Adamson, 'The End of an Avant-Garde? Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Futurism in World War 1 and its Aftermath', in *The History of Futurism: The Precursors, Histories and Legacies*, ed. by Geert Buelens, Harald Hendrix, and Monica Jansen (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), pp. 299–318.
13. Gabriella Belli, 'Arredo, oggettistica, moda: l'avventura della ricostruzione futurista dell'universo', in *Futurismo, 1909–1944*, ed. by Enrico Crispolti, cat. of the exhibition (Milan: Mazzotta: 2001), pp. 147–61 (p. 147).
14. *Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo*, ed. by Enrico Crispolti, cat. of the exhibition (Turin: Mole Antonelliana, 1980), p. 11.
15. Maria Drudi Gambillo and Teresa Fiori, *Archivi del Futurismo: raccolti e ordinati* (Rome: de Luca, 1958). See also Maria Drudi Gambillo, *Occasioni critiche: dai Macchiaioli all'informale fiorentino* (Naples: Fausto Fiorentino Editrice, 1975).
16. *Giacomo Balla*, ed. by Enrico Crispolti and Maria Drudi Gambillo, cat. of the exhibition (Turin: Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, 1963). The exhibition was hugely influential on a number of Italian post-war designers, including Emilio Pucci; see Emily Braun, 'Making Waves: Giacomo Balla and Emilio Pucci', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 20.1 (2015), 67–82. It remains one of the most important post-war exhibitions for introducing a younger generation of Italian artists and designers to the scope and range of Futurist theory and creative practice in the interwar years.
17. Carlo Carrà, *Guerrapittura* (Florence: S.P.E.S., Salimbeni, 1978). Originally published as Carlo Carrà, *Guerra Pittura: futurismo politico, dinamismo plastico, 12 disegni guerreschi, parole in libertà* (Milan: Edizioni futuriste di poesia, 1915).

18. In *Distruzione della sintassi. Immaginazione senza fili. Parole in libertà* [Destruction of Syntax — Radio Imagination — Words-in-Freedom] (1913), Marinetti challenged traditional free verse and advocated the liberation of language from syntax and structure in favour of the free association, 'wireless' imagination, and a typographical revolution which created a new type of visual poetry.
19. *Marinetti e i Futuristi*, p. 23 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 64.
20. Ibid.
21. Umberto Boccioni, *Pittura e scultura futuriste*, ed. by Zeno Birolli (Milan: Abscondita, 2006). See in particular Chapter 13 'La compenetrazione dei piani', pp. 111–14, and Chapter 14 'Complementarismo dinamico', pp. 115–20.
22. *Marinetti e i Futuristi*, p. 24 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 65.
23. See for instance Boccioni's *La strada entra nella casa* [The Noise in the Street Penetrates the House] 1911, oil on canvas, 100.5 × 100 cm, Sprendel Museum, Hanover, and Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 197.
24. *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 209.
25. Anna Maria Damigella, *La pittura simbolista in Italia (1885–1900)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1981).
26. *Marinetti e i futuristi*, p. 60 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 105.
27. *Marinetti e i futuristi*, p. 61 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 106.
28. *Marinetti e i futuristi*, p. 24 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 65.
29. In 1912, they clarified this idea further: 'per far vivere lo spettatore al centro del quadro, secondo l'espressione del nostro manifesto, bisogna che il quadro sia la sintesi di *quello che si ricorda e di quello che si vede*' [in order to make the spectator live in the centre of the picture as we express it in our manifesto, the picture must be the synthesis of *what one remembers* and *what one sees*], in *Marinetti e i futuristi*, p. 62 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 106.
30. *Pittura e scultura futuriste*, especially Chapter 11, 'Linee-forza', pp. 101–05 (p. 101).
31. On Balla, esoteric philosophy and the fourth dimension see Fabio Benzi, *Balla: genio futurista* (Milan: Electa, 2007), pp. 129–30. One should also note that late nineteenth-century science is dominated by the word 'energy': electricity, magnetism, electromagnetic waves. The discovery of radiation, X-rays, the first understanding of the atomic structure, Einstein's understanding that matter was energy in space: all of this went against materialism, and 'the result was a universe that could only be imagined', Tim Armstrong, *Modernism. A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), p. 116. See also Luciano Chessa, *Russolo: Futurist Noise, Visual Arts, and the Occult* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).
32. *Marinetti e i futuristi*, p. 63 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 107.
33. *Marinetti e i futuristi*, p. 68 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 114.
34. *Marinetti e i futuristi*, p. 68 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, pp. 114–15.
35. In the 1912 *Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista* [Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature], Marinetti rejects the interest in human psychology as 'now exhausted' and asks for a reorientation towards '**the lyrical obsession with matter**' [bold in the original] in *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 122; 'an intuitive psychology of matter' (p. 123) and 'the reign of the machine' (p. 124).
36. Umberto Boccioni, *Gli scritti editi e inediti*, ed. by Zeno Birolli (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1971), p. 25.
37. *Scritti editi e inediti*, p. 25.
38. *Scritti editi e inediti*, p. 27. On Rosso and visual perception especially in relation to the representation of central and peripheral vision, see David Melcher and Francesca Bacci, '"A Moment's Monument": The Central Vision of Italian Sculptor Medardo Rosso (1858–1928)', *Perception*, 32 (2003), 1051–58.
39. In *The Painting of Sounds, Noises and Smells*, Carrà noted: 'Quando si parla di architettura si pensa a qualche cosa di statico. Ciò è falso. Noi pensiamo invece a una architettura simile all'architettura dinamica musicale resa dal musicista futurista Pratella' [Though architecture is often thought of as something static, this is wrong. What we have in mind is an architecture similar to the dynamic, musical architecture achieved by the Futurist musician Pratella], *Marinetti e i futuristi*, p. 126 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 157.
40. *Scritti editi e inediti*, p. 27.

41. *Marinetti e i futuristi*, p. 6 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 51.
42. *Marinetti e i futuristi*, p. 71 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 117.
43. The manifesto was in fact first published in *Lacerba*, 1.17 (1 September 1913), pp. 185–87, and republished in the volume *Guerrapittura*.
44. *Guerrapittura*, p. 81 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 158.
45. *Marinetti e i futuristi*, p. 79 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 120.
46. *Guerrapittura*, p. 82 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 159.
47. *Guerrapittura*, p. 80 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, pp. 157–58.
48. Enrico Prampolini (1894–1956). Enrico Prampolini, 'La cromofonia e il valore degli spostamenti atmosferici', *L'artista moderno*, 12.23 (10 December 1913), 371–74.
49. *More than Meets the Eye: New Research on the Estorick Collection*, ed. by Roberta Cremoncini and Mattia Patti, trans. by Christopher Adams and Diane Kunzelman, cat. of the exhibition (London: Estorick Collection, 2015); Luigi Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, trans. by Barclay Brown (New York: Pendragon Press, 1986).
50. These same theories also gave birth to one of the modernist masterpieces on the relationship between colour and music, Piet Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, 1942–43, oil on canvas, 127 × 127 cm, MOMA, New York. Mondrian's painting was the visual translation of his encounter with the city of New York and jazz music.
51. Quoted in Karen von Maur, *Vom Klang de Bilder. Die Musik in der Kunst de 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1985), p. 121.
52. One should note that *Tavole parolibere* were designed to be performed. Wanda Strauven, 'Futurist Images for your Ear: Or, how to Listen to Visual Poetry, Painting, and Silent Cinema', *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 7.3 (2009), 275–92.
53. Paul Hegarty, *Noise/Music: A History* (London: Continuum, 2007). See also Rhys Davies, *Luigi Russolo's Imagination of Sound and Music* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2017).
54. *Guerrapittura*, p. 9.
55. Carlo Carrà, 'qa!', in *Guerrapittura*, pp. 1–4 (p. 3).
56. *Guerrapittura*, p. 4
57. Carlo Carrà, 'La deformazione nella pittura', in *Guerrapittura*, pp. 71–75 (p. 71).
58. *Marinetti e i Futuristi*, p. 172 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 209.
59. Fabio Benzi, 'Giacomo Balla: Modernity and the Avant-Garde', in *Giacomo Balla: Designing the Future*, ed. by Fabio Benzi, cat. of the exhibition (London: Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, 2017), pp. 9–35.
60. Ara H. Merjian, 'A Future by Design: Giacomo Balla and the Domestication of Transcendence', *Oxford Art Journal*, 35.2 (2012), 121–46.
61. *Marinetti e i Futuristi*, p. 172 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 209.
62. *Marinetti e i Futuristi*, p. 172 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 210.
63. The *Manifesto of Aeropainting* was published in 1929. Signatories included: Balla, Benedetta [Cappa Marinetti], Depero, Gerardo Dottori, Fillia, Marinetti, Prampolini, Mino Somenzi, and Tato. On Aeropainting see Massimo Duranti, *Aeropittura e aeroscultura futuriste* (Perugia: EFFE, 2005). Catalogues of the exhibitions include: *Aeropittura futurista aeropittori*, ed. by Enrico Crispolti (Modena: Galleria Fonte d'Abisso Edizioni, 1985), and *Futurist Skies: Italian Aeropainting*, ed. by Renato Miracco (Milan: Mazzotta, 2005).
64. *Marinetti e i Futuristi*, p. 73.
65. *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 118.
66. Katia Pizzi, *Futurism and the Machine* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).
67. *Marinetti e i Futuristi*, p. 173.
68. *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 210.
69. 'La deformazione nella pittura', p. 74.
70. On verbo-visual poetry and Futurism see: Teresa Spignoli, 'No Man's Land: From Free-Word Tables to Verbo-Visual Poetry', in *The History of Futurism*, pp. 353–76.
71. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Bruno Corra, Emilio Settimelli, Arnaldo Cinna, Giacomo Balla, and Remo Chiti, 'La Cinematografia futurista, 11 September 1916', in *Marinetti e i Futuristi*, p. 190 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 233.

72. *Marinetti e i Futuristi*, p. 190 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 230. Marinetti's ambivalent attitude towards the cinematic medium is discussed by Wanda Strauven in 'Futurist Poetics and the Cinematic Imagination: Marinetti's Cinema without Films', in *Futurism and the Technological Imagination*, ed. by Günter Berghaus (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 201–28.
73. Millicent Marcus, 'Anton Giulio Bragaglia's "Thaïs"; or, The Death of the Diva + The Rise of the Scenoplastica = The Birth of Futurist Cinema', *South Central Review*, special issue on 'Futurism and the Avant-Garde', 13.2/3 (1996), 63–81 (p. 63).
74. *Archivi del Futurismo*, ed. by Maria Drudi Gambillo and Teresa Fiori, 2 vols (Rome: De Luca, 1962), I, 255.
75. *Marinetti e i Futuristi*, p. 191 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 230 (emphasis in the original).
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
79. 'We shall project two or three different visual episodes at the same time, or next to the other', *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 232.
80. See Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano*, 4 vols (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1993), I, 'Il cinema muto 1895–1929', section on 'Il cinema futurista', pp. 213–19.
81. See Arnaldo Ginna, 'Note sul film d'avanguardia "Vita futurista"', *Bianco e Nero*, 26.5 (May–June 1965), 156–58. For Marinetti's claim that the Italians invented the avant-garde cinema based on the innovations of *Vita futurista* and the manifesto of Futurist cinema, see his article 'La cinematografia astratta è un' invenzione italiana', *L'impero*, 1 December 1926; the article was revised and reprinted in 1927 as 'Cinematografia futurista astratta e pura'. See Wanda Strauven, *Marinetti e il cinema: tra attrazione e sperimentazione* (Pasian di Prato: Campanotto, 2006), pp. 112–14.
82. On Futurist and dance see Giovanni Lista, 'La danza futurista', in *La danza delle avanguardie: dipinti, scene e costumi, da Degas a Picasso, da Matisse a Keith Haring*, ed. by Gabriella Belli and Elisa Guzzo Vaccarino (Milan: Skira, 2005), pp. 27–38.
83. In Brunetta, p. 216. Originally in Carlo Belloli, 'Poetiche e pratiche d'avanguardia dalle origini agli anni Trenta', *La Biennale*, 14.54 (1964), 39–40.
84. *Marinetti e i Futuristi*, p. 190 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 230.
85. *Marinetti e i Futuristi*, p. 191 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 230.
86. *Marinetti e i Futuristi*, p. 190.
87. *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 229.
88. Jeffrey T. Schnapp, 'Politics and Poetics in Marinetti's Zang Tumb Tuuum', *Stanford Italian Review*, 5.1 (1985), 75–92.
89. Gabriella Belli, *Depero Futurista: Rome-Paris-New York, 1915–1932*, cat. of the exhibition (Milan: Skira Editore, 1999). In Rome, his collaboration with Balla was mutually enriching. Both founded their own *casa d'arte futurista* — Depero's was in his hometown of Rovereto — and within these interartistic creative labs they pursued the Futurist reconstruction of the universe.
90. Depero Futurista, *The Bolted Book: A New Facsimile* <https://www.boltedbook.com/> [accessed 12 July 2019].
91. Lucia Collarile, *Fedele Azari: vita simultanea futurista* (Trento: Museo Gianni Caproni aeronautica, scienza e innovazione, 1992).
92. The Monza biennial had begun in 1923 and was the most important showcase of design and applied arts in Italy at the time, before it was moved to the Palazzo dell'Arte, built by Giovanni Muzio between 1931 and 1933, and became the Triennale di Milano.
93. Fortunato Depero, *Depero Futurista* (Milan and Paris: Edizione della Dinamo Azari, 1927), unpaginated.
94. On this project and other examples of advertising architecture see Denis P. Doordan, 'The Advertising Architecture of Fortunato Depero', *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, 12 (1989), 46–55.
95. *Marinetti e i Futuristi*, p. 109.
96. *Futurism: An Anthology*, pp. 149–50.
97. Mirella Bentivoglio, 'The Reinvention of the Book in Italy', *The Print Collector's Newsletter*, 24.3 (1993), 93–96 (p. 94). Tullio Mazzotti was a designer and ceramist from the little Ligurian town

of Albisola, who like early modern artists, assumed the name of his hometown as his surname. On his activity as a ceramist see *La ceramica futurista da Balla a Tullio D'Albisola*, ed. by Enrico Crispolti, cat. of the exhibition (Florence: Centro Di, 1982).

98. The other famous tin book is Tullio d'Albisola's *L'anguria lirica: lungo poema passionale* (Rome: Edizioni futuriste di Poesia, 1934) with illustrations by Bruno Munari. See Pierpaolo Antonello, 'Visible Books, Unreadable Books: Bruno Munari's Iconotextual Playground', *Italian Studies*, 74.4 (2019), 331–51.
99. Bentivoglio, p. 95.
100. Bentivoglio turned the reading of the book into a phonic experience by recording and amplifying the sounds of the turning of the pages. She performed this reading in 1982 at the Pompidou Centre in Paris. The performance was called *Jouer la page* [Playing the page]. This is how she describes it: 'air pressed between the pages at different times and distances from the microphone produced unexpected results. The tin book proved to be a regular instrument furnished with a sounding-box. The cylinder of the spine is an elementary flute through which the pages seem to materialize as sounds', Bentivoglio, p. 96.
101. See also Giovanni Lista, *Le Livre Futuriste: de libération du mot au poème tactile* (Modena: Editions Panini, 1982).
102. Pierpaolo Antonello, '"Out of touch": F. T. Marinetti's *Il Tattilismo* and the Futurist Critique of Separation', in *Back to the Futurists*, pp. 38–55.
103. '"Out of touch"', p. 44 and p. 48. See also Barbara Spackman, 'Touching the Future: Marinetti's Haptic Aesthetic', in *Beyond Futurism. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Writer. For the Centennial Anniversary of the Italian Avant-Garde. Al di là del futurism. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, scrittore. Per il centenario dell'avanguardia italiana*, ed. by Gino Tellini and Paolo Valesio (Florence: Società editrice fiorentina, 2011), pp. 159–71.
104. *Marinetti e i Futuristi*, pp. 245–51 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, pp. 264–69.
105. *Marinetti e i Futuristi*, p. 251 and *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 269.
106. Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
107. David Lomas, '"New in art, they are already soaked in humanity": Word and Image, 1900–1945', in *Art, Word and Image: Two Thousand Years of Visual/Textual Interaction*, ed. by John Dixon Hunt, David Lomas, and Michael Corris (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), pp. 110–77.
108. Emily Braun, 'Futurist Fashion: Three Manifestoes', *Art Journal*, 54.1 (1995), 34–41.
109. See *Il Futurismo e la moda*, ed. by Enrico Crispolti, cat. of the exhibition (Milan: Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, 1988). See also Eugenia Paulicelli, 'Fashion and Futurism: Performing Dress', *Annali d'Italianistica*, 27 (2009), 187–208.
110. Francesco Leone, 'Giacomo Balla and the Origin of Futurist Fashion: Items of Clothing as "Living Plastic Complexes"', in *Giacomo Balla: Designing the Future*, pp. 37–47 (p. 37).
111. Balla was invited by his former student Grethel Löwenstein, whose violinist husband is the subject of Balla's influential *The Hand of the Violinist*, 1912, Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, London <https://www.estorickcollection.com/the-collection/the-hand-of-the-violinist-1912> [accessed 2 April 2023].
112. The link between the suit and interventionism was Marinetti's doing. See Selena Daly, *Italian Futurism and the First World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), p. 165, n. 9.
113. Volt, 'Manifesto della moda femminile futurista', *Roma Futurista*, 29 February 1920, unpaginated; *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 253.
114. As Daly argues, Futurism remained very elitist and the appeal to larger, more mainstream audiences only really happens from 1915–16 onwards, when Marinetti developed his 'futurismo moderato' agenda. Selena Daly, '*Futurismo moderato*: Re-imagining Futurism for a War-time Society', in *Italian Futurism and the First World War*, pp. 88–114.
115. Claudia Salaris, 'Marketing Modernism: Marinetti as Publisher', *Modernism/Modernity*, 1.3 (1994) 109–27.
116. Luciano De Maria, 'Una panoramica del futurismo italiano', in *Marinetti e i futuristi*, ed. by Lucia De Maria, p. viii.
117. Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

❖

1932: *Gesamtkunstwerk*

3.1. Introduction

It may seem counterintuitive to associate 1932, the year of the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome, the Decennale of Fascism, with a term coined by Richard Wagner in 1848: the year of the European revolutions.[1] The history and theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is rooted in the quest to reunite the arts into one integrated whole and it is thus of fundamental import to this volume for more than one reason. We want to address the obvious centrality of this concept in the history and theory of interartistic and intermedial experimentation and exchanges, and its rich legacy in European avant-garde art and culture. Doing this, however, leads also to questioning what, more often than not, is a highly positive narrative that accompanies ideas of intermedia in twentieth-century creative practice. The programmatic link between 1932 and the 'total work of art' then becomes a means to reflect on a more troubling example of the utopian idea of the unity of the arts, when framed in political and ideological terms.

As David Roberts noted, an eminent premodern model of the 'total work of art' was the Baroque integration of the arts: churches, palaces, and opera houses were the stages onto which the pomp of religious services, pageantry, and courtly festivals united the arts into the creation of elaborate spectacles in the service of political and religious power.[2] Heinrich Wölfflin, in his seminal 1888 study *Renaissance and Baroque*, saw the Baroque as a movement towards open, dynamic forms which he posited in antithesis to the closed forms of the Renaissance. The violent rupture to the *ancien régime* brought about by the French Revolution resulted in novel ideas about the autonomy of the arts and their separation, and was aided by the reconceptualization of the role of the artist in Romantic culture; traditional forms of patronage were lost and a renewed focus on the autonomy of the artist, away from political interference, emerged. Yet the idea of the integration of the arts began to resurface almost as soon as its religious and absolutist counterpart waned, and, importantly, it was tied 'to the desire to recover and renew the public function of art',[3] especially, as we have just seen, in avant-garde theory and practice.

Jeffrey Schnapp sees the end of the nineteenth century as central to a fundamental rethinking of the role of the arts, noting that up until the end of the century 'the arts had been envisaged as a stable, interconnected set of practices of craft and cultural communication'.[4] 'Total' art rises in his view when three conditions are

met — and he considers these conditions to be fundamental to our understanding of modernity. The first is the 'fragmentation' that disjoins the arts from traditional sources of patronage, clients and audiences, and 'tradition-bound crafts'; the second is the idea of autonomy when the arts 'are decoupled from traditional social functions'; the third is secularization.[5]

The long nineteenth century is ripe with theories and practices of intermedia collaboration: the international artists colonies in the forest of Fontainebleau, and the web of artist retreats all over Europe, are examples of a rich transnational culture of artistic collaboration which was as important as the one that we find in the interartistic and multi-national milieu of nineteenth-century Paris (and other European art capitals) in the lead-up to the Great War and in the interwar period.[6] Whilst these practices of artistic and cultural exchange may run counter to received ideas about the autonomy of the arts and the artist in an increasingly secular Europe, it is important that we consider fin-de-siècle artistic practices and the role played by connectivity in social and ideological terms if we are to rethink the role and legacy of new ideas of interartistic collaboration in Fascist Italy. This will also help us to reconsider the influence of avant-garde theories and practices under Fascism and their instrumental redeployment in the service of the Fascist state.

Roger Fornoff sees as a fundamental characteristic of the total work of art the combination of an interartistic and/or intermedial union of the arts together with what Roberts calls 'a comprehensive vision of the world'.[7] This world view is often a utopian one, and the union of the arts is the medium through which to enact change; it is the transformative power of the arts working together that will be able to effect change and transform the present into a utopian future. The aesthetic experience of society is thus the engine of social and cultural regeneration — the 'total work of art' presupposes an active social function of art and the artist. The regeneration hailed by many avant-garde movements was also central to the myths of palingenesis which underpinned Fascism. Yet, the difficult legacy of Fascism and received notions about the role of the arts under the regime still act as a smoke screen which overall confounds ideas about the place and function of the arts under Fascism, and the ideological and political re-appropriation of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in Fascist Italy.

The 'total work of art' in Modernism is both a critique of the status quo and a utopian projection which aims at the reintegration of the arts and, through them, of society. In this chapter we suggest that we look at how Fascism was able to integrate the arts into the regime more seamlessly precisely because ideas and practices of intermedia collaboration, which were already deeply rooted in Italy and Europe at the time and in the previous century, were less likely to be seen as directly linked with the regime and could thus prop up the rhetoric of the freedom of the arts and the artist under Fascism. Ideas of collaboration between the arts and artists in relation to the Fascist state, as we shall see, were in fact exploited and refashioned by the regime and can be seen as one of the many porous boundaries between Fascist ideology and concurrent cultural practices. We are particularly interested in exploring this mutual exchange because all too often the way Fascism is analysed

tends to focus on how the regime imposed new practices (which it undoubtedly did). We want to focus instead on how a reconsideration of the arts under, and at the time of, Fascism, when looked at from multi-directional foci, allows for a shift in perspective that enables us to reconsider the role of the 'total work of art' under Fascism and the Fascist 'totalitarian work of art'.

3.2. The *Gesamtkunstwerk* in Italy: From Wagner to the Bauhaus

The reception of Wagner in Europe, especially within French Symbolist circles, is an important moment in the appropriation and development of the concept of the 'total work of art'.[8] Italy normally does not figure much within this history, which is still French-biased. Yet Gabriele d'Annunzio (1863–1938) stands out as a hugely important figure in the Italian context. In characteristic fashion, d'Annunzio was an enthusiastic early adopter of new trends and was among the very first in Italy to write about the fashionable Wagnerian craze in Europe in the 1880s.[9] D'Annunzio's controversial dramas, in the period leading up to the First World War, were attempts to fuse the arts on stage and were examples of a highly successful collaboration with composers, performers, set and costume designers, making him in many ways the Italian linchpin of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.[10] It is within this context that we also see the birth of Futurist ideas on the obsolescence of the traditional arts and the need to inject into the arts a public function and reunite them to enact a 'total' Futurist reconstruction of the universe.

Both d'Annunzio and the Futurists are important in this context because of the way they helped to reshape the central significance of the theatre and the stage (in theory and practice) which, in the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, is where the separation between actors and spectators is overcome and where the spectators through their participation (almost) without barriers are part of a totalizing circle of aesthetic experience, which is transformative and leads, in ever-expanding circles, to the transformation of communities, the people, and the nation.[11] These were also the years in which cinema had a major impact in shaping the perception of the relative position of the arts in relations to one another. In his manifesto *The Birth of the Sixth Art*, published in 1911, Italian film theoretician Ricciotto Canudo famously argued that cinema was a new art, 'a superb conciliation of the Rhythms of Space (the Plastic Arts) and the Rhythms of Time (Music and Poetry)', a synthesis of the five ancient arts: architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry; a plastic art in motion.[12]

The transformation of art into action also held special significance in Italy in the years that led up to the world conflict. For both d'Annunzio and Marinetti, art was action: the idea of war as poetic action, and the Futurist call for the disruptive gesture and metaphorical use of war as a source of creativity, we would argue, made Italy especially receptive to ideas about the totalizing function of art and its potential palingenetic value. Importantly both d'Annunzio and Marinetti saw art as a means to reach out to the masses. Futurism programmatically set out to take art out of its elitist spaces, symbolized by the fossilized learning of the academies

and Italy's museums. D'Annunzio refashioned himself into the *poeta vate* and *poeta soldato*, elevating war and military leadership into art. The idea of war in Futurism remains of fundamental theoretical import: the overthrowing of the old, the collective experience, the *guerra festa* as cleansing and regenerating act, were all part of the redemptive ideas which chimed with the transformative power of the total work of art and the social function of art.[13] Both d'Annunzio and Marinetti provided Benito Mussolini (1883–1945) with important models: the symbols and ceremonies of national rebirth in Fiume married the images of technologically driven modernity conjured up by Marinetti and by the Futurists, creating a perfect springboard for the Fascist myths and rituals of national regeneration, and especially the entwined myth of revolution and nation in Fascist Italy.[14] The political activism of the Italian avant-garde, combined with the creative and theoretical desire to break through the boundaries separating art from life, seem to lead seamlessly to the mass rallies and spectacles of Fascism.[15]

For many artists, architects, and designers in Italy, however, the most influential rethinking of the boundaries between the arts came, at least initially, from abroad. The Bauhaus remains a fundamental milestone in the theory and practice of the unity of the arts in the European avant-garde. The single most influential idea that would later become central to the Fascist totalizing project was rooted in Walter Gropius's 1919 manifesto: 'today the arts exist in isolation, from which they can be rescued only through the conscious, cooperative effort of all craftsmen. Architects, painters, and sculptors must recognize anew and learn to grasp the composite character of building as an entity and in its separate parts'.[16] This was a call for a return to craft, eliding the difference between artists and craftsman, with its implied class distinction, and to the workshop as the locus in which the merging of the arts could take place on a practical and theoretical level. It was also, and more importantly for the current discussion, a call for a reshaping of the hierarchy of the arts in which architecture and design gained a new centrality. If, for Walter Pater, all the arts aspired to the condition of music, and for Wagner the stage and opera (music-drama) were the culmination of the process of unification of the arts, for Gropius 'the ultimate aim of all visual arts is the complete building!'.[17] As we shall see, this call for a new unity of architecture, painting, and sculpture would acquire increasing relevance in Italy as the Fascist regime tightened its grip on the country and focused on an unprecedented reshaping of the physical fabric of Italian society and its institutions.

3.3. Fascism and the Arts System

The role of para-governmental organizations to regulate leisure and communication was central to the way the Fascist regime directed and influenced the arts and the mass media. The peculiarity was that state-directed organizations often worked alongside private enterprise, leading to a mistaken perception of the freedom of the arts and artists under the regime.[18]

Alongside debates on aesthetics, the structures which were set in place to support and control the arts remain an important record of the totalizing vision of the

arts and the centrality of intermedia collaboration in the service of the Fascist state.[19] Fascist corporatism played a major role in the syndical organization and restructure of the arts, and was followed by an active involvement of the Fascist state in patronage via exhibitions, competitions, awards, commissions, and public purchases.[20] Giuseppe Santomassimo sees the creation of the corporations as the real starting point of a cultural policy of Fascism.[21] As Mussolini stated, in his November 1934 speech, the National Council of the Corporations had legislative power and replaced the Chamber of Deputies.[22] Corporatism was thus fundamental to the ideological construct of the Fascist Third Way and has been analysed extensively in its economic implications.[23]

What remains striking is that coeval writings on Fascist corporatism, especially in relation to the arts, picked up and reinforced the twin-strategies which we see at play in Fascist rhetoric at all levels: the idea of an alleged freedom of the artist coupled with principles of discipline and order. The rhetoric of equality and freedom introduced by Fascism can be seen clearly in the following statement by Franco Ballarini, in which he openly praises the principle of 'self-discipline'.[24] Riccardo del Giudice is more transparent in his appeal to the need to impose order and discipline:

> l'organizzazione professionale nel moderno ordinamento sociale ha lo scopo, oltre tutto, di coordinare e disciplinare la libera iniziativa dei singoli, che, abbandonata a se stessa, si risolverebbe necessariamente in una disorganica molteplicità di opere, dispersive di energie, causa di disorientamenti nella direzione delle imprese e dei mercati.[25]
>
> [The professional organization of the modern social order has the goal, above all, of coordinating and disciplining the free initiative of individuals, who, left to their own devices, would necessarily result in a disorganized multiplicity of works, dispersing energy, causing disorientation in the management of companies and markets.]

These ideas went straight to the roots of Fascist ideology as expressed in Mussolini's and Gentile's Foundations and Doctrine of Fascism: the idea of the relationship between the individual and the state aimed to overcome individualism and self-service. This resonated within a rich tradition of debates about the social function of art, the importance of collaborative practices, and the overturning of the narrow boundaries of individual artistic disciplines and media. It is not difficult to see how it could easily lead to the regime's open support of interartistic collaborations and the synthesis of the arts. Collaboration could be seen as moving beyond the bourgeois confines of the individualism of the artist working for a single wealthy client. Giuseppe Pagano, in the pages of the influential architecture and design magazine *Casabella*, on the occasion of the sixth Triennale in Milan (May–October 1936), provides a clear statement of the intersection between the unity of the arts and a nationalistic framing:

> l'arte italiana è conscia di una sua missione. Gli avvenimenti stessi la spingono a realizzarla; anzi, le stesse opposizioni costringono le arti a superare gli isolamenti, a coordinare gli sforzi, a immedesimarsi del fatto collettivo. La

> prima tappa verso questa ripresa di potenza è quella di riconoscere un problema generale: la necessità di realizzare quella unità spirituale nella quale le varie arti senza dispersioni e senza capricci individuali ritornino a collaborare per la esaltazione della nostra civiltà.[26]
>
> [Italian art is conscious of its mission. The events themselves push it to make it happen; rather, the same oppositions force the arts to overcome isolation, to coordinate its efforts, to identify with the collective event. The first stage towards this recovery of power is to recognize a general problem: the need to achieve that spiritual unity in which the various arts, without dispersion or individual whims, return to collaborate in order to exalt our civilization.]

1929 was in many ways a turning point for Fascist arts politics; this is when the Sindacato Fascista Professionisti e Artisti was tasked with managing all exhibitions, from the bottom level of the exhibitions of the Provincial Syndicates to the highest level — the national Quadriennale romana and the international Biennale in Venice. The Triennale and the Biennale were also made autonomous in order to take control away from the local Councils. It was an exhaustive mapping which effectively resulted in full control of the entire art mainstream. The free artists' associations of the past, like the Società Promotrici di Belle Arti, which were still present in the largest cities and had managed to retain a regional dimension in post-unification Italy, became part of the Sindacato Fascista Professionisti e Artisti. The exhibition system was open to all members of the Fascist union of artists. The structure was comprised of provincial branches and regional and inter-provincial exhibitions which could lead to an invitation to exhibit at the Quadriennale in Rome and from there to the Venice Biennale. It was a very clear progressive hierarchical structure which moved from local to regional, and then from national to international level.

Key regime figures became the chief impresarios-cum-bureaucrats of the regime. Cipriano Efisio Oppo was secretary of the Sindacato Fascista degli Artisti,[27] and Antonio Maraini was secretary of both the Roman Quadriennale (which opened in 1931) and the Venice Biennale. In 1940, Giuseppe Bottai introduced the Ufficio per l'Arte Contemporanea, within the Ministero dell'Educazione Nazionale. The Ufficio became directly involved in the art establishment and private commercial art world via the 1941 prize for the role in the promotion of contemporary art for private galleries.[28] Bottai was also responsible for the introduction, in 1942, of the '2% Law' which allocated 2% of the funding for new public buildings to decoration which can be seen as the end point of the regime's deliberate totalizing vision for the arts, pointing towards the centrality of the close interconnection between architecture, art, and design.[29]

Changes were also brought about by the regime in the area of art education with the creation of a single Ministero for all the Istituti di Belle Arti, and art and design schools — Scuole di istruzione artistica, professionale e industriale. The underpinning idea was described by Francesco Sapori as being rooted in the distinguished Renaissance tradition: like in the workshops in Renaissance Italy, one would move from the study of decorative art to 'arte pura' [pure art].[30] Whilst this still signals a hierarchical relationship, which places the fine arts as the culmination

of artistic education, concurrent debates on mural painting show that ideas about the integration of the arts were central to artistic theory and practice. Italy's most influential interwar international architecture and design magazines, *Domus* and *Casabella*, for instance, openly championed the interaction of the arts. One might argue that this was in line with international Modernism, but, significantly for our present discussion, interartistic and intermedial exchanges, as well as the idea of architecture as the coming together of all the arts, did not challenge Fascist doxa. In fact, it can be seen as one of the many contact zones between the culture of Fascism and pre-existing theories and practices which made sure that Fascist cultural policies were seamlessly integrated in Italian society and cultural life.[31]

The integration of the arts was also seen as peculiarly Italian. Lamberto Vitali, in an article on fresco, viewed this artistic medium as a 'monumental and architectural art form', praising monumental art as 'non-fragmentary'.[32] Vitali's statement could be seen as gesturing towards Gropius's ideas on buildings as the sites in which the arts came together, but it also befitted the Fascist ideal of the coming together of the arts and artists in order to materialize the vision of the regime, effacing the barriers between the individual and the collective, and between self and Fascism. Whilst the tone of the debate in *Domus* or *Casabella* was far removed from the over-emphatic advocacy of Fascism, we can nevertheless detect a common endorsement of the theories and practices of intermedia collaboration and the special place of the interlinking between architecture and design as key in the coming together of the arts and artists.

By the time of the Decennale, when the first film festival was held at the Venice Biennale, on 6 August 1932, cinema occupied a central position in the organization of leisure and its power to reach unprecedented numbers of people had turned it into a key vehicle of mass communication. Cinema also offered the ultimate model of collaborative practice between creative practitioners and technical personnel and, together with architecture and design, became a strategic area for the Fascist state. The director Alessandro Blasetti, who was the principal promoter of some key state institutions which supported the Italian film industry in the 1920s and 1930s, championed the idea of the cinema as a 'collective art', rooted in the collaborative practice of screen writers, costume designers, cinematographers and actors.[33] Whilst cinema could be seen as the ultimate intermedial art form of its time, it was a craft (a term favoured by Blasetti to conceive of cinematic practice as noted by Stephen Gundle and Michela Zegna) that was only possible because of the collaboration and the coming together of not just different arts and media but their practitioners as well.

Gundle has noted the decisive role of the regime in reviving Italian cinema and the Italian film industry in the 1930s after its collapse in the period after the First World War.[34] Whilst, as he rightly points out, we cannot talk of cinema as entirely state-directed, given the conspicuous presence of private industry, the close interest that the regime and Mussolini took in cinema is another important step in the direction of both state support-cum-control of the arts system and the special interest of the regime towards modern media and new art forms which were distinctly collaborative and intermedial.

After many failed attempts to revive the industry after its near collapse in the 1920s, on 29 January 1936 Mussolini laid the foundation stone of what would become Cinecittà, the largest studio complex in Europe. Among the senior officials surrounding Mussolini at the time were Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano, the president of the Cines film company, Carlo Roncoroni (who was also a member of Parliament), and the director general for cinema, Luigi Freddi, 'the most important single Fascist official in the area of cinema', who later became president of the Cinecittà complex in 1940.[35] Freddi, who, as we shall see, had been one of the two masterminds behind the Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista,[36] considered cinema a 'formidable social weapon' paralleled only by the press.[37]

The creation of what would become Cinecittà followed a series of other measures that had been put in place in the 1930s to support and develop the Italian film industry, which signalled a stepping up of the propaganda machine in all areas and a more targeted Fascist intervention in the arts. 1934 saw the creation of a number of state bodies responsible for propaganda in the areas of film, radio, theatre, and literature.[38] It is interesting to note that shortly after work began at Cinecittà, work also began to create new buildings for Luce, the state-owned photography and newsreel service, and a permanent home for the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, the training schools for actors, directors, and technical personnel.[39] All these institutions were in the same district and close to the centre of Rome. Gundle notes that this concerted plan was a response to the centralization of all propaganda functions in Nazi Germany but also to the importance of the cinematic medium and its huge success as leisure activity, and hence its strategic importance in the propaganda efforts of the regime.

The opening of Cinecittà was the culmination of a process which is better understood when viewed comparatively with the wider reorganization of the arts system. Between 1934 and 1937, cinema become the creative hub in which writers, musicians, and technicians worked together but it did not do so in isolation; architects and designers, decorators and fine artists were also actively encouraged to work together on large-scale state-sponsored projects. The collaborative and intermedia nature of cinema was part of a continuum in which, under the active sponsorship of the regime, collaboration and interartistic practice came to characterize the Fascist approach to cultural production. The Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista (henceforth MdRF), as we shall see, was the turning point for this concerted totalizing vision of the arts.

3.4. 1932: Ideology, Spectacle and the Fascist Synthesis of the Arts

Among the many hyperbole-laden eulogies of the MdRF, Margherita Sarfatti's description stands out in its overt reference to Fascism's political religion: 'Questa esposizione-dimostrazione è concepita come una cattedrale dove le mura parlano. Per la prima volta nei tempi moderni porta un fatto della storia contemporanea nel clima ardente delle affermazioni e manifestazioni religiose' [This exhibition-demonstration is conceived as a cathedral where the walls speak. For the first time in modernity, it brings a fact of contemporary history into the ardent climate of

religious affirmations and expressions].[40] The reference to a cathedral, however, is also proof of the role of space, especially the designed space of architecture, as enabling the symbolic and physical communion between the arts and the people.[41]

The exhibition, held in the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Via Nazionale, opened in October 1932; in 1933, it was declared permanent, but it finally closed down in 1934. It remains one of the most striking instances of the totalizing aim of Fascism, its intent of fundamentally reshaping the past and the future, creating new myths and narratives in its wake. It is also one of the most compelling attempts to bring together different artistic disciplines and media in interwar Italy.[42] Its importance in Fascist self-mythologizing was matched by its popular success. An impressive 3,701,818 visitors went through its doors, which were open every day from morning to 11pm, with an average of 5000 visitors per day.[43] The mass mobilization of nearly four million visitors, in the two-year run, is extraordinary for Italy at the time.

The exhibition focused on the period 1914 to 1922, in a process of re-appropriation of Italy's recent past and mythmaking supported by an extraordinary multimedia staging which included art, photographs, pamphlets, artefacts, autographs, publications, and relics, sent in by private citizens and Fascist organizations, displayed in twenty-three rooms, each focusing on a single year starting with the battles for intervention in the First World War, and culminating in the Sala Del Duce and the Sacrario dei Martiri [Chapel of the Martyrs]. The celebrations of the Fascist Decennale had been preceded by an already substantial restructuring of the social and cultural institutions of the country in the late 1920s, which would continue more systematically in the 1930s and was part of an ongoing physical and metaphorical reshaping of the country's landscape and culture.[44] Because of its ambitious design and popularity, the MdRF has been analysed as a significant case study in the creation of the culture of consent.[45] Whilst one can find precursors to the pageantry of the MdRF — for instance, the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Garibaldi — it remained unique in scope and execution.[46]

The iconography and aesthetics of the exhibition display speak powerfully to the idea of unifying the arts in the service of the ideals and needs of the regime. Marla Stone for instance called it 'the most enduring propaganda event of the fascist dictatorship'.[47] She also noted how the 'formula of modern aesthetics, emotionalized and mythmaking ritual, and crowd-pleasing entertainment' was one of the legacies of the exhibition which was redeployed in similar propaganda exhibitions in the 1930s. Yet, the MdRF did retain a special place as 'a modernist Gesamtkunstwerk, blending rite, drama, art, propaganda, and entertainment into a total experience'.[48] As Jeffrey Schnapp put it: 'a voler indicare una sola creazione in grado di cristallizzare tutte le tensioni appena delineate, essa sarebbe sicuramente da identificare nella Mostra delle Rivoluzione Fascista: il "museo in movimento" multimediale' [to indicate a single creation capable of crystallizing all the tensions already outlined, this would certainly be identified in the Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista: the multimedia 'museum in motion'].[49]

The artists who were invited to participate came from the three major artistic currents prevalent in Italy at the time — Futurism, Novecento, and Razionalismo

Fig. 3.1. Façade of Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista, in Dino Alfieri and Luigi Freddi, *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*, catalogue of the exhibition, Bergamo, Officine dell'Istituto di Arti Grafiche, 1933.

— with a mix of established and younger artists, confirming the regime's broad-church strategy in the support of the arts.[50] Mussolini, in his speech at the Academy of Fine Arts in Perugia in 1926, had declared: 'a great art can be reborn, an art which can be both traditionalist and modern [...] the new art of our time, a Fascist art'.[51] The programmatic pluralism was important in that it created a spacious consensual base in which the Italian Avant-Garde found its place alongside exponents of architectural modernism, and artists who had replied to the *rappel à l'ordre* of Margherita Sarfatti's Novecento Italiano, a movement which in itself maintained a stylistic pluralism which welcomed academic-inflected art, artists who had been close to the Metaphysical school of Giorgio De Chirico, and Expressionist painters.[52]

On the occasion of the MdRF, architects, painters, and sculptors worked together to create a series of rooms in which intermediality was central to the affective and haptic experience. The rooms were conceived as 'ambienti' [environments]: the fusion of different arts and media created a series of spaces which invited an immersive experience in which the messages were communicated through multiple channels which invited an aesthetic experience, intended in the Greek original of perception through the senses. Abstract motifs, photomontage and *fotomosaici* [photomosaics], slogans, enlarged photographs, Futurist *plastica murale*, multimedia

projections — all contributed to the creation of a compelling narrative of war, crisis, resolve, and renewal. This was achieved via different physical and symbolic framings, which relied on mediatic form and function as signifying devices.

The façade of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni is perhaps the clearest embodiment of the complex interplay of semiotic modes. It was designed by Adalberto Libera, who was also tasked with designing the Chapel of the Martyrs together with Antonio Valente.[53] At the time, Libera and Giuseppe Terragni were the two major exponents of Italian Razionalismo — in 1928 they had created the Movimento Italiano per l'Architettura Razionale, which was directly inspired by the Bauhaus and Le Corbusier.[54] The colossal fasci, one of the omnipresent icons of the regime, were made of oxidized and polished copper sheets (Fig. 3.1). They were not merely decorative but were integrated into the entranceway. They were the pillars that supported the structure that enveloped the Palazzo delle Esposizioni, and were surmounted by a scaffolding of steel on which ran the title of the exhibition in characteristic sans-serif block capitals, marking the physical and imaginary threshold as a declaration of uncompromising modernity and rupture with the surrounding fabric of the city. Yet their monumental proportions also created a visual blend with the past, recalling on more than one level the apparently contradictory view of a new Fascist art as both modern and traditional.[55] The use of reinforced concrete and steel by the Rationalists was indicative of their embracing the principles and materials of Modernist architecture, but it also functioned at a symbolic level. The steel covering, for instance, openly referenced modern factories and machine aesthetics. According to Vieri Quilici, Libera saw architecture as 'a great "container" of symbolic messages, as a monumental envelope and organizer of basic iconographic material, objects and significant ideas'.[56]

The façade of the building, given its visual impact and symbolic consequence, was also the stage of Fascist spectacle: a variety of figures took their place on the steps of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni among the Fascist militia that stood constant guard. They included the artists and architects who were responsible for the MdRF, Balilla Fascist youth groups, and athletes, as well as local Fascist organizations. The change of the guard appeared in countless remediations: press photography, *cinegiornali* [newsreels], and official publications, as well as written accounts. Francesco Gargano's commemorative volume of the exhibition carried several examples of this important ceremonial pageantry in complex photomontage sequences, which multiplied, on the same page, the military presence, turning a dozen guards standing on each side of the pillar-like fasci into impressive displays of military might.[57] The graphic arrangement, in similar mode to the exhibition display, made extensive use of sharp diagonal lines, played with font and image size, and featured countless cut-outs of military parades, inviting a mis-reading of the physical presence of the armed men which stood for Italy's orderly and disciplined military might, as well as the unwavering support and enthusiasm of the Italian people for the Fascist revolution.

The famous 'Room of 1922' (Fig. 3.2), designed by Terragni, has attracted much critical attention because of its innovative features and its role in staging the myth of the rebirth of the nation.[58] The so-called march on Rome is better understood as a

Fig. 3.2. Room of 1922, Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista, in Dino Alfieri and Luigi Freddi, *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*, catalogue of the exhibition, Bergamo, Officine dell'Istituto di Arti Grafiche, 1933, detail.

'parade', though we know that Black Shirts were at a short distance from the city and ready to march on it. Simonetta Falasca Zamponi called it a 'march-parade' that was 'the choreographic appendix to Mussolini's legal appointment as prime minister'.[59] Giacomo Balla's commemorative canvas *The March on Rome* (1932–35), painted on the back of his earlier Futurist painting *Velocità astratta* (1913, Pinacoteca Gianni e Marella Agnelli, Turin), portrays Mussolini surrounded by a crowd of Fascist high officials and Black Shirts as he strides purposefully in his trademark hands-on-hips pose. The canvas is a realistic rendition of a series of photographs by Adolfo Porry Pastorel (Fig. 3.3), showing the ease with which images migrated through different media and were repurposed.[60] The march was called a 'revolution' by the Fascists, and Fascist rhetoric turned it into a mythical event: 28 October 1922 became one of the most important dates in the Fascist calendar and marked an epochal turning point in Italian history.[61]

The 'Room of 1922' (Fig. 3.4) had a complex interplay of photomontage, cut-outs, and collage. The dynamic diagonal emphasis of the display and the architectural features, and the symbolic use of light — the semidarkness surrounding the giant 'X', symbol of the Decennale — has been read in relation to stage set design.[62] In spatial and design terms, this staging functions as a perceptive device which creates meaning by affecting the aesthetic experience, playing on the physical and symbolic function of light in our embodied experience of space. One of the most significant

Fig. 3.3. Adolfo Porry Pastorel, Mussolini during the so-called March on Rome, historical footage no. FPR00000113, © Istituto Luce Cinecittà Archivio Storico.

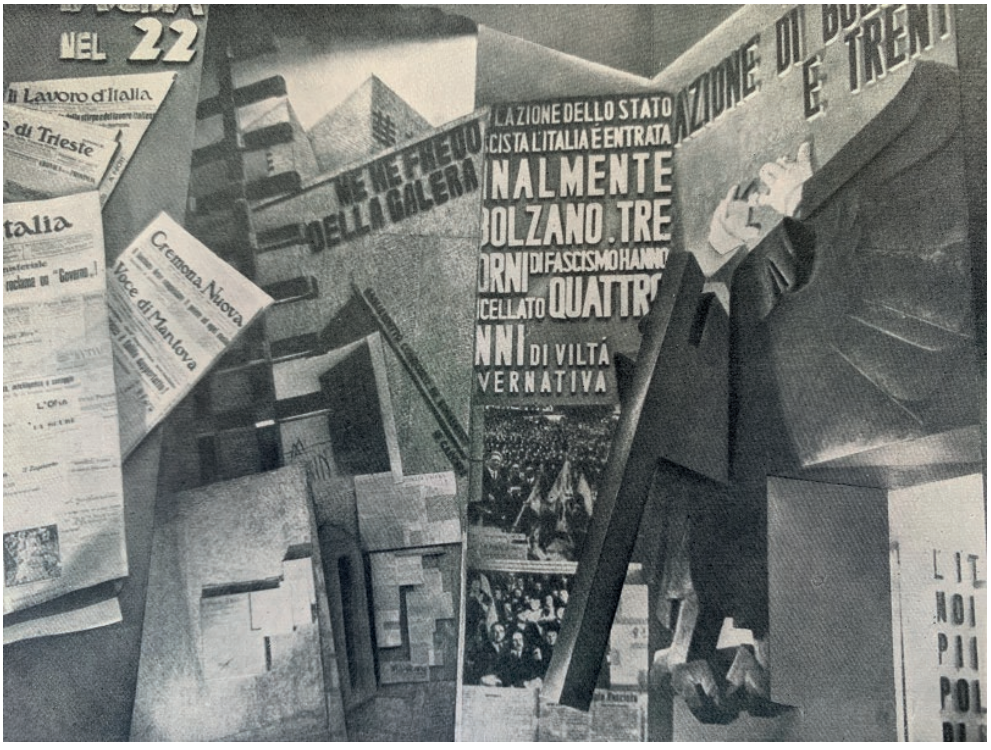

Fig. 3.4. Room of 1922, Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista, in Dino Alfieri and Luigi Freddi, *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*, catalogue of the exhibition, Bergamo, Officine dell'Istituto di Arti Grafiche, 1933, detail.

features of this room, and of the entire exhibition, was the bodily immersion in the space which accompanied the physical and emotional journey constructed by the exhibition. It materialized the theatrical performative nature of Fascism and remains one of the best examples of the aesthetics of politics which dramatized the myths of Fascism and mobilized the masses.[63]

The idea of a people in movement and Fascism's role in marching an entire country towards its historical mission was mirrored by the journey inside the exhibition space via the carefully orchestrated circuit, which also hinted at the mechanization of society in its fixed course. It stressed the collective embodied experience over the individual one, a key element of Fascist ideology: the coming together of the people was mirrored by the coming together of the arts and the artists who had conceived this extraordinary materialization of the Fascist total work of art. The entry on the Fascist doctrine in the 1932 *Enciclopedia italiana* makes the totalizing and totalitarian thrust patent, declaring:

> Antiindividualistica, la concezione fascista è per lo stato; ed è per l'individuo in quanto esso coincide con lo stato [...] il fascismo è per la libertà. E per la sola libertà che possa essere una cosa seria, la libertà dello stato e dell'individuo nello stato. Giacché per il fascista, tutto è nello stato, e nulla di umano o spirituale

> esiste, e tanto meno ha valore, fuori dello stato. In tal senso il fascismo è totalitario, e lo stato fascista, sintesi e unità di ogni valore, interpreta, sviluppa e potenzia tutta la vita del popolo.[64]
>
> [Against individualism, the Fascist conception is for the State; and it is for the individual in so far as he coincides with the State. [...] Fascism stands for liberty, and for the only liberty worth having, the liberty of the State and of the individual within the State. The Fascist conception of the State is all embracing; outside of it no human or spiritual values can exist, much less have value. Thus understood, Fascism is totalitarian, and the Fascist State — a synthesis and a unit inclusive of all values — interprets, develops, and potentiates the whole life of a people.][65]

The use of photomontage in the rooms is one of the most striking examples of intermediality in the exhibition. Photographs dominated the display — whether enlarged and part of complex photomontage sequences, *fotomosaici*, press photography, or in their material form as photographs of individuals — and were in constant dialogue with other arts as well as a variety of texts (handwritten personal notes, press clippings, slogans, single words, room and display wall titles). The rooms embody Peter Wagner's conceptualization of the iconotext, which invites a different process of interpretation that takes place in the in-between space of the text and image, and surpasses the interpretive confines of the singular medium.[66] The visual overload created by the dynamic displays, over-crowded with items, the extensive use of directional lines; the instability of the walls with their use of *plastica murale*, sculpture, and display cases jutting out on multiple levels; the complex interplay of visual and textual material — all conspired to making a careful 'reading' of the material displayed impossible.[67] What the spectators were asked to do was to respond emotionally and kinaesthetically. As the Futurist Enrico Prampolini perceptively noted, the whole exhibition was characterized by *pathos*, which he used in its Greek original meaning of 'experience' or 'emotion'.[68]

The visual dissonance and complexity created in the rooms that lead up to the establishment of Fascism played on the intricate and multi-layered juxtaposition of different media, and the sensory intermedia overload. The latter, whilst forming a common refrain of the entire exhibition, did have a number of significant pauses in which a more pared-down display invited a different emotional response to the space and its symbolism. One such example was Libera's Chapel of Martyrs (Fig. 3.5), with its circular rings obsessively repeating the word 'presente' [present], the rollcall of the dead in the name of Fascism.[69] The circular empty space contained only a blood red pedestal in the middle, at the centre of which stood a metal cross. The immersive experience was aided by the careful use of light and sound — the Fascist hymn *Giovinezza* was played *sotto voce* in the room. It is further proof of the total aesthetic experience constructed by the MdRF which moved boldly away from traditional reliance on objects and textual interpretation (the *ekphrastic* modality of museum exhibits) and exclusively ocular-centric modes of contemporary exhibition display. Many reviewers spoke openly about the quasi-religious and deeply emotional response to the spaces of the exhibition, highlighting the significance of the embodied nature of their experience.

Fig. 3.5. *Il sacrario dei Martiri* [The Shrine of the Martyrs], Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista, in Dino Alfieri and Luigi Freddi, *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*, catalogue of the exhibition, Bergamo, Officine dell'Istituto di Arti Grafiche, 1933, detail.

In a radical move away from traditional historical displays, with their contemplative distance between the exhibits and the spectators, the exhibition display created an immersive space in which the barrier between what was being staged and the spectator was practically invisible. Boris Groys noted how the changes to the museum that already took place towards the end of the nineteenth century facilitated a further erosion between art and life which could serve the political and ideological means of totalitarian regimes:

> the ideologies of the new age strove to erase the boundary between the museum and the surrounding world in order to lend the museum a social function and integrate it into its milieu while at the same time striving to conceive of the entire space of life as the object of aesthetic experience. Totalitarianism represents but another such attempt to create a single, total visual space within which to efface the boundary separating art from life, the museum from practical life, contemplation from action.[70]

The idea of including 'personal' objects also encouraged a different relationship with the material on show. Whilst the architectural space and the way items were exhibited were evidently meticulously designed and curated, the exhibition did invite the direct participation of the people whose personal relics, artefacts, and materials had directly contributed to this display. Additionally, as we have seen, each room was designed by teams, making the idea and practice of collaboration integral to the MdRF. What is striking is the extensive use of the rhetoric of collaboration — between design teams of historians, party officials and artists, between architects and designers, as well as between curators and the people who provided the exhibits — suggesting a co-production of knowledge on a giant scale, underpinned by the idea that the people were creating history themselves rather than passively witnessing the curatorial choices made by others.[71] If Bottai's review of the MdRF placed the emphasis on 'seeing Fascism', one might be tempted to rephrase the title into 'feeling Fascism' since the intermedia display relied on embodiment and aurality as much as on the dazzling visual display.[72]

The strategic participation of a plurality of artists and artistic styles at the MdRF reinforces the peculiarity of the Fascist *Gesamtkunstwerk* which appears as much a vision for a totality of the arts as a programmatic coming together of the artists; a *GesamtKünstlerwerk* in which the emphasis shifts onto the artists, architects, and designers as prime actors in the totalizing vision of art and culture of the regime.

3.5. Conclusions

This chapter has focused on a key concept in the analysis of the theories and practices of interartistic and intermedia exchange in twentieth-century Italy: the idea of the total work of art and its Fascist inflection, what we have termed a move from *Gesamtkunstwerk* to *GesamtKünstlerwerk*, the collaborative coming together of the artists. The special emphasis on the MdRF, alongside the contextual analysis of the arts system under Fascism, has allowed us to explore one controversial instance of the coming together of the arts and artists in the service of Fascist ideology.

As we have seen, the regime's patronage strategies were extremely effective in creating and maintaining consensus. Fascist patronage ranged from the physical reshaping of the landscape in large-scale land reclamation projects and major public works in Italy's towns and cities to the media that presented 'the fascist regime as a ubiquitous agent committed to modernizing the nation'.[73] Ruth Ben-Ghiat sees culture under Fascism as an integrative and binding device.[74] Collaboration rather than coercion was the preferred way and it was obtained through subsidy, flattery, and the creation of opportunities for the cultural industries. Ben-Ghiat sees the relationship between private and commercial actors in the cultural sphere as one of complex entanglements; this was the key to Fascist patronage and what kept the balance between relative freedom and control. These entanglements were, however, also at play on the level of aesthetics and artistic practice.

Thespian cars, *cinemobili*, newsreels, and exhibitions were all part of the capillary diffusion of Fascist sponsored cultural productions at the time. They were also the carriers of what Alice Yaeger Kaplan calls the 'binding machine' of Fascism, referring to its slogans, mass choreography, public works projects, and myths.[75] What we witness in Italy at the time is the complex process of mediation and remediation of Fascist art works: photography, film, advertising, exhibitions, the press (especially the illustrated press), and the radio, as well as conferences and exhibitions, were among the mediums which supported cultural production under and of the regime. The MdRF emerges as the flagship example of a much more diffused rhetoric and practice of collaborative work and unity of the arts in the service of the Fascist state.

Prampolini attributed the huge popular appeal of the MdRF to the Futurist-inspired design of the exhibition: he spoke of the 'fisionomia spettacolare e travolgente che ha assunto questa mostra, in virtù del suo stile tipicamente futurista [...] Il dinamismo architettonico, il senso costruttivo, la simultaneità tra realtà concreta e realtà astratta, regnano sovrane' [spectacular and overwhelming physiognomy that this exhibition has taken on, thanks to its typically futurist style [...] The architectural dynamism, the structural meaning, the simultaneity between concrete and abstract reality, reign supreme].[76] Prampolini was especially full of praise for Terragni's room of 1922, noting its 'travolgente potenza dinamica' [overwhelming dynamic power],[77] and the visual complexity of the room which he describes as: 'prospettive di piani sconvolgenti, imperiosità di vortici di realtà ingigantita dal *fotomontage*, e architetture di luci' [perspectives of shocking planes, imperiousness of vortices of reality magnified by photomontage and architectures of lights].[78] Aside from lamenting the marginal role of Futurist artists in the MdRF, Prampolini perceptively highlighted the 'potenza espressiva ed epicità emotiva' [expressive power and epic emotionality] and the power of the exhibition to mediate a re-enactment of the early days of the Fascist revolution.[79] The aim of the exhibition and, as Prampolini suggests, of art in the service of Fascism, was thus one of intense emotional engagement, creating anew the passionate involvement of the people in the events that led to the Fascist revolution.

Architecture, display design, and the extraordinary mix of objects, testimonials, artefacts, and artworks in the MdRF worked in unison in the service of the

mythmaking of the Fascist state. The totalitarian thrust, which was at the roots of the Fascist doctrine, was achieved by relinquishing individualism and embraced by other totalitarian regimes in the interwar period.[80] The MdFR was the embodiment of Fascist ideas about *Gesamtkunstwerk* and *GesamtKünstlerwerk*, and the emotional power of the arts when brought together via the complex intermedia potential of the exhibition space in which what binds the material objects and the physical spaces, through which visitors passed in order to experience the creation of the Fascist State, was immaterial (light, colour, and sound) which, as we have seen, was a key element in Futurist theories of synthetic interconnection. Futurist ideas of simultaneity and the collapsing of time and space worked alongside the assemblage of different elements. The practice of assemblage was both a physical display strategy (the extensive use of collage and photomontage bears witness to it) and a theoretical model which was predicated on the totality of the arts in the service of Fascism, whilst also signalling the adoption of new intermedia experimentations in tune with the international Avant-Garde.

The arts were important vehicles for the projection of Fascism and they were part of an arts system which included mass media. This system was rooted in processes of interconnection and entanglement, and in intermedia practices and exchanges which were central to both Futurism and Fascism and would continue to play a central role in post-war experimentations and theorization of the relationships between arts and media.

Notes to Chapter 3

1. Richard Wagner's *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (Leipzig: Wigand, 1849) develops his theorization of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*: the total work of art is one in which each of the arts — architecture, painting, dance, music, and poetry — attains its full potential thanks to the freedom achieved by joining together all the faculties of man. The ultimate expression is drama.
2. David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011). Other monographs that focus on the history of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* are: Roger Fornoff, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem Gesamtkunstwerk: Studien zu einer ästhetischen Konzeption der Moderne* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2004); Matthew Wilson Smith, *The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace* (New York: Routledge, 2007); and Marcella Lista, *L'Œuvre d'art totale à la naissance des avant-gardes, 1908–1914* (Paris: CTHS, 2006).
3. Roberts, p. 1.
4. Jeffrey T. Schnapp, 'The Utopia of Total Art', in *The Avant-Garde Movements, 1900–1919*, ed. by Gabriella Belli, *Art of the Twentieth Century* (Milan: Skira, 2006), pp. 300–06 (p. 301).
5. Schnapp focuses attention onto the secular turn in which certain forms of art became 'a potential locus for forms of experience, belief and communication that heretofore had belonged to the sphere of religion' (ibid).
6. Nina Lübbren, *Rural Artists' Colonies in Europe, 1870–1910* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).
7. Roberts, p. 7. Fornoff. Part of the series Literaturwissenschaft im interdisziplinären Dialog.
8. For the import of Symbolism in mediating the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in the twentieth century see Juliet Koss, *Modernism after Wagner* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2010).
9. *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, ed. by Daniel Large and William Weber (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984). See also Gabriele d'Annunzio, *Il caso Wagner*, ed. by Paola Sorge (Rome: Elliot, 2013).

10. AAVV, *D'Annunzio e il teatro in Italia fra Ottocento e Novecento* (Pescara: Ediars, 1999).
11. Mark Berry, 'Richard Wagner and the Politics of Music-Drama', *The Historical Journal*, 47.3 (2004), 663–83.
12. Ricciotto Canudo, 'The Birth of the Sixth Art (1911)', *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 13 (1980), 3–7.
13. Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchic Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909–1944* (Oxford: Berghahn, 1996).
14. Fiume: songs, processions, meetings, military celebrations, and ritualistic occasions characterized d'Annunzio's regency at Fiume (September 1919–December 1920).
15. Simonetta Falasca Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997).
16. Walter Gropius, 'Manifesto of the Staatliche Bauhaus in Weimar (1919)', in *The Theory of Decorative Art: An Anthology of European and American Writings, 1750–1940*, ed. by Isabelle Frank, trans. by David Britt (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 83.
17. Ibid.
18. See in particular Philip Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso: Fascismo e mass media*, trans. by Giovanna Ferrara (Bari: Laterza, 1975).
19. As Dennis P. Doordan noted: 'Modern political culture is not only pervasive, it is *invasive*'; Dennis P. Doordan, 'In the Shadow of the Fasces: Political Design in Fascist Italy', *Design Issues*, 13.1 special issue 'Designing the Modern Experience, 1885–1945' (1997), 39–52 (p. 43). His article focuses on what he calls Fascist political design and Fascism's 'design of information', p. 46. See also Dennis P. Doordan, 'Political Things: Design in Fascist Italy', in *Designing Modernity: The Arts of Reform and Persuasion, 1885–1945*, ed. by Wendy Kaplan (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), pp. 225–55.
20. The Ministero delle Corporazioni was established by R.D. (Regio Decreto) of 2 July 1926, no. 1131; and lasted until R.D. of 9 August 1943, no. 718. Mussolini was the head of the Ministry, and, on 12 September 1929, Giuseppe Bottai became minister.
21. 'la creazione del ministero delle Corporazioni e del vasto apparato ad esso collegato rappresentò un salto di qualità nella politica culturale del fascismo, ampliando enormemente la sfera di campi e interessi del suo raggio di azione' [the creation of the Ministry of Corporations and the vast apparatus attached to it represented a qualitative leap in the cultural politics of Fascism, greatly enlarging the scope of fields and interests within its reach], Giuseppe Santomassimo, *La terza via fascista: il mito del corporativismo* (Rome: Carocci, 2006), p. 102.
22. And added: 'la Camera presuppone un mondo che abbiamo demolito; presuppone una pluralità di partiti' [the Chamber presupposes a world that we have destroyed; it presupposes a plurality of parties], Benito Mussolini, *Verso il corporativismo integrale: il discorso del Duce al consiglio nazionale delle corporazioni*, 14 November, XII (1934), p. 17.
23. Vincenzo Nardi, *Il corporativismo fascista* (Rome: Edizioni I.A.T., 1974).
24. 'auto-disciplina; il che significa non disciplina imposta dallo Stato, ossia dalla burocrazia accentratrice, od egoisticamente stabilita dal più forte [...] ma liberamente decisa da tutti colori che partecipano in qualità di industriali, dirigenti, lavoratori intellettuali o manuali, alla produzione' [self-discipline, which does not mean discipline imposed by the state, that is bureaucracy whether centralized or selfishly established by the strongest [...] but that which is freely decided by everyone who participates as managers, intellectual or manual workers, in its production], Franco Ballarini, *Dal liberalismo al corporativismo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1935), p. 131.
25. Riccardo del Giudice, *Autarchia e corporativismo* (Rome: Armani di M. Courrier, 1939), p. 7.
26. This passage was also quoted by Edoardo Persico in his article 'Per la VI Triennale', originally published in *L'Italia letteraria*, 26 May 1934, now in Anty Pansera, *Storia e cronaca della Triennale* (Milan: Longanesi, 1978), p. 303.
27. See: Cipriano Efisio Oppo, *Un legislatore per l'arte: scritti di critica e di politica dell'arte, 1915–1943*, ed. by Francesca Romana Morelli (Rome: De Luca, 2000).
28. The Galleria Il Milione in Milan was one of the winners of the first edition of the prize, see Marla Stone, *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 32. Pia Vivarelli makes a very important point about the role of

galleries, such as Il Milione, in Milano since November 1930, and La Cometa, Rome, founded in 1935: 'queste gallerie sono punto di raccordo e di dialogo tra i critici, architetti, pittori, grafici, scrittori, poeti, musicisti, filosofi, fino all'intreccio di sodalizio artistico, galleria, rivista e attività editoriali che si realizza con "Corrente di Vita Giovanile", poi "Corrente", attiva a Milano dal 1938' [these galleries are a point of connection and dialogue between the critics, architects, painters, graphic designers, writers, poets, musicians, philosophers, as far as the intertwining of artistic partnerships, galleries, magazines, and publishing activities, which were realized with 'Corrente di Vita Giovanile', then 'Corrente', which was active in Milan from 1938], Pia Vivarelli, 'La politica delle arti figurative negli anni del Premio Bergamo', in AAVV, *Gli anni del premio Bergamo: arte in Italia intorno agli anni Trenta* (Milan: Electa, 1993), pp. 24–38 (p. 25).

29. See Alessandro Masi, *La politica delle arti: scritti, 1918–1943* (Rome: Editalia, 1992).
30. Francesco Sapori, *L'arte e il Duce* (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1932), p. 193.
31. See Romy Golan, *Muralnomad: The Paradox of Wall Painting, Europe 1927–1957* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2009).
32. Lamberto Vitali, 'Noi e l'affresco', *Domus*, 58 (October 1932), 93–94 (p. 93). See also Mario Tinti, 'Massa e decorazione', *Casabella*, 66 (June 1933), 34–35; Mario Tinti, 'Decorazione e architettura', *Casabella*, 69 (November 1933), 32–33.
33. Stephen Gundle and Michela Zegna, 'Art, Entertainment and Politics: Alessandro Blasetti and the Rise of the Italian Film Industry, 1929–1959', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 40.1 (2020), 6–28.
34. Stephen Gundle, *Mussolini's Dream Factory: Film Stardom in Fascist Italy* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2013).
35. Gundle, p. 8. The inauguration of the studio complex was on 21 April 1937, a highly significant date in the Fascist calendar, since it marked the birth of Rome, hence this was seen as an imperial project. The Cinecittà complex was based on Freddi's study of the layout of Hollywood studio complex which he had seen on a fact-finding visit, and on architect Gino Peressutti's careful consideration of European studios. Mussolini took a very keen interest all through the construction period and ensured that substantial support continued to be given to the Italian state-of-the-art and state-sponsored film-making facilities.
36. Partito Nazionale Fascista, *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista: Guida Storica*, ed. by Dino Alfieri e Luigi Freddi (Bergamo: Officina dell'Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche, 1933).
37. Quoted in Gundle, p. 24; originally in Luigi Freddi, *Il cinema: il governo dell'immagine* (Rome: Gremese, 1994), p. 20.
38. See David Forgacs and Steven Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); see p. 215 in particular. This year also saw the expansion of the press office of the prime minister with Ciano at the helm of the under-secretariat for press and propaganda, later turned into the Ministry of Press and Propaganda, which under the direction of Dino Alfieri would become the Ministry of Popular Culture in 1937.
39. The Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, Italy's national film school, had been created in 1934 and played a major role in the development of the Italian film industry in the interwar and post-war period. It is another example of the regime's focus on training and organizational structure in the arts sector in order to exercise control via patronage. Mario Verdone, 'The Experimental Cinema Center in Italy', *Hollywood Quarterly*, 4.1 (1949), 65–68. See also Ermanno Taviani, 'Il cinema e la propaganda fascista', *Studi Storici*, 55.1 (2014), 241–56.
40. Margherita Sarfatti, 'Architettura, arte e simbolo alla Mostra del Fascismo', *Architettura*, 12 (1933), 1–17 (p. 10). On Fascism as a political religion see Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).
41. As Alfieri noted, the idea behind the project was to create something that was more than a show or an exhibition: it 'will be deeply felt by the people in their souls, thirsting for light, love and drama'; quoted in Marla Stone, 'Staging Fascism: The Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 28.2 (1993), 215–43 (p. 216).
42. For the role of exhibitions and display in Fascist Italy see Antonella Russo, *Il fascismo in mostra*

(Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1999); Jeffrey T. Schnapp, 'Epic Demonstrations: Fascist Modernity and the 1932 Exhibitions of the Fascist Revolution', in *Fascism, Aesthetics and Culture*, ed. by Richard J. Golsan (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England 1992), 1–37.

43. Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *Anno X: La Mostra della Rivoluzione fascista del 1932* (Pisa and Rome: Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 2003), p. 17. Stone's attendance figures are 3,854,927 visitors ('Staging Fascism', p. 233).
44. For a summary of the wide-ranging fascistizzazione of the arts see Laura Malvano, *Fascismo e politica dell'immagine* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1988) and Marla Stone, *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).
45. Victoria De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). See also George Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (New York: H. Fertig, 1975) and *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
46. Claudio Fogu, 'Fascism and *Historic* Representation: The 1932 Garibaldian Celebrations', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 31.2, special issue 'The Aesthetics of Fascism' (1996), 317–45. This article analyses the uses and abuses of the Risorgimento in Fascist Italy.
47. Stone, 'Staging Fascism', p. 215.
48. Stone, 'Staging Fascism', p. 218.
49. Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *Anno X. La Mostra della Rivoluzione fascista del 1932* (Pisa and Rome: Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 2003), p. 17. See also in the same volume, Claudio Fogu, 'L'immaginario storico fascista e la Mostra della Rivoluzione fascista', pp. 131–54.
50. John London noted the 'perversely flexible attitude' of Fascism towards all aesthetic currents. John London, 'The Uncertainty of Fascist Aesthetics: Political Ideology and Historical Reality', *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 42.1 (2009), 49–63 (p. 60).
51. Quoted in Francesco Sapori, 'Tendenze plastiche', in his *L'Arte e il Duce* (Milan: Mondadori, 1932), pp. 187–99 (p. 187).
52. *Il Novecento italiano*, ed. by Elena Pontiggia (Milan: Abscondita, 2003). See also Fabio Benzi, *Arte in Italia tra le due guerre* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2013).
53. Francesco Garofalo and Luca Veresani, *Adalberto Libera* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992). See also *Adalberto Libera: opera completa*, ed. by Gabriella Belli, cat. of the exhibition (Milan: Electra, 1989).
54. Their two major declared reference points were Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture* (Paris: Editions G. Crès et Cie, 1923), and Walter Gropius's *Internationale Arkitectur* (Munich: Langen, 1925).
55. See Margherita Sarfatti, 'Architettura, arte e simbolo alla Mostra del Fascismo', *Architettura*, 2.12 (1933), repr. in *Anno X*, pp. 69–72) p. 7. See also Simona Storchi, 'Margherita Sarfatti and Il Popolo d'Italia: National Classicism between Tradition and Modernity', *Modern Language Review*, 108.4 (October 2013), 1135–55.
56. Vieri Quilici, *Adalberto Libera: l'architettura come ideale* (Rome, 1981), quoted in 'Staging Fascism', p. 220.
57. Francesco Gargano, *Italiani e stranieri alla Mostra della Rivoluzione fascista* (Rome: S.A.I.E., 1935); see also images in Russo, and hundreds of exhibitions in the photographic archive of Luce.
58. Roger Griffin, 'Staging the Nation's Rebirth: The Politics and Aesthetics of Performance in the Context of Fascist Studies', in *Fascism and Theatre: Comparative Studies on the Aesthetics and Politics of Performance in Europe, 1925–1945*, ed. by Günter Berghaus (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996), pp. 11–29.
59. Simonetta Falasca Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1997), p. 1.
60. Adolfo Porry Pastorel, Photograph no. FPR00000113, Archivio Fotografico Luce, Fondo Porry Pastorel, <https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL0000000077/10/mussolini-bianchi-de-bono-balbo-de-stefani.html> [accessed 15 January 2020].
61. For a history of the event and its sacralization see Emilio Gentile, *Il culto del littorio: la sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia fascista* (Rome: Edizioni Laterza, 1993).

62. See Emilio Gentile, 'The Theatre of Politics in Fascist Italy', in *Fascism and Theatre*, pp. 72–93.
63. See Jeffrey T. Schnapp, 'Fascism's Museum in Motion', *Journal of Architectural Education*, 45 (1992), 87–97.
64. Arturo Marpicati, Entry for 'Fascismo', in *Enciclopedia Italiana* (1933) <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/fascismo_(Enciclopedia-Italiana)/> [accessed 15 January 2020].
65. The English translation in the main text is from the official Fascist government publication: Benito Mussolini, *Fascism Doctrine and Institutions* (Rome: Ardita Publishers, 1935), pp. 7–42.
66. Peter Wagner, *Reading Iconotexts: From Swift to the French Revolution* (London: Reaktion Books, 1995).
67. Antonella Russo noted: 'questa continua sollecitazione emotiva faceva sí che ogni elaborazione critica fosse rimandata in continuazione fino a essere negata' [this continuous emotional solicitation means that any critical elaboration was continually postponed until it was denied], *Il Fascismo in mostra*, p. 11.
68. Enrico Prampolini, 'Artisti Futuristi e Futuristizzati alla Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista', in Fortunato Depero, *Numéro unico futurista Campari 1931, Futurismo 1932, Dinamo Futurista 1933* (Paris: Éditions Jean-Michel Place, 1979), pp. 146–47.
69. Libera would use the same space in the palazzo del Littorio in the project for the Augusteo. Garofalo and Verasani.
70. Boris Groys, 'The Struggle against the Museum; or, The Display of Art in Totalitarian Space', in *Museum Culture: Histories Discourses Spectacles*, ed. by Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 144–62 (p. 144).
71. This chimed with Francesco Sapori's hyperbolic praise for Mussolini as artist creator of the state, and the equivalence of creativity and politics.
72. Giuseppe Bottai, 'Vedere il Fascismo', *Critica Fascista*, 1 November 1932, p. 401.
73. Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *Staging Fascism: 18BL and the Theater of Masses for Masses* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. xiii.
74. Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
75. Alice Yaeger Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 24. On the mass as ornament and the aesthetic of 'ornamental mass movement', see also Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 79.
76. Prampolini, p. 146. The only two Futurist artists who exhibited at the MdRF were Enrico Prampolini, *Episodio della battaglia di via Mercanti* and *Arditismo e Futurismo*, both in Room of 1919; and Gerardo Dottori.
77. Prampolini, p. 147.
78. Ibid.
79. He spoke of 'fare rivivere integralmente l'intensa passione di quelle ore' [bringing the intense passion of those hours alive], ibid.
80. Michael Tymkiw, *Nazi Exhibition Design and Modernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

CHAPTER 4

❖

1963: Experiment

4.1. Introduction

For the aspiring theatre director Mario Ricci, 1963 began with a performance at the Roman home of art historian Nello Ponente, where numerous artists, writers and intellectuals had gathered to celebrate New Year's Eve. The cheerful crowd included poets Elio Pagliarani and Alfredo Giuliani, painters Giulio Turcato, Gastone Novelli, and Achille Perilli, sculptor Pasquale Santoro, and scenographer Nato Frascà, among others. Thirty-year-old Ricci, who had recently returned to Rome after a period of more than two years in France and Sweden, saw an opportunity. At Stockholm's *Marionetteater*, under the direction of marionettist Michael Meschke, he had mastered the art of puppetry and struck up a friendship with the German choreographer and kinetic sculptor Harry Kramer. In Paris, he had shared a house with the painter Jean-Claude Vignes and developed a lifelong passion for the ideas of the British theatre pioneer Edward Gordon Craig, as expressed in his *On the Art of the Theatre*.[1] Despite his young age, Rome-born Ricci could already look back to a successful career as a self-taught interior designer, having worked, for example, on the development of a large retail space in Via Appia Nuova.[2] His decision to return to the eternal city, however, was not inspired by a desire for greater prosperity. Instead, this son of a communist bricklayer from Tuscany dreamt of an independent theatre and a school of drama and puppetry in his hometown — a project that would become reality exactly two years later, on 23 December 1964, when the theatre club *Orsoline 15* opened its doors in a backstreet near Via del Babuino. Ricci, who gave his first solo performance in the early hours of 1963, would soon make history as the pioneer of a theatrical revolution that even now, more than half a century later, still goes by the name of *nuovo teatro italiano* [new Italian theatre].[3]

Ricci's enthusiasm and his craving for novelty were entirely characteristic of the time. Like many of the guests at Ponente's party, the ambitious puppeteer and future theatre director had reached adulthood during the spectacular economic boom of the 1950s. Rome, for the members of his generation, was a city of opportunity. Thousands of houses, shops, and apartments had been built over the space of just a few years, and huge profits made as Italians flocked to the capital in ever-growing numbers. Urban sprawl and unprecedented wealth created a flourishing market for cheap consumer goods and stylish, mass-produced furniture and fashion.[4]

As an interior designer, Ricci could have made a fortune. But the cultural sector was also in rapid expansion. Since the advent of television, in 1954, Italy had undergone an unprecedented phase of modernization and had witnessed the birth of a vibrant culture industry, with innovative technologies of reproduction and fresh approaches to marketing and distribution.[5] Encouraged by the wild consumerism of the boom years, publishing houses, magazines, newspapers, cinemas, and radio stations competed for the attention of a newly affluent urban middle class.

By 1963, literature and the arts were no longer the exclusive domain of an educated elite. A wide-ranging, recent reform of the Italian education system had created the basis for widening participation, with a single national curriculum for all children under the age of fourteen, encompassing both primary education (*scuola elementare*) and a compulsory new middle school (*scuola media unificata*).[6] In preparation for the expected rising demand for education and entertainment, Italy's *imprese culturali* [cultural industries] recruited intellectuals and creative practitioners in large numbers. Professional opportunities abounded.[7] While previous generations of Italian artists had struggled at the margins of society, the young, self-professed avant-gardists of the 1960s benefited from media exposure, patronage, and national and international networks, and found it easy to enter the cultural mainstream. Over the years, this sense of opportunity would become a central tenet of the *neoavanguardia*'s narrative and sense of identity. Like the Futurists (whom they dismissed because of their collusion with Fascism), the Leftist new avant-gardes of the 1960s sought admission and legitimation in the centres of cultural production. Unlike the Marxist ideologues of the post-war Italian Left, from Palmiro Togliatti to Franco Fortini, they did not believe in the power of radical opposition but focused their ambition and attention on cultural institutions, which they aspired to transform from within.[8]

Ricci's first performance, *movimento numero uno per marionetta sola* [movement number one for solo marionette] was an enthusiastically collaborative project. In Stockholm, the Italian artist had crafted a large puppet, which he proudly showed off to his Roman family and friends. Built in the manner of Oskar Schlemmer's *Triadisches Ballett* [triadic ballet], this relatively simple marionette possessed two faces, and therefore could appear to its audience either as a naïve youth or as a 'vecchio satiro' [lecherous old man], depending on the puppeteer's intentions and movements. The idea for the performance itself came from Pasquale Santoro, who was in search of an event that would lighten up Ponente's New Year's party.

Over the space of just a few days, in late December 1962, the project for a short play took shape. While Santoro selected the music for Ricci's performance — a mixture of bossa nova, samba, and jazz — Ricci and Nato Frascà worked on a miniature stage: a merry-go-round, on which four naked dolls circled endlessly, in lascivious poses. Riccardo Paladini, a well-known television anchor man at RAI, lent his voice, and gave Santoro permission to record him while he read one of Ricci's unpublished poems. The actual performance, as Gastone Novelli later recalled, lasted approximately thirty minutes. During this time, the marionette, operated by Ricci, span and danced in circles to the changing rhythms of music,

Fig. 4.1. Mario Ricci, *movimento numero uno per marionetta sola*, 31 December 1962, photo: Mario Ricci; courtesy of Filippo Ricci

while Paladini's deliberately monotonous voice rattled in the background: 'Gira / spara / bumm! ... / soldi / gettoni / macchine devolitrici di fortuna. / Folla. / Folla! / sconosciuta / amara / sola disperata / alla ricerca del senso della noia –' [Spin / shoot / boom! ... / money / tokens / fortune-giving machines. / Crowd. / Crowd! / unknown / bitter / desperately alone / in search of the meaning of boredom –].[9] For the full duration of the play, the puppeteer's legs remained deliberately in full sight, also dancing.

4.2. The Sounds of Everyday Life

Ricci's light-hearted experimental puppet show marked the symbolic beginning of a new phase in the history of Italian theatre, but it was also indicative of the wider mood and cultural context of the early 1960s, when new talents emerged quickly and effortlessly, in the joyful atmosphere of a newly affluent country that looked optimistically into the future. Like many artworks of the period, *movimento numero uno* poked irreverent fun at the perceived moralism and shallowness of Italy's middle class, but also mocked the self-important *gravitas* of the artistic establishment. At a superficial level, Ricci's short play — similarly to the pseudo-Marinettian poem that he wrote in Stockholm — appeared to pay homage to the aesthetics of Futurism, and to genres such as sound poetry or the mechanical ballet.[10] Ricci's understanding of the social role of the artist, however, had little in common with the worldview shared by his influential precursors. The flamboyance and hyperbolic rhetoric of Futurism, for example, were entirely absent from Ricci's surprisingly mundane performance. Whereas Marinetti had fantasized about virile heroes, *movimento* featured an awkward and hopelessly ineffectual libertine, oscillating between immature youth and pathetic old age. While the Futurists celebrated audacity, authenticity and transgression, Ricci's repetitive execution sought to evoke the alienating, predictable, and uneventful patterns of everyday life. In this respect, the play could be seen as a deliberately humorous response, across artistic media, to an important set of demands that had been formulated by another of Ponente's dinner guests, the poet Alfredo Giuliani.

In 1961, Giuliani spearheaded and edited *i novissimi*, a collection of representative works by five young poets, which served, as its editor intended, as a battle cry against traditionalism and commercialization.[11] Frequently credited as the first Italian literary avant-garde of the 1960s, the *novissimi* poets — Nanni Balestrini, Elio Pagliarani, Antonio Porta, Edoardo Sanguineti, and editor Alfredo Giuliani — practised a systematic subversion of genre conventions and of syntactic and semantic norms in order to force their readers into what they saw as a more dynamic, critical, and 'vital' attitude.[12] In his introduction to the second edition of the collection, Giuliani described this objective as follows:

> Senza dubbio in ogni epoca la poesia non può essere 'vera' se non è 'contemporanea'; e se ci domandiamo: — a che cosa? — la risposta è una sola: al nostro sentimento della realtà, ovvero alla lingua che la realtà parla in noi con i suoi segni inconciliabili.[13]
>
> [Undoubtedly, in every age poetry cannot be 'true' unless it is 'contemporary'; and if we ask ourselves, 'contemporary with what?', we meet with a single response: with our sense of reality, or rather with the language that speaks within us by its irreconcilable signs.]

In search of a new, timely 'sense of reality', the *novissimi* poets embraced all registers of everyday language. Sanguineti, for example, mixed the rhetorical, rhythmic, and syntactic conventions of lyrical poetry with shreds of academic, bureaucratic, and colloquial Italian and with snippets of other European languages, thereby conjuring up a dazzling cacophony of voices. Pagliarani professed the political importance

of a 'demystified' literature and focused his attention on the alienating and degrading linguistic habits of many workplaces.[14] Porta adopted a self-conscious and stilted, faux-lyrical mode, while Balestrini, the group's most uncompromising experimentalist, presented his readers with a Dadaist verbal collage of pre-existing texts: newspapers, technical manuals, and novels of every kind.[15]

This provocative widening of literature's semantic and stylistic range triggered new levels of creative inventiveness, beyond the conventions of lyrical poetry, now seen as a 'codice letterario, che conserva l'inerzia delle cose' [a literary code that maintains the inertia of things].[16] For Giuliani and his peers, it entailed 'a composition of texts with heterogeneous materials', in Francesco Muzzioli's terms.[17] This did not mean, however, that the *novissimi* were willing to cater to the needs of mass consumerism. As Giuliani pointed out, poetry had to overcome the obsolete conventions of literary high culture, but even more importantly, it needed to resist 'l'odierno avvolgente consumo e sfruttamento commerciale cui la lingua è sottoposta' [today's enveloping consumption and the commercial exploitation to which language is subjected].[18] This difficult balancing act, for the *novissimi*, entailed an unprecedented attention to different artistic media and inspired new ways of understanding the analogies between literature, painting, and music. North American and British pop artists, for example, were hailed for their ironic engagement with mass-produced cultural objects. As Renato Barilli explains, the *novissimi* practised writing as a form of textual collage and treated language as a set of objects that could be endlessly re-shuffled and re-arranged, in the tradition of the Surrealist *objet trouvé* or in the manner of Robert Rauschenberg's playful ready-mades:

> I Novissimi [...] prendono atto che c'è una presenza straripante di oggetti prefabbricati (usciti dalla produzione industriale), nei cui confronti non pretendono certo di avanzare un drammatico e perentorio rifiuto. Gli oggetti, le merci, sia a livello cosale che linguistico, 'ci sono', si tratta di prenderli in carico, magari dando prova, in questo caso, di vitalismo, di appropriazione avida, vorace, accelerata.[19]
>
> [The *novissimi* [...] acknowledge the abundant presence of prefabricated objects (coming out of industrial production), and certainly do not react with a dramatic and absolute refusal. These objects and commodities 'are there', both at a physical and at a linguistic level. What matters is how to take control of them, in a display of vitality, and in order to achieve greedy, voracious and speedy appropriation.]

Pop art and abstract expressionism were not the only sources of inspiration for the *novissimi*'s poetic revolution. Experimental music also served as an important model. In a long interview with the musicologist Luigi Pestalozza, Sanguineti described his passion for serialism as 'una sorta di vocazione infantile' [a childhood vocation of sorts].[20] For young Sanguineti, the achievements of composers such as Arnold Schönberg, Henri Pousseur, and Karlheinz Stockhausen were more than simply a successful emancipation from obsolete artistic conventions. Their concern with automatism, chance composition and 'pure form' also marked a specific precedent for the poet's own efforts to create a non-referential poetic language and an

'authentically critical' verbal art outside 'the boundaries of bourgeois normality, namely its ideological and linguistic norms'.[21]

Since the heydays of serialism, in the early 1950s, experimental music had been described by its makers as a process of formal variation. According to composer and conductor Pierre Boulez, it was essentially about 'structure: one of the key words of our time'.[22] Form was given systematic priority over reference and content. In one of his most significant publications, *Relevés d'apprenti* [Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship] (1966), Boulez attributed this idea to the painter Paul Klee, whom he described as an important influence on his own creative practice.[23] Klee's notebooks — which Boulez read in an abridged, posthumous edition by Jürg Spiller, *Das Bildnerische Denken* (1956) — were praised by the French musician as an exemplary achievement, which highlighted the stark limitations of artistic 'specialism':

> Et qu'ai-je trouvé dans *Das bildnerische Denken* qui puisse à ce point séduire un musicien et m'amener plus tard à comprendre d'une autre façon le phénomène de la composition? Cela touche au problème même du langage. Quand on est soi-même impliqué dans une technique et dans son langage, on se comporte en spécialiste [...]. Un musicien qui cherche à fournir une explication va la donner en termes musicaux et elle échappera à son interlocuteur si celui-ci n'a aucune familiarité avec ce langage. Tous les vocabulaires techniques peuvent produire ce même décrochement, cette même incompréhension, on en fait chaque jour l'expérience. Rien de tel avec Klee. Il n'utilise aucun vocabulaire spécialisé, le sien est tellement courant, il prend des exemples d'une telle généralité, d'une telle simplicité de base qu'il est possible d'en déduire une leçon s'appliquant à n'importe quelle autre technique.[24]
>
> [And what did I find in *Das bildnerische Denken* that could seduce a musician to this point and that could subsequently make me understand the phenomenon of composition in a different way? This has to do with the question of language. When somebody relies on their own techniques and their language, they behave as a specialist. [...] A musician who seeks to provide an explanation [of their work] will do so in musical terms but will not be able to reach out to their audience if the latter has no familiarity with this language. All technical vocabularies produce this same disengagement, this same incomprehension, and we experience this every day. Nothing of the sort with Klee. He uses no specialized vocabulary, his expressions are topical, he picks examples that are widely relevant and of essential simplicity, so that it becomes possible to apply his lessons to any other technique.]

In the early 1960s, Boulez's understanding of composition and his critique of over-specialization had a direct influence on debates about the future of Italian literature. As Giovanna Lo Monaco has pointed out, many post-war experimental authors in Italy gained their first theatrical experiences not as playwrights, but as librettists.[25] This included three *novissimi* authors, who, like Boulez, were deeply fascinated by the creative opportunities afforded by other arts, and intrigued by Boulez's question of 'how far automatism would go'.[26] In 1959, Elio Pagliarani collaborated with the serialist composer Angelo Paccagnini on the experimental opera *Le sue ragioni*. Nanni Balestrini and the mathematician and composer Vittorio Fellegara co-authored the ballet *Mutazioni*, which was first performed in 1965. Sanguineti,

who shared Boulez's admiration for Klee, was especially keen to experiment with new writing practices that mirrored painting and music, and that subverted conventional ideas of 'readability'.[27]

> Ma è certo che un punto di vista di riferimento, nella mia formazione giovanile, proprio dal punto di vista letterario, era la ricerca dodecafonica come modello di rigore compositivo, che aspiravo a trasportare appunto sul terreno della letteratura [...] un'aspirazione a costruire nuove possibilità tecniche, di ordine diverso, al di là di una certa paralisi del linguaggio convenzionato e pattuito, e della sua cristallizzazione inerte.[28]
>
> [Undoubtedly, dodecaphonic research was an important reference point for my own early instruction, especially in a literary context: it provided a model of rigorous composition, which I aspired to transport into the terrain of literature [...] it marked an aspiration to develop new technical possibilities, of a different order, beyond a certain paralysis of conventional, established language, and its inert crystallization.]

Sanguineti's first collection of poetry, *Laborintus* (1956), and his experimental novels *Capriccio italiano* (1963) and *Il giuoco dell'oca* (1967), mixed and combined linguistic registers and rhetorical figures — prolepsis, metalepsis, metonymy and repetition — with musical thoroughness and precision. The poet also worked with composer Luciano Berio on a ballet, *Esposizione*, and on a minimalist experimental opera, *Passaggio*, which were both performed in spring 1963.[29] These works, we shall see, marked a milestone in the renewal of artistic expression, across media. As musicologist Rossana Dalmonte and literary critic Niva Lorenzini have explained, literary writing, for the *novissimi*, was no longer meaningful as a self-contained artistic practice: 'Il materiale verbale sviluppa la propria specificità non più nel senso dell'autonomia, ma in quello dell'interferenza, si fa strumento duttile di una sensibilità rinnovata' [Verbal material develops its own specificity no longer in a state of autonomy, but through interference; it becomes a flexible tool for a renewed sensitivity].[30]

Sanguineti was not the only *novissimi* poet to draw inspiration from serialism and atonal music. Alfredo Giuliani similarly associated 'vitality' with John Cage's tape music of the early 1950s, which he saw as a positive example of 'structural disorganization'.[31] The creative freedom achieved by Cage's chance compositions, for Giuliani, marked a utopian horizon for literary writers, who still struggled with the legacies of Romanticism in lyrical poetry. In a short theoretical essay written for the *i novissimi* anthology, Sanguineti subscribed to a similar view, when he remarked that his first collection of poems, *Laborintus* (1956), was inspired by Arnold Schönberg:

> Il mio modello era una poesia che fosse dicibile come lo *Sprechgesang* del *Pierrot lunaire* di Schönberg. Ciò significava tornare indietro nel tempo, ma quella era l'unica strada per adeguarmi a quelle che sentivo come le necessità della contemporaneità.[32]
>
> [My model was a type of poetry that could be spoken like the *Sprechgesang* of Schönberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*. This meant going back in time, but it represented the only way to be in tune with the demands of the contemporary period.]

The success of Schönberg's tersely dramatic and fragmentary atonal music, according to Sanguineti, offered a message of hope to the experimental writer: like music, literature held the power to reject neo-romantic platitudes. Writing, like music, could be practised as an abstract game of formal variations, where conflicts and contradictions were expressed only on a purely figurative level. In summary, the breakdown of familiar polarizations between poetry, painting, and music marked an important incentive for literature: it created new stylistic opportunities and invited a fresh consideration of verbal expression.[33] Disdainful of the idea of poetry as a self-contained creative domain, some *novissimi* demanded a complete abolition of genre boundaries. Pagliarani, for example, wrote a theoretical contribution to *i novissimi*, entitled 'La sintassi e i generi' [Syntax and Genres], in which he called for a greater freedom of experimental expression, beyond generic conventions: 'Non ha senso negare l'identificazione lirica = poesia senza una reinvenzione dei generi letterari' [It is pointless to deny the equation lyric = poetry without reinventing the literary genres].[34] The provocative force of such declarations was heard well beyond the sphere of poetry. During the early 1960s, Giuliani and his peers became an important reference point for artists working in other media. Just as the *novissimi* had drawn inspiration from pop art, abstract expressionism, and serial music, their poetry, in turn, came to offer inspiration to experimental novelists and playwrights, performance artists, and theatrical innovators like Ricci.

Some of the zeal of this artistic revolution appears dated. Like the work of the *novissimi* poets, Ricci's *movimento numero uno* exhibited an irreverent, mischievous interest in different registers and media, exuberant liveliness, and a grating attention to the most intimate levels of physical experience, beyond what was deemed acceptable by Italy's conservative cultural establishment or its emerging culture industry. Just as typically — and notwithstanding its playful mockery of the conventions of bourgeois theatre — Ricci's performance displayed a crudely heteropatriarchal sense of humour that was presumably shared by many of its original spectators. Despite their efforts to open a space for the culturally repressed, the performer and his friends appeared unwilling to complicate markers of sexuality or to explore categories of femininity that were not defined by male desire. Ricci's ecstatically dancing and incongruously priapic puppet was unequivocally gendered male, while the female objects of his scopophilic gaze — the group of four naked, 'exhibitionistic' dolls — were represented, very literally, as sexual fetishes. The play's ironic celebration of artistic transgression and its rather infantile voyeuristic enjoyment were firmly embedded in a spirit of male, homosocial camaraderie — a mood that also prevailed at many of the *neoavanguardia*'s initiatives and encounters. As literary critic Lucia Re has explained, Italian experimental art of the 1960s was marked by a profound tension between two conflicting tendencies: a utopian desire to overthrow the patriarchal bourgeois system, and an emotional attachment to masculinist, 'mercilessly confrontational' discursive modes. This was especially true for *Gruppo 63*, Italy's most influential post-war avant-garde, which was founded in Palermo in October 1963 and which included all five *novissimi* poets. Reflecting on the goliardic temperament of Italy's *neovanguardisti* and on the atmosphere at *Gruppo 63*'s official encounters, Re remarks:

> In this manly ritual of roughing each other out, authors would receive fierce criticism without batting an eyelash. It was this confrontational style, with rough interventions and aggressive discussions [...] that cemented the group and gave it a sense of its strength precisely inasmuch as it acted and was perceived by the media as a group.[35]

It is worth pointing out, in this context, that all known guests of Nello Ponente's New Year's party were men, even if it may be assumed that women must have been present.[36] Likewise, the *novissimi* poets constituted as an all-male group, and women writers and artists remained a small minority in the larger and more interartistic *Gruppo 63*. At the group's first official meeting in October 1963, only two of the twenty-nine participants who spoke or read from their work defined as women: Amelia Rosselli and Carla Vasio.[37]

4.3. Expanding Horizons

The desire for wider cultural horizons was not only felt among poets, or at the level of high theory. Like Mario Ricci, many Italian musicians, visual artists, and writers of the 1960s had little sympathy for a national cultural establishment, which they perceived as reactionary, provincial and stale. Internationalism became associated with artistic renewal. In his important work on cultural globalization, art historian Jonathan Harris has argued that cosmopolitanism acquired a new, positive significance in the early 1970s, in the context of a growing awareness of ecological vulnerability and planetary inequalities.[38] The Italian artistic fascination with international travel, however, predates these developments and crystallized around a substantially different set of values and concerns. Indeed, its origins must be sought in the grave disillusionment of the immediate post-war years. After the collapse of the Fascist regime, many Italians felt that their nation could only redeem itself through introspection and thorough self-analysis. The nationalistic rhetoric of the *ventennio nero* and its hyperbolic notion of *romanità*, according to several cultural commentators, had to give way to a more compassionate, scrupulous, and unbiased analysis of social reality.[39]

In an influential essay, *Psicologia e destino del nostro popolo* [Psychology and Destiny of our People], neurologist and writer Rosario Ruggeri proclaimed: 'È indispensabile quest'opera di chiarificazione per il nostro popolo, trattato sino a ieri con adulazioni e menzogne' [This effort of clarification is requisite for our nation, which until yesterday was exposed to flattery and lies].[40] In this intellectual climate, few artists or critics felt inclined to champion values or cultural traditions that were external to the nation, and many chose instead to engage with Italy's specific inequalities and difficult legacies. This was the dominant political mood of neorealism, but, from the perspective of the late 1950s and early 1960s, it appeared like an ideological and creative dead end. In 1956, the Milanese philosopher Luciano Anceschi founded a new interdisciplinary journal, *Il verri*, which gave voice to a different understanding of the arts.[41] Uncompromising originality, theoretical inquiry, and attention to international and intermedia exchange were among the key characteristics of

Anceschi's project. Frustrated by the preponderance of outmoded aesthetic practices and canons, many young authors and intellectuals flocked to the journal.

Art critic Renato Barilli wrote in praise of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, musicologist Luigi Pestalozza engaged with the latest trends in serial music, and Alfredo Giuliani shared his excitement for T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Vladimir Mayakovsky. As Elisabetta Mondello has shown, the journal aimed at a careful balance between the arts, and was attentive not only to literature, philosophy, and music, but also to new developments in the study of language and to the achievements of visual artists such as Alberto Burri, Jean Dubuffet, Lucio Fontana, and Edouard Vuillard.[42] In a well-known article of 1963, 'La gita a Chiasso' [The Trip to Chiasso], novelist Alberto Arbasino voiced his impatience with a generation of middle-aged intellectuals who still appeared to blame Fascist censorship for Italy's cultural backwardness. Even in the 1930s, wrote Arbasino, these writers could easily have visited Chiasso, on the Swiss border, where they would have found not only tasty chocolate, but also the works of Karl Marx, Edmund Husserl, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, among others.[43]

International travel, for Arbasino and his peers, was an essential prerequisite for intermedia exchange. Inspired by the vibrant cultural life abroad, artists and critics in Milan, Rome, Turin, and Florence started to question the traditional separation of the arts that was still reflected in the work of many cultural institutions.[44] Paris, in particular, served once again as an important temporary home for some Italian artists and writers, and as a regular meeting point for numerous others. During his frequent promenades on Avenue des Champs-Élysées, between 1959 and 1962, Mario Ricci could have encountered philosopher Umberto Eco or painter and sculptor Enrico Baj, the inventor of *arte nucleare* [nuclear art]. Edoardo Sanguineti and Nanni Balestrini also looked with great interest to the French capital, while others, like the Swiss-Italian author and translator Enrico Filippini, were more drawn to the German-speaking world.[45] Further afield, composer Luciano Berio and painter Gastone Novelli sought inspiration, respectively, in the United States and in the vibrant international community of Brazil's self-styled art capital, São Paulo.

London also became an increasingly popular destination for Italian artists and intellectuals. As an undergraduate student at the Slade School of Fine Art, the Roman polymath Lorenza Mazzetti had struck a friendship with the painter and sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi, a Scottish-born son of Italian immigrants. In London, Mazzetti gained renown for her experimental films *K.* (1954) and *Together* (1956), which inspired the artistic revolution of British Free Cinema. She eventually decided to move back to Rome, but showed little interest in Italian neorealist cinema, and became a writer instead.[46] Meanwhile, Paolozzi, a pioneering champion of British pop art, continued to follow the work of younger Italian artists, as a mentor to the Florentine painter and radical architect Adolfo Natalini, a co-founder of *Superstudio*.[47] From 1961 until the end of the decade, Natalini and his British wife Frances Brunton were frequent guests at Paolozzi's studio in Chelsea, from where they returned with enthusiastic updates about the latest trends in the

British art scene. Some forty miles west of London, at the University of Reading, the novelist Luigi Meneghello — who had left Italy in 1947 with a one-year British Council scholarship — pursued what would become a life-long career in higher education. When the university's newly established department of Italian Studies opened its doors in 1961, Meneghello designed a curriculum that featured language and literature alongside political history and the history of art, without excessive regard for traditional disciplinary boundaries.

In brief, Italy had become fashionable in the United Kingdom — not only its literary classics, but also its cinema, design, *alta moda*, and food. Connected by numerous personal friendships and reciprocal cultural interest, the two countries no longer seemed worlds apart. When the *Times Literary Supplement* decided, in 1963, to dedicate its latest weekly issue to emergent trends in literary criticism, Umberto Eco was delighted, but not particularly surprised, to see his name listed alongside those of F. R. Leavis, Roland Barthes, René Wellek, and George Steiner. As Eco confessed many years later: 'Ritenevo perfettamente normale che gli inglesi mi avessero letto in italiano in 1962 e mi chiedessero un intervento nel 1963. Per la mia generazione, il mondo si era allargato. Non andavamo a Chiasso, ma a Parigi e Londra in aereo' [I considered it perfectly normal that the English should have read me in Italian in 1962 and that they should ask me for a contribution in 1963. For my generation, the world had expanded. We did not travel to Chiasso, but to Paris and London, by plane].[48]

Back in Italy, Rome was not the only major hub of cultural innovation. In the North, the galleries and salons of Milan and Turin were regularly visited by Europe's and North America's leading experimental artists.[49] The Venice Biennale, which had been suspended between 1942 and 1948, resumed its important role for the international art market. The festival acquired particular notoriety in 1964, when pop artist Robert Rauschenberg unexpectedly won the Grand Prize in Painting as only the third North American in the festival's long history.[50] Florence also forged new connections, thanks to the composers and painters Sylvano Bussotti and Giuseppe Chiari, who took part in the activities of *Fluxus*, an instantly legendary international network of experimental artists.[51] Noise music, performance art, visual poetry, and architecture featured among the chief interests of a new generation of Florentine radicals. Meanwhile, in the Southern half of the peninsula, Palermo gained similar prominence as a vibrant centre for classical and experimental music: a golden age in the city's tumultuous post-war history, according to musicologist and political scientist Piero Violante.[52] In October 1963, Italy's most famous post-war avant-garde, *Gruppo 63*, was founded in the Sicilian capital, on the occasion of the city's fourth annual *settimana internazionale nuova musica* [international new music week].

Alongside these well-known cultural capitals, smaller regional centres also played an important role. Guy Debord, Pinot Gallizio, Asger Jorn, and Piero Simondo met in the tiny Ligurian hill town of Cosio di Arroscia in July 1957 and founded the Situationist International in the bar opposite the town hall. Alba and Albisola hosted diverse, international communities of painters and sculptors. But one city, above all,

became a powerful new magnet for artists and intellectuals: Milan. During the early years of the economic boom, Italy's self-styled economic capital had benefited from exceptionally rapid urban growth and mass migration from the rural South. The city's numerous theatres, galleries, design studios and publishing houses could rely on a wealth of fresh talent and on ever-growing demand.[53] Milan was also famous for its trendy restaurants, bars, and numerous boutiques, which sold both elegant and everyday clothes. While Florence maintained its reputation as the original home of Italian *alta moda*, Milanese designs were known for their practicality, simple elegance, and more affordable prices. By the end of the 1960s, the city had eclipsed its rival on the Arno, and was widely considered the emergent fashion capital of Europe.[54] As Edoardo Sanguineti recalls, 'Milano [era] un ambiente molto vivo, con i bar famosi dell'epoca, veri luoghi d'incontro per gli artisti' [Milan, with its famous bars, real hang-outs for artists, was a very exciting place].[55]

4.4. The Discovery of Openness

Umberto Eco, who shared Sanguineti's love for Milan, first moved to the city in the mid-1950s, to work for Italy's newly established state television service, RAI TV. As a contributing editor for RAI's cultural programme, between 1956 and 1958, the young Piedmontese philosopher was thrilled to learn that he had largely free rein to explore different kinds of content. 'Culture', according to Eco's employers at RAI, included the visual arts, literature, and political history, but also religion, children's programmes, architecture, fashion, and cookery shows.[56] This was a tantalizing discovery for an intellectual raised in the strict tradition of disciplinary expertise that continues to shape Italian academic curricula to the present day. At the University of Turin, Eco had been taught to be suspicious of any aesthetic discourse that sought to generalize across the arts. His mentor, the Catholic hermeneutic philosopher Luigi Pareyson, was among the most vociferous critics of a specifically Italian strand of philosophical idealism, developed and championed since the early years of the century by philosopher Benedetto Croce. Instead of promoting the importance of the aesthetic, Pareyson argued, Croce's insistence on the ontological primacy of imaginative intuition had isolated the study of the arts from its social and political context. Luciano Anceschi, the influential editor of *Il verri*, shared this belief and rejected Crocean idealism, in its mid-century form, as an increasingly dogmatic and sterile pursuit. As Michael Caesar explains, the two philosophers held that Croce

> had displayed sovereign indifference to the materiality of the work of art, to the historical conditions of its production, to the processes of conceptualization through which the work of art came into being, to the positive role played by convention and rhetoric (dismissed by Croce as 'precepts', in a rearguard polemic with a long-dead classicism), and to the reception and consumption of the work.[57]

In the wake of Pareyson's and Anceschi's considerations, a new generation of Italian philosophers and art critics set out to establish fresh practices of cross-disciplinary inquiry.[58] If the relation between disciplinary traditions could not

be expressed in a single conceptual frame, as Croce had assumed, then it needed to be explored at the level of historical difference, methodology, and material practice. At the University of Perugia, Catholic philosopher Pietro Prini launched an ambitious new series of annual, cross-disciplinary conferences: 'Il mondo di domani' [The World of Tomorrow]. Between 1963 and 1969, these regular events would bring together many of the period's leading thinkers, from Italy, Germany, France, Poland, and Spain. Social scientists, philosophers, life scientists, and cultural critics were invited by Prini to discuss, from their respective disciplinary perspectives, what he described as 'gli aspetti salienti della civiltà odierna, dei modi e dei tempi del suo trapasso in quella di domani' [the salient features of contemporary civilization, and the forms and temporalities of its transformation into the civilization of the future].[59] In Prini's opinion, no academic discipline, by itself, was sufficiently equipped to describe and analyse the modern world. Instead, the contemporary age needed new cross-disciplinary approaches: an intellectual revolution, 'con non minore impegno e radicalità di quanto ha fatto al suo sorgere il pensiero rinascimentale anticipando profeticamente le conquiste e il destino della umanità moderna' [with no less commitment and radicalism than the thinkers of the early Renaissance, who prophetically anticipated the conquests and the destiny of modern humanity].[60]

For his first conference, in 1963, Prini invited Umberto Eco to speak about interdisciplinarity.[61] Predictably, the young theorist moved his attack against Crocean aesthetics and against the figure of the traditional philosopher, whom he mocked, in the words of theoretical physicist Eduardo Caianiello, as 'colui che sa tutto, ma niente altro' [a man who knows everything, but nothing else].[62] Idealism, according to Eco, had failed to pay attention to technological and social progress, and to their repercussions for the arts. If aesthetic philosophy wished to remain socially and politically relevant, it had to engage more fully with the structural similarities between the arts, science, and technology:

> Nel corso [dell'analisi interdisciplinare] il filosofo prende atto delle ricerche compiute dalle varie discipline, e tenta di ridurre i vari metodi e i vari risultati a *modelli descrittivi*, capaci di riflettere la struttura dei vari fenomeni indagati e dei vari procedimenti indagati. È proprio del filosofo condurre questa riduzione interdisciplinare, ed è suo compito rilevare, tra i modelli elaborati, *similarità di struttura*.[63]
>
> [In this process [of interdisciplinary analysis] the philosopher takes note of the findings of various disciplines, and seeks to reduce their methods and results to *descriptive models*, capable of reflecting the structure of the phenomena and procedures under investigation. It is the philosopher's specific responsibility to advance this interdisciplinary reduction, and to highlight *similarities of structure* across his elaborated models.]

Modern society, according to Eco, had no need for traditional philosophers but required versatile polymaths: 'tecnici della totalità' [technicians of totality].[64] In the field of linguists, scholars were already exploring the similarities between natural languages to develop a single, theoretical model. Eco believed that this approach was also relevant to the arts and humanities, and especially to the study of

contemporary literature, painting, and music. Each of these arts, as Eco explained to his listeners, had renewed and widened its range of expression by drawing from diverse sources, and by blending artistic and theoretical reflection: 'un'arte che non si propone più come fatto creativo originale, ma come riutilizzazione di un prodotto che era già artistico' [art no longer defines itself as original creative expression, but recycles products that are already works of art].[65] If critics did not wish to be left behind, Eco claimed, they had to be as interdisciplinary and versatile as the artists they studied: 'Il che tuttavia richiederebbe che il filosofo non fosse più studioso isolato, ma qualcuno che lavora in continuo contatto con altri, per verificare continuamente i modelli che elabora' [This, however, would require that the philosopher is no longer an isolated scholar, but someone who works in permanent contact with others, and who continuously verifies the models that he develops].[66]

At RAI and in his work for the Milanese publisher Bompiani, Eco had personally experienced the pleasures of collaboration and the excitement of working freely across different media. In 1962, the philosopher chose to relay these experiences in a book that would make his name, and that would soon be adopted by Italy's new avant-garde as its unofficial manifesto.[67] *Opera aperta* ranged from experimental literature to action painting, from Edmund Husserl to Werner Karl Heisenberg, and from non-Euclidean geometry to serial music. It was a passionate homage to the omnivorous cultural appetites of Milan's artistic circles. But it also pioneered a new theoretical understanding of the arts. 'Openness' and its related attributes — ambiguity, indeterminacy, discontinuity, and polyvalence — were explained by Eco as 'structural homologies' ('analogie di struttura'): rhetorical and material practices that could be traced across all historical periods and in every form of artistic expression. All works of art, Eco declared, were open to interpretation. But not all forms of openness were equally interesting or innovative. As literary theorist David Seed has pointed out, Eco treated progressive openness as an important cultural achievement that had to be defended and advanced by every subsequent generation of artists: 'the term "open" is never used neutrally by Eco. It always carries connotations of heuristic freshness, freedom from prescription, and so on'.[68]

Eco believed that the most sophisticated forms of openness could be found in a relatively small set of high modernist experimental works, which he labelled *opere in movimento* [works in movement]. As he pointed out, these works did not simply invite interpretation, but gave performers and audiences an active role in the creative process itself. They could not exist without the reader or spectator, who was literally expected 'a fare l'opera con l'autore' [to make the work together with the author].[69] In one of the central chapters of *Opera aperta*, Eco explained this idea through a discussion of Karlheinz Stockhausen's famously polyvalent *Klavierstück XI*. First performed in New York on 22 April 1957, this composition consisted of nineteen fragments, spread over a single, large page. The performer could begin with any fragment, and continue to any other, proceeding at will through the labyrinth until a fragment had been reached for the third time, when the performance ended. Markings for tempo and dynamics, at the end of each fragment, had to be applied to the next fragment. Every performance of *Klavierstück XI* was therefore

unique and unrepeatable. Stockhausen's 'openness' was a formal feature that only gained meaning, in the words of comparatist Sangjin Park, through an 'active and conscious dialectical relationship with the conditionings' of cultural context.[70] The same could be said of Eco's own volume, as Michael Caesar has suggested. Unlike some of the philosopher's later work, *Opera aperta* embraced openness not only at the conceptual level, but also materially and rhetorically: '*Opera aperta* is itself an "open work", subject to change, and above all growth, during its successive editions, particularly in the 1960s; true to itself, it does not offer definitive solutions'.[71]

Eco, as we have seen, understood philosophy as a multidisciplinary practice of inquiry. According to Caesar, one of the greatest achievements of *Opera aperta* lay in Eco's ability to challenge 'long established academic barriers' between over-specialized disciplines, and to extend 'the bounds of aesthetics in order to open a dialogue with the emergent sciences of communication'.[72] But Eco's interest in music had personal roots, too. As the philosopher explained in his preface to the first edition of *Opera aperta*, the book could not have been written without Luciano Berio and the *Studio di fonologia musicale* at RAI: 'Desidero ricordare che le ricerche sull'opera aperta non avrebbero avuto inizio se non ne fossi stato stimolato dalla consuetudine col lavoro creativo di Luciano Berio, e dalle discussioni su questi problemi con lui, Henri Pousseur e André Boucourechliev' [I wish to stress that this research on the open work would not exist if I had not been stimulated by a familiarity with the creative work of Luciano Berio, and by the discussions about these questions with him, Henri Pousseur and André Boucourechliev].[73] Indeed, when Eco first arrived in Milan in 1956, Berio was already an influential figure in the city's cultural life.

By 1954, the composer had encountered many of the artists who were to shape his understanding of music and composition: Giorgio Ghedini, his teacher at the *conservatorio*; Luigi Dallapiccola, whom he met in the United States; and finally, during a first visit to Darmstadt in 1953, Stockhausen, Boulez, and Pousseur.[74] Berio had also been introduced to the composer Bruno Maderna, who encouraged his plans for a new studio of electronic music, to be established in Milan with the support of Italian state television.[75] When the *studio di fonologia musicale* finally opened its doors in 1955, under Maderna's and Berio's direction, Eco became one of its earliest and most enthusiastic supporters: he was an eager admirer of the music that Berio wrote for radio plays such as Enzo Ferrieri's *Il trifoglio fiorito* (1953) and for the more ambitious *Ritratto di città* (1954), an acoustic portrayal of Milan created by Berio, Maderna, and Roberto Leydi.[76] By 1957, Eco and Berio were working together on a radio programme entitled *Onomatopea nel linguaggio poetico* [onomatopoeia in poetic language] which, according to Eco's plans, was going to present different uses of onomatopoeia in modern literature. In its final version, the programme contained passages from Edgar Allan Poe, Dylan Thomas, and W. H. Auden, read by Berio's wife, the American-Armenian singer Cathy Berberian. Only a year later, Berio, Berberian, and Eco resumed their fruitful collaboration and gave shape to one of the most significant works of Italian experimental art: the pioneering electroacoustic composition *Thema: omaggio a Joyce* (1958–59).[77]

4.5. Singular Encounters

There are interesting similarities between the stories of Ricci's return to Rome and Eco's arrival in Milan. Both experiences reveal the importance of serendipitous encounter. The 1960s were a period of opportunity and increasing mobility, and being in the right place, at the right time, was of considerable importance. As Sanguineti remarked in an affectionate personal recollection of his friendship with Berio, co-creative collaboration and interartistic networks were often the result of *circostanze* [happenstance].[78] This was certainly true of Sanguineti's own collaboration with Berio. In her authoritative study of Italian experimental theatre, Giovanna Lo Monaco has pointed out that 'l'incontro artistico tra Sanguineti e Berio avviene quasi naturalmente per una profonda affinità poetica' [the artistic encounter between Sanguineti and Berio occurs almost naturally, as the result of a profound poetic affinity].[79] Berio read Sanguineti's *Laborintus* in 1961, and promptly decided to write to its author, asking for a libretto. Less than two years later, the pair had already completed *two* ambitious collaborative projects, almost simultaneously. *Passaggio: messa in scena di Luciano Berio ed Edoardo Sanguineti* was first performed at Milan's *Piccola Scala* on 7 May 1963, under the direction of Virginio Puecher. A few weeks earlier, on 18 April 1963, *Esposizione*, an experimental ballet, made its debut at the Venetian *Teatro La Fenice*. Both projects were the result of an intensive collaboration between Berio and Sanguineti, and engaged the support of other like-minded artists. Sanguineti, who had some familiarity with composition, wrote the libretti directly in musical notation, and took a keen interest in Berio's creative practice. The composer, meanwhile, paid homage to Sanguineti's characteristically over-erudite multilingualism with a rich pastiche of citations from classical and popular music: 'feticci musicali' [musical fetishes], in Berio's words.[80] Musical theatre, for both men, was more than simply a juxtaposition of different media. Like Sanguineti's *novissimi* poetry and Berio's electroacoustic compositions, it marked an opportunity to widen and transform the creative repertoire of established cultural forms. Berio's music, as Sanguineti put it, 'convalida in maniera straordinaria la possibilità di un impiego della voce al di là di tutte le dimensioni tradizionali della recitazione, attraverso il grido, il canto, il mugolamento, tutto il rumore vocale' [endorses in an extraordinary manner the possibility of using the voice beyond all traditional dimensions of acting, through shouting, singing, moaning, every kind of vocal noise].[81]

Other artists completed the work of the dynamic duo. When it came to the vocal parts of *Esposizione*, mezzosoprano Berberian was an obvious choice for Berio, who wanted her to be accompanied by a boys' choir. Meanwhile, the choreographic elements of the production were realized by American performance artist and theatre pioneer Anna Halprin, the co-founder of the San Francisco Dancer's Workshop. Six performers, including Halprin herself, interacted on stage with a large cargo net, and recited snippets of Sanguineti's text, which they had received from him without any explanation. In order to heighten the play's dramatic tension, Berio had further insisted that the dancers rehearse without music, and that they

should only hear Berberian's voice on the evening of the performance. This resulted in overwhelming, joyful chaos, as Halprin recalls:

> The performers emerged from both outside and within the theatre, burdened by all kinds of luggage, from tires to rolled-up newspapers to a basket of tennis balls. They embarked on a journey through the space, at times making direct contact with the audience. A huge cargo net was stretched up some 40 feet into the opera house from the orchestra pit, and they began climbing it up, carrying all their belongings. Objects and performers would drop and come tumbling down the net. At one point [Halprin's nine-year-old daughter] Rana swung out on a rope from the top, soaring over the audience to screams of 'bambino'. [...] The only trouble with the vocal material was that we never heard it in performance because the audience shouted so much and responded so excitedly.[82]

Where *Esposizione* focused on chance operations, *Passaggio* began like a more traditional theatrical performance. In fact, Berio's and Sanguineti's second collaboration is best described as a progressive deconstruction of the conventions of opera and spectatorship. Performed on a black box stage, *Passaggio* explicitly evoked Dadaism and the aesthetics of German Expressionist drama. Enrico Baj and the Sicilian abstract painter Felice Canonico created a set of ominous dark containers, overshadowed by bright neon letters that spelt the word 'MERZ'.[83] Walking between these props, soprano Giuliana Tavolaccini performed as 'Lei', an unnamed and seemingly archetypal female character who, in the intentions of the two authors, embodied 'feminine historicity' ('uno storico femmineo'). For Berio, 'Lei' was meant to resemble the Czech writer Milena Jesenská, while Sanguineti imagined her as a theatrical representation of Rosa Luxemburg.[84] In the first part of the performance, 'Lei' was insulted, imprisoned, and even tortured by a spectral, sinister chorus (*coro B*), who mingled freely with the audience and who proclaimed the absolute value of social hierarchies and norms:

> CORO B: — in noi l'ordine! [...] che qui, ordinati, adesso, / assistiamo qui, / noi, presenti! Presenti nel / silenzio [...] in questa ordinata gerarchia; in his scaenis atque spectaculis; / noi, immagine, dio! Adesso! / [...] di una ordinata società![85]
>
> [CHOIR B: — in us, the order! [...] here, ordered, now, / we assist here, / we, present! Present in / silence [...] in this ordered hierarchy; in *his scaenis atque spectaculis*; / we, image, God! Now! / [...] of an orderly society!]

A second, invisible chorus spoke out against this idea from the orchestra pit (*coro A*), and urged the woman to resist. After several melodramatic exchanges between the two choruses, *Passaggio* took an unexpected turn in the fourth and final act, when 'Lei' suddenly interrupted her performance, took off her stage costume and prepared to leave, while coro B, in a panicky crescendo, ordered her to get back into character: 'buio tutto! / anche qui! / Silenzio! Effetto! [...] al centro! / a destra! / prevalentibus / più gesti! muoversi, / accidenti! / Siamo a teatro!' [all dark! / here as well! / Silence! Effect! [...] to the middle! / to the right / *prevalentibus* / more gestures, / Damn it! / We're in a theatre!].[86] 'Lei', of course, paid no attention to this.

In a short essay for the programme, Umberto Eco praised the political force of Berio's and Sanguineti's meta-theatrical provocation, which he interpreted in the manner of Berthold Brecht's epic theatre:

> [Il coro B] cerca di ridurre a puro spettacolo la vicenda. Non è questa la tentazione del melodramma? [...] Ma in *Passaggio* gli autori vogliono evitare questa suprema ipocrisia: e con un improvviso effetto di straniamento, la donna caccia via il coro e noi che assistiamo.[87]
>
> [[Chorus B] tries to reduce the story to pure spectacle. Isn't this the attraction of melodrama? [...] In *Passagio*, however, the authors want to avoid such supreme hypocrisy: in an unexpected, defamiliarizing turn, the woman chases away the chorus and us, who are watching.]

Eco's uncharacteristically earnest reading of *Passaggio* acknowledged Sanguineti's and Berio's political convictions, but paid little attention to the ostentatious playfulness of their *coup de théâtre*. As Eco pointed out, *Passaggio*'s surprise ending challenged the conventions of bourgeois spectatorship, in true Brechtian style. But it also questioned the modernist principle of choreographic authorship, which had been fundamental to Brecht's political theatre. Where *Episches Theater* achieved defamiliarization through carefully measured and scripted provocations, Berio's and Eco's musical theatre relished the abandonment of aesthetic control, and the creative potential of unpredictable and spontaneous gestures. In this respect, *Passaggio* appeared closer in spirit to Dario Fo's anarchic television show *Chi l'ha visto?* (1962) or to the theatrical and musical improvisations of Halprin and Cage than to Brecht.[88] *Passaggio* and *Esposizione* were also reminiscent of Ricci's collaboration with Pasquale Santoro and Nato Frascà. Like *movimento numero uno*, Sanguineti's and Berio's musical theatre did not seek to disguise its spontaneous origins, but exulted at the chance encounter between different artistic forms.

Throughout the early 1960s, poetry, music, and the visual arts joined forces in a carnivalesque mood, in a cheerful celebration of artistic transience. Performative practice marked a radical alternative to the creation of tangible, 'definitive' art objects, which Berio, Sanguineti and others associated with commodification and the demands of mass consumerism. In the context of a society shaped by capitalist expansion, this co-creation of unique and partly spontaneous artistic experiments was experienced, by their makers, as a precarious and dynamic space, reflecting the simultaneous, incommensurate presence of different and diverse personal and disciplinary trajectories. Italy's most influential avant-garde movement of the 1960s, *Gruppo 63*, was inspired by similar ambitions. More than thirty writers, visual artists, musicians, and critics took part in the group's first meeting in Palermo in October 1963. Two *novissimi* poets — Balestrini and Giuliani — were responsible for practical arrangements and would subsequently co-edit the group's first anthology, *Gruppo 63: la nuova letteratura* (1964). Diversity was considered fundamental. While all participants at the Palermo conference shared broadly leftist political views and a strong dislike for representational realism and lyrical intimacy, these positions were never summarized in programmatic statements or official manifestos. According to Sanguineti, 'l'esistenza di posizioni diverse era in sintonia con la struttura del

gruppo che poi era quella adeguata alla situazione: non c'era un manifesto di poetica e non lo si voleva fare' [the existence of different positions was in tune with the group's structure and this was appropriate to the situation: there was no poetic manifesto and we did not want to create one].[89]

Similarly, Eco remarked that the group 'non era una massoneria [...]. Era piuttosto come una festa di paese, in cui fa parte chi è presente e partecipa dello spirito generale e del genius loci' [was not a Freemasonry. [...] It was rather like a country fair, which includes anybody who is present and who takes part in the genius loci].[90] In one of his rare retrospective accounts of the *neoavanguardia*, experimental novelist Giorgio Manganelli also confirmed this impression:

> Il Gruppo 63 non ha mai elaborato dei suoi precetti estetici. In realtà, mi si passi l'espressione, era un gran casino. C'era dentro tutto e il contrario di tutto: gente che barava e gente che non barava e perfino gente che contava i numeri da uno a cinquemila. Ma contare da uno a cinquemila non era mica obbligatorio per tutti.[91]
>
> [*Gruppo 63* never expressed its aesthetic principles. Actually, if you will forgive the expression, it was a big mess. The group included a bit of everything, and the opposite of everything: people who cheated and people who did not cheat, and even people who counted from one to five thousand. But counting from one to five thousand was not obligatory for everybody, of course.]

This is not to say that *Gruppo 63* simply ignored the differences between artistic media. On the contrary, each medium, in turn, was exposed to careful scrutiny and creative-critical attention. From 3 until 7 October 1963, the members of *Gruppo 63* divided their days between the Hotel Zagarella in Solunto and the Scarlatti Room of Palermo's *Conservatorio*, where they convened a series of public-facing workshops. Each workshop, in turn, focused on one artistic medium or genre. Gillo Dorfles, Achille Perilli, and Nello Ponente spoke about painting; Giuseppe Bartolucci, Eco, and Luigi Gozzi chaired a session on theatre; Luciano Anceschi, Alfredo Giuliani, and Sanguineti were jointly responsible for the group's poetry event; Renato Barilli, Angelo Guglielmi, and Francesco Leonetti took charge of a workshop on the novel, and Mario Bortolotto and Fedele D'Amico contributed with some reflections on experimental music.[92] Systematic attention to different media and genres also prevailed in the group's first anthology, *Gruppo 63. La nuova letteratura*, which included textual samples from thirty-four *scrittori nuovi* [new writers], in strict alphabetical order.[93] Six theoretical essays introduced the anthology.[94] Of these, only the first two, written by Anceschi and Guglielmi, defined experimentalism in generally comprehensive terms, while a further three were dedicated, respectively, to the novel, to poetry and to theatre. Dorfles, finally, addressed the relationship between different artistic media, but focused largely on their comparative history, without seriously questioning their respective autonomy.

From the perspective of philosophy, *Gruppo 63*'s specific engagement with particular genres and media was indicative of the post-Crocean turn, which Eco had embraced in *Opera aperta* and subsequently explained in his conference paper at the University of Perugia. At the level of creative practice, the group's meticulous

attention to different media prepared the ground for serendipitous encounter. Interartistic exchange was of vital importance, according to the artists and writers of Italy's *neoavanguardia*, but there was no expectation that different media should merge or contribute to the unfolding of a single, teleologically ordained cultural form, in the manner of a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Instead, it was considered that every artistic form had its own distinctive qualities and history. Media were free to mingle without constraints, like the artists at the Palermo conference. Inside this volatile, dynamic field, every interartistic encounter could be celebrated as a unique moment of co-creative production, which held the power to display and displace established artistic conventions. In a recent, insightful study, Brazilian curator and performance scholar André Lepecki has described this approach to creative practice as a desire for 'singularities', a Deleuzean concept.[95] Singularities, as Gilles Deleuze argues in *Logique du sens*, resist categorization. They are 'turning points and points of inflection; bottlenecks, knots, foyers, and centres; points of fusion, condensation and boiling; points of tears and joy, sickness and health, hope and anxiety, sensitive points'.[96] They rejoice in contingency. This also holds true for many of the artists discussed in this chapter. Deleuze's reflections capture a fascination with experimental art that was typical of the early 1960s, and the importance of heterogeneity and openness for a rapidly changing society.

4.6. Conclusions

Like their precursors in Paris and New York — Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Boulez, Robert Rauschenberg and John Cage, among others — many Italian artists of the 1960s saw themselves as heirs to the historical avant-gardes, but also as members of a new generation, untarnished by the experience of dictatorship and war. A popular new term, 'sperimentalismo' [experimentalism], gained traction in the passionate theoretical debates of the period. Experimental artists still viewed themselves as avant-gardists — often combining the term with the fashionable prefix 'new' or 'neo' — and relished what Berio called the 'liberating effect' and the 'sacrificial and somehow clownish impulse' of avant-garde culture: its sense of freshness, confidence and iconoclastic zeal.[97] Despite this fascination, however, Berio's generation took little interest in rehearsing the cultural practices or political arguments of earlier decades. Where the historical avant-gardes had directed their wrath against a largely homogeneous and solidly conservative cultural establishment, their self-styled heirs of the 1960s found themselves at the heart of a rapidly modernizing economy, surrounded by new media and a seemingly endless appetite for cultural novelty. Celebrations of heroic transgression à la Marinetti appeared naïve in this context of mass consumerism, proliferating new cultural forms and potentially global communication networks. In his pioneering book-length study of experimentalism, *Avanguardia e sperimentalismo* (1964), Angelo Guglielmi mocked the antagonistic rhetoric of avant-garde discourse and called for more pragmatic forms of cultural and political activism:

> La situazione della cultura contemporanea è simile a quella di una città dalla quale il nemico, dopo averla cosparsa di mine, è fuggito. Il vincitore che è alle

> porte della città cosa farà? Invierà delle truppe d'assalto a conquistare una città già conquistata? Se lo facesse aggraverebbe il caos, provocando nuove inutili rovine e morte. Piuttosto farà arrivare dalle retrovie i reparti specializzati che avanzeranno nella città abbandonata non con le mitragliatrici ma con gli apparecchi Geiger. E grazie alle nuove strade da essi aperte (strade naturalmente straordinarie, costruite su sedi impreviste e non tradizionali) la circolazione nella città potrà ricominciare.[98]
>
> [The situation of contemporary culture is similar to that of a city from which the enemy, after laying mines, has fled. What will the winner do, on his arrival at the city gates? Will he send assault troops to conquer a city that is already conquered? If he did so, this would create chaos and provoke new, useless destruction and death. Instead, he will dispatch specialized sections of the rearguard, who will enter the abandoned city not with machine guns but with Geiger counters. And thanks to the new roads created by them (naturally extraordinary roads, built in non-traditional ways, in improvised locations) the traffic in the city will flow again.]

Other theorists and writers agreed with Gugliemi's analysis, even if they did not share his political demands. In 1965, Fausto Curi described *Gruppo 63* as an 'avanguardia fredda' [cold avant-garde] in evident contrast with the alleged revolutionary heat of Futurism.[99] Similarly, Eco evoked the contrast between a 'generation of Vulcan' and a 'generation of Neptune', and Sanguineti deplored the inevitable transition from a heroic to a cynical age, sanctioned by the triumph of the culture industry and its most tangible avatar, the museum.[100] Experimentalism, for these thinkers, had a strong utopian dimension, which was captured, for instance, by Gugliemi's suggestion, at *Gruppo 63*'s third meeting, to see the world as a broken vase or a universe in fragments, which literature must re-arrange into a new, more harmonious order.[101] Or by Sanguineti, who famously urged the experimental poet to dive 'nella Palus Putredinis, precisamente, dell'anarchismo e dell'alienazione, con la speranza, che mi ostino a non ritenere illusoria, di uscire poi veramente, attraversato il tutto, con le mani sporche, ma con il fango, anche, lasciato veramente alle spalle' [into the murky pool of anarchism and alienation, with the hope (that I do not consider an illusion) of really getting through, with our hands dirty, but leaving the mud behind].[102] Sanguineti also suggested that creative writing ought to be imagined in radically new terms, as a form of deductive reasoning:

> Anziché muovere da un testo, e con sano procedimento venire deducendo infino all'ultima conclusione interpretativa, procederemo a ritroso, e salpando dalla astratta ipotesi di un testo, dalla sua mera possibilità ideale, lo dedurremo criticamente. In questo modo il nostro 'campione', anziché collocarsi a principio, si collocherà, come è necessario, in coda, in funzione di epilogo.[103]
>
> [Instead of starting out with a text and arriving through a healthy process of deduction at its interpretative conclusions, we will proceed in the inverse direction: beginning with the abstract hypothesis of a text, its ideal possibility, we will deduce it critically. Consequently, our 'sample' will not stand at the beginning, but will necessarily come at the end, and take on the function of an epilogue.]

But how original was this idea of experimentalism? From Paris, the mathematician and OULIPO writer François Le Lionnais cautioned his readers that all works of literature were experimental: 'de Lycophron (peut-être) à Raymond Roussel (certainement) en passant par les Grands Rhétoriqueurs, la littérature expérimentale accompagne la littérature tout court' [from Lycophrones (perhaps) to Raymond Roussel (certainly) via the great rhetoricians, experimental literature has always been a part of literature *tout court*].[104] Experimentalism, for Le Lionnais, was not historically situated, and existed independently of political ideology. Writing in 1984, on the occasion of *Gruppo 63*'s twentieth anniversary, Eco reached a similar conclusion. *Sperimentalismo*, as he explained, had been championed by progressive writers and intellectuals who felt uncomfortable with the Manichean juxtaposition of bourgeoisie and avant-garde. Without the avant-garde's revolutionary fervour, however, experimentalism came to look like a very malleable category: 'Se sperimentare significa operare in modo innovativo rispetto alla tradizione assestata, ogni opera d'arte che noi celebriamo come significativa è stata a proprio modo sperimentale.' [If experimentalism describes any innovative approach to established traditions, every work of art that we celebrate as significant is in its own way experimental].[105]

Eco's intervention raises a series of questions that will accompany us in the second half of this volume. Can creative artistic experiments have a political value if they are no longer perceived in the context of a wider struggle for radical social reform? How does intermedia practice thrive without the avant-garde's deliberately provocative gestures? These questions were not familiar to creative practitioners in the early 1960s, when the popularity of experimental art remained profoundly connected, in common perception, to the cultural *kudos* of the avant-garde, the promise of internationalization and opportunity, and the fascination with new media and new audiences. As this chapter has shown, that nexus relied on an unusually strong and widespread sense of optimism and opportunity, which pervaded Italian society during the 1960s. As we shall see in the next chapter, things would rapidly change when that optimism began to fade.

Notes to Chapter 4

1. Edward Gordon Craig, *On the Art of the Theatre* (London: Heinemann, 1911). On Ricci's interest in Craig, see Luca Franco and Edoardo Zaccagnini, *La luce solida: sul teatro di Mario Ricci* (Rome: Un Mondo a Parte, 2009), p. 50. For a more general discussion of Craig's influence on Italian new theatre, see Luigi Gozzi, 'Di Jarry e del personaggio', *Il verri*, 25 (1967), 14–33.
2. This account draws on Mario Ricci's autobiographical recollections, as recorded by Luca Franco in eighteen video interviews, in 2009. See Mario Ricci, *Teatro Immagine*, <http://marioricci.net/biografia-media> [accessed 10 August 2020].
3. See Daniela Visone, *La nascità del Nuovo Teatro in Italia, 1959–1967* (Corazzano: Titivillus, 2010). See also Franco Quadri, *L'avanguardia teatrale in Italia: materiali, 1960–1976* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977); Marco De Marinis, *Il nuovo teatro, 1947–1970* (Milan: Bompiani, 1987).
4. See John Foot, *The Archipelago: Italy Since 1945* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), Chapter 2; Valerio Castronovo, *L'Italia del miracolo economico* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2014).
5. David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

6. The new law, which made primary education mandatory for all children under the age of fourteen, was officially passed on 31 December 1962. See Maurizio Degl'Innocenti, 'La "grande trasformazione" e la "svolta" del centro sinistra', in *Il miracolo economico italiano, 1958–1963*, ed. by Antonio Cardini (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006), pp. 249–85.
7. Luciano Bianciardi's autobiographical novel, *La vita agra* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1962) offers a vivid and memorable personal account of this situation.
8. The following examples illustrate the success of this strategy: Renato Barilli, Giorgio Celli, Umberto Eco, Alfredo Giuliani, Luigi Gozzi, Giorgio Manganelli, and Edoardo Sanguineti all held university professorships. Angelo Guglielmi entered the senior leadership team of RAI, the Italian national broadcasting company, and was director of RAI Tre from 1987 to 1994.
9. For the full text of Ricci's poem, see <http://marioricci.net/wp-content/files_mf/1526326001Movimentopermarionettan1.pdf> [accessed 10 August 2020]. For a discussion of Novelli's interest in Ricci's work, see Franco Mancini, *L'illusione alternativa: lo spazio scenico dal dopoguerra a oggi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1980). All translations in this chapter are by Florian Mussgnug, unless otherwise indicated.
10. On Futurist stage design and 'robotic acting', see Günter Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909–1944* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 396–441.
11. The collection was first published by Paolazzi in 1961, with a preface by Alfredo Giuliani. Following the success of *Gruppo 63*, Giuliani wrote an expanded preface and notes for a second edition*: I Novissimi: poesie per gli anni sessanta* (Turin: Einaudi, 1965). All quotations in this chapter are from the bilingual edition, based on the 1965 Italian edition and translated by David Jacobson, Luigi Ballerini, Paul Vangelisti, Michael Moore, Bradley Dick, and Stephen Sartarelli: *I Novissimi: Poems for the Sixties* (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1995).
12. See John Picchione, *The New Avant-Garde in Italy: Theoretical Debate and Poetic Practices* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), especially Chapter 1; Fausto Curi, *La modernità letteraria e la poesia italiana d'avanguardia: cultura, poetiche, tecniche* (Milan: Mimesis, 2019).
13. *I Novissimi: Poems for the Sixties*, pp. 18–19.
14. Pagliarani's long poem 'La ragazza Carla' [The girl Carla] first appeared in complete form in 1960, in the literary journal *Il Menabò* and was republished as Pagliarani's contribution to *i novissimi*. It tells the story of a seventeen-year-old girl who works as a typist in a large company office and is sexually molested by a senior colleague.
15. See Nanni Balestrini, *Come si agisce (poemi piani)* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1963).
16. *I Novissimi: Poems for the Sixties*, pp. 18–19
17. Francesco Muzzioli, 'Subverting Literature: Literary Theory and Critical Discourse in the Italian *Neoavanguardia*', in *Neoavanguardia: Italian Experimental Literature and Arts in the 1960s*, ed. by Paolo Chirumbolo, Mario Moroni, and Luca Somigli (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), pp. 21–37 (p. 31).
18. *I Novissimi: Poems for the Sixties*, pp. 18–19.
19. Renato Barilli, *La neoavanguardia italiana: dalla nascita del 'Verri' alla fine di 'Quindici'* (Bologna: Mulino, 1995), p. 82.
20. Edoardo Sanguineti, 'Critica spettacolare della spettacolarità: conversazione con Edoardo Sanguineti di Luigi Pestalozza', in his *Per musica*, ed. by Luigi Pestalozza (Modena: Mucchi, 1993), p. 12.
21. We paraphrase a passage from Sanguineti's speech at the *Gruppo 63*'s general debate, in 1963: 'Per essere autenticamente critica, e autenticamente realistica, l'arte deve energicamente uscire dai limiti della normalità borgehese, cioè dalle sue norme ideologiche e linguistiche' [In order to be authentically critical, and authentically realistic, art must energetically escape the boundaries of bourgeois normality, namely its ideological and linguistic norms]; in *Gruppo 63: la nuova letteratura*, ed. by Nanni Balestrini and Alfredo Giuliani (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1964), p. 383.
22. Pierre Boulez, *Relevés d'apprenti* (Paris: Seuil, 1966); Pierre Boulez, *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, trans. by Stephen Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 39.
23. On Boulez and Klee, see Etty Martha Mulder, *Het vruchtbare land: Pierre Boulez Paul Klee, zielsverwantschap* (Maarn: Stichting Pierre Boulez, 2015).
24. Pierre Boulez, *Paul Klee: le pays fertile*, in his *Points de repère*, II (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1981), pp. 725–26.

25. See Giovanna Lo Monaco, *Dalla scrittura al gesto: il Gruppo 63 e il teatro* (Milan: Prospero Editore, 2019), p. 231.
26. Pierre Boulez, *Par volonté et par hasard: entretiens avec Célestin Deliège* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), translated by B. Hopkins as *Conversations with Célestin Deliège* (London: Eulenburg, 1977), p. 55; quoted in Paul Griffiths, *Modern Music and After: Directions since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 38.
27. Selected poems from Sanguineti's earliest collection, *Laborintus* (1956), first appeared in 1951 in the Florentine journal *Numero*, where they were accompanied by reproductions of paintings by Klee and Wassily Kandinsky.
28. *Per musica*, pp. 12–13.
29. See Cecilia Bello Minciacchi, '"Vociferazione" e "discorso ininterrotto": aspetti testuali nelle prime collaborazioni di Berio e Sanguineti (1961–1965)', in her *La distruzione da vicino: forme e figure delle avanguardie del secondo Novecento* (Nocera Inferiore: Oèdipus, 2012).
30. Rossana Dalmonte, Niva Lorenzini, Loris Azzaroni, and Fabrizio Frasnedi, *Il gesto della forma: musica, poesia, teatro nell'opera di Luciano Berio* (Milan: Arcadia, 1981), p. 9.
31. Picchione, *The New Avant-Garde in Italy*, p. 20.
32. Fabio Gambaro, *Colloquio con Edoardo Sanguineti: quarant'anni di cultura italiana attraverso i ricordi di un poeta intellettuale* (Milano: Anabasi, 1993), pp. 26–27.
33. According to Marshall Brown, the breakdown of conventional distinctions between literature and music was characteristic of Modernism and its tendency 'to substitute embodiment for designation in order to restore expressivity where formal control has been lost'. See Marshall Brown, 'Origins of Modernism: Musical Structures and Narrative Forms', in *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries*, ed. by Steven Paul Scher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 75–92. See also Hayden White, 'Form, Reference and Ideology in Musical Discourse', in his *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (Baltimore, MD, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 147–76.
34. *I Novissimi: poesie per gli anni sessanta*, pp. 384–85. On this topic, see also Florian Mussgnug, 'Between *Novissimi* and Nuovo Romanzo: Literary Genre Categories in the works of the *Gruppo 63*', in *From Eugenio Montale to Amelia Rosselli: Italian Poetry in the Sixties and Seventies*, ed. by John Butcher and Mario Moroni (Leicester: Troubador, 2004), pp. 21–40.
35. Lucia Re, 'Language, Gender, and Sexuality in the *Neoavantguardia*', in *Neoavanguardia: Italian Experimental Literature*, pp. 171–211 (p. 196).
36. As Ellen G. Friedman points out, many mid-twentieth-century cultural commentators paid little attention to intersectionality and employed the gender category 'woman' in essentializing terms. This suggests that a robust critique of the *neoavanguardia*'s attitude towards gender must address Re's considerations, but also move beyond the scope of her polemic, and interrogate the explanatory power of binary gender categories as instruments of critical intervention. See Ellen G. Friedman, 'Sexing the Text: Women Avant-Garde Writing in the Twentieth Century', in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, ed. by Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons, and Brian McHale (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 154–67.
37. See *Gruppo 63. La nuova letteratura. 34 scrittori*, ed. by Nanni Balestrini and Alfredo Giuliani (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1964). A heavily revised and expanded version of this anthology, also edited by Balestrini and Giuliani, was published in preparation for the fortieth anniversary of *Gruppo 63*, entitled *Gruppo 63: l'antologia*, ed. by Nanni Balestrini and Alfredo Giuliani (Turin: Testo & Immagine, 2002). In addition to Rosselli and Vasio, this volume also includes texts by Patrizia Vicinelli, Giulia Niccolai, and Alice Ceresa. The works of ten additional male authors, reputed to be close to the spirit of *Gruppo 63*, were also included.
38. Jonathan Harris, *The Utopian Globalists: Artists of Worldwide Revolution, 1919–2009* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013). Similarly, Liam Connell describes mid-century internationalism as a critique of advanced capitalism, and dates the emergence of both phenomena to the socio-economic crises of the early 1970s. See Liam Connell, 'Globalization and Transnationalism', in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, ed. by Bray, Gibbons and McHale, pp. 224–37.
39. See Florian Mussgnug, 'The Foreigner's Gaze: Constructions of National Identity and Alterity in Post-War Italian Literature', *Forum for Modern Languages Studies*, 38.2 (2002), 189–212.

40. Rosario Ruggeri, *Psicologia e destino del nostro popolo* (Milan: Arnaldo Mondadori, 1945), p. v.
41. Fabio Gambaro, *Invito a conoscere la neoavanguardia* (Milan: Mursia, 1993).
42. Elisabetta Mondello, *L'avventura delle riviste: periodici e giornali letterari del Novecento* (Turin: Robin Edizioni, 2012).
43. Alberto Arbasino, 'La gita a Chiasso', *Il Giorno*, 23 January 1963. Arbasino's text was subsequently included in *Gruppo 63: critica e teoria* [1976], ed. by Renato Barilli and Angelo Guglielmi (Turin: Testo & Immagine, 2003), p. 180.
44. Experimental musical theatre, for example, rejected the distinction between *teatro lirico* [opera] and *teatro di prosa* [prose theatre]. See Vivienne Suvini-Hand, *Sweet Thunder: Music and Libretti in 1960s Italy* (Oxford: Legenda, 2006).
45. Inge Feltrinelli, 'Testimonianza', in *Il Gruppo 63: quarant'anni dopo*, ed. by Renato Barilli, Fausto Curi, and Niva Lorenzini (Bologna: Pendragon, 1965), p. 16.
46. See Giorgio Betti, *L'italiana che inventò il free cinema inglese: vita cinematografica di Lorenza Mazzetti* (Tortona: Vicolo del Pavone, 2002).
47. See Gabriele Mastrigli, 'Oggetti come specchi: l'utopia critica del Superstudio', in *Superstudio: Opere 1966–1978* ed. by Gabriele Mastrigli, preface by Cristiano Toraldo di Francia (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2016), pp. ix–lxxxv (p. xxii).
48. Umberto Eco, 'Prolusione', in *Il Gruppo 63: quarant'anni dopo*, ed. by Barilli, Curi, and Lorenzini, pp. 20–43 (p. 32).
49. See *Arte italiana, 1960–1964: identità culturale, confronti internazionali, modelli americani*, ed. by Flavio Fergonzi and Francesco Tedeschi (Milan: Scalpendi, 2017).
50. See Enzo Di Martino, *The History of the Venice Biennale, 1895–2005* (Venice: Papiro Arte, 2005).
51. See *The Fluxus Reader*, ed. by Ken Friedman (Oxford: Wyley, 1998).
52. See Piero Violante, *Swinging Palermo* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2015).
53. See John Foot, *Milan Since the Miracle: City, Culture, and Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).
54. See *The Glamour of Italian Fashion Since 1945*, ed. by Sonnet Stanfill (London: V&A, 2015).
55. Paolo Chirumbolo, 'Signs and Designs: Sanguineti and Baj from *Laborintus* to *The Biggest Art-Book in the World*', in *Neoavanguardia: Italian Experimental Literature*, pp. 233–54 (p. 237).
56. Thomas Stauder, *Gespräche mit Umberto Eco* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004), p. 134.
57. Michael Caesar, *Umberto Eco: Philosophy, Semiotics and the Work of Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), p. 6.
58. Pareyson's students at the University of Turin included Umberto Eco, Gianni Vattimo, Mario Perniola, and Sergio Givone, among many others.
59. *Il mondo di domani*, ed. by Pietro Prini (Rome: Edizioni Abete, 1964), preface.
60. Ibid.
61. Other speakers included philosophers Paul Ricoeur, Jean Wahl, Guido Calogero, and Bogdan Suchodolski, anthropologist Ernesto de Martino, composer Pierre Schaeffer, literary critic Carlo Bo, futurologist Robert Jungk, and anthropologist Arnold Gehlen, among many others.
62. Umberto Eco, 'La ricerca interdisciplinare', in Prini, pp. 361–66 (p. 362). Eco's assumption of masculinity appears problematic now, but received no particular attention at a conference that ignored the question of gender altogether and that saw interventions by twenty-seven men, but not a single woman.
63. Ibid., p. 363, original emphasis.
64. Ibid., p. 366.
65. Ibid., p. 364.
66. Ibid., p. 366.
67. See Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta: forma e indeterminazione nelle poetiche contemporanee*, 3rd edn (Milan: Bompiani, 1976). A partial English translation by Anna Cancogni was published as *The Open Work*, introduction by David Robey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989). Two chapters of *Opera aperta* first appeared in Luciano Berio's journal *Incontri musicali*. On the *neoavanguardia*'s interest in *Opera aperta*, see Barilli, *La neoavanguardia italiana*, Part Three.
68. David Seed, 'The Open Work in Theory and Practice', in *Reading Eco: An Anthology*, ed. by Rocco Capozzi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 73–81 (p. 78).
69. *Opera aperta*, p. 60; *The Open Work*, p. 21.

70. Sangjin Park, 'Reconsidering the Implications of the 'Pre-Semiotic' Writings in Umberto Eco', in *Illuminating Eco: On the Boundaries of Interpretation*, ed. by Charlotte Ross and Rochelle Sibley (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 123–37 (p. 131).
71. Caesar, *Umberto Eco*, p. 26.
72. Ibid., pp. 26–27.
73. *Opera aperta*, p. 14.
74. See Luciano Berio, *Intervista sulla musica*, ed. by Rossana Dalmonte, 2nd edn (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2007), pp. 50–61.
75. See David Osmond-Smith, *Berio* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 12–13. For a more detailed description of Maderna's role in the creation of the *Studio*, see Luciano Berio 'Bruno Maderna ai Ferienkurse di Darmstadt', in *Bruno Maderna: documenti*, ed. by Mario Baroni and Rossana Dalmonte (Milan: Suvini Zerboni, 1985), pp. 126–28.
76. See *Nuova Musica alla Radio: esperienze allo Studio di Fonologia della RAI di Milano 1954–1959*, ed. by Angela De Benedictis and Veniero Rizzardi (Rome: RAI-ERI, 2000); Nicola Scaldaferri, *Musica nel laboratorio elettroacustico: lo Studio di Fonologia di Milano e la ricerca musicale negli anni Cinquanta* (Lucca: LIM, 1997) and Matteo Nanni, 'Luciano Berios Weg zur elektroakustischen Musik: Die Entstehung des Mailänder Studio di Fonologia Musicale', in *Luciano Berio*, ed. by Ulrich Tadday (Munich: edition text+kritik, 2005), pp. 43–65.
77. For a full discussion of Eco's and Berio's artistic collaboration, see Florian Mussgnug, 'Writing Like Music: Luciano Berio, Umberto Eco and the New Avant-Garde', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 5.1 (2008), 81–97.
78. Edoardo Sanguineti, 'Quattro passaggi per Luciano', in *Luciano Berio: nuove prospettive*, ed. by Angela Ida De Benedictis (Florence: Olschki, 2012), p. 51.
79. Lo Monaco, *Dalla scrittura al gesto*, p. 260.
80. *Intervista sulla musica*, p. 118.
81. *Per musica*, pp. 189–90.
82. Anna Halprin, 'Yvonne Rainer interviews Anna Halprin', in Mariellen Sandford, *Happenings and Other Acts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 145–49, cited in Lo Monaco, *Dalla scrittura al gesto*, pp. 286–87.
83. The word 'MERZ' is a reference to German Dadaist Kurt Schwitters.
84. See Edoardo Sanguineti, 'Parole e musica', in *Forme del melodrammatico: parole e musica (1700–1800)*, ed. by Bruno Gallo (Milan: Guerini, 1988), p. 341; cited in Lo Monaco, *Dalla scrittura al gesto*, p. 273.
85. *Per musica*, pp. 30–31.
86. *Per musica*, pp. 47–48.
87. Umberto Eco, 'Programma di sala di *Passaggio*', cited in Lo Monaco, *Dalla scrittura al gesto*, p. 276.
88. On the origins of Dario Fo's theatre, see Beatrice Tavecchio Blake, *Dario Fo: teatro di attivazione e comunicazione, 1950–1973* (Milan: Mimesis, 2016).
89. *Colloquio con Edoardo Sanguineti*, pp. 70–71. On the manifesto in the 1960s, see Florian Mussgnug, 'Futurism and the Manifesto in the 1960s', in *The History of Futurism: Precursors, Protagonists, Legacies*, ed. by Geert Buelens, Harald Hendrix, and Monica Jansen (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2012), pp. 337–52.
90. Umberto Eco, *Sugli specchi e altri saggi: il segno, la rappresentazione, l'illusione, l'immagine* (Milan: Bompiani, 1985), p. 94. On Eco's changing attitude towards *Gruppo 63*, see Caesar, *Umberto Eco*, pp. 29–36. See also Picchione, *The New Avant-Garde in Italy*, pp. 46–60.
91. Giorgio Manganelli, 'Scrittori d'Italia', *L'Espresso*, 12 January 1986, pp. 80–86; reprinted in Giorgio Manganelli, *La penombra mentale: interviste e conversazioni, 1965–1990*, ed. by Roberto Deidier (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 2001), pp. 164–74 (p. 169). See also Florian Mussgnug, *The Eloquence of Ghosts: Giorgio Manganelli and the Afterlife of the Avant-Garde* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), Chapter 1.
92. See Floriana Tessitore, *Visione che si ebbe nel cielo di Palermo: le Settimane internazionali nuova musica, 1960–1968* (Rome: ERI-RAI, 2002), p. 288.
93. Balestrini and Giuliani, *Gruppo 63: la nuova letteratura*.
94. Luciano Anceschi, 'Metodologia del Nuovo'; Angelo Guglielmi, 'Avanguardia e Sperimentalismo';

Renato Barilli, 'Le strutture del romanzo'; Fausto Curi, 'Sulla giovane poesia'; Giuseppe Bartolucci, 'Tradizione e rottura nel teatro italiano'; Gillo Dorfles, 'Relazioni tra le arti'. All in Balestrini and Giuliani, *Gruppo 63: la nuova letteratura*, Part 1.

95. André Lepecki, *Singularities: Dance in the Age of Performance* (New York and London: Routledge, 2016).
96. Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1969); English translation by Mark Letser with Charles Stivale, *The Logic of Sense*, ed. by Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 52.
97. Luciano Berio, *Remembering the Future* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 17.
98. Angelo Guglielmi, *Avanguardia e sperimentalismo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1964), p. 56. For a comprehensive discussion of Guglielmi's ideas, see Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987), pp. 120–25.
99. See Fausto Curi, *Ordine e disordine* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1965). On the poetics of 'sperimentalismo' see Vincenzina Levato, *Lo sperimentalismo tra Pasolini e la neoavanguardia, 1955–1965* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2002). For a discussion of *Gruppo 63*'s attitude towards earlier avant-garde movements, especially Futurism, see Andrea Barbato et al., *Avanguardia e neo-avanguardia*, intro. by Giansiro Ferrata (Milan: Sugar, 1966).
100. See Edoardo Sanguineti, 'Sopra l'avanguardia', in his *Ideologia e linguaggio* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1965); revised and expanded edn, ed. by Erminio Risso (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2001), pp. 55–58; Umberto Eco 'La generazione di Nettuno', in his *Il costume di casa: evidenze e misteri dell'ideologia italiana* (Milan: Bompiani, 1973), pp. 267–74.
101. *Gruppo 63: il romanzo sperimentale*, ed. by Nanni Balestrini (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1966), revised and expanded second edition, ed. by Nanni Balestrini and Andrea Cortelessa (Rome: L'Orma, 2013), pp. 27–39.
102. *I Novissimi: poesie per gli anni sessanta*, p. 204.
103. Edoardo Sanguineti, 'Il trattamento del materiale verbale nei testi della nuova avanguardia', *Lettere italiane*, 16.5 (1964), reprinted in *Ideologia e linguaggio*, pp. 77–107 (p. 77).
104. François Le Lionnais, 'À propos de la littérature expérimentale: postface aux *Cent Mille Milliards de Poèmes* de Raymond Queneau' (1961), in *Oulipo, La Littérature potentielle: création, re-créations, récréations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), pp. 246–49.
105. Umberto Eco, 'Il Gruppo 63, lo sperimentalismo e l'avanguardia', in his *Sugli specchi e altri saggi*, pp. 93–104 (p. 96).

CHAPTER 5

❖

1972: Collapse

5.1. Introduction

The 1960s did not end well. On 12 December 1969, a large explosion rocked the interior of the National Agricultural Bank in Milan, killing seventeen people and leaving more than eighty wounded. During the afternoon of the same day, three further bombs were detonated in Rome, while a fourth bomb, also in Milan, was found unexploded. The terrorist attacks, which quickly came to be known as *la strage di Piazza Fontana* [the Piazza Fontana massacre], left the nation in a state of shock and fear. Amidst escalating political and social tensions, different fractions of society rushed to position themselves, and to assign blame. The police, predictably, looked towards the left and the anarchist movement. Within hours of the first explosion, over one hundred activists were arrested and detained in police stations across the country. One of them, the anarchist railway worker Giuseppe Pinelli, died on the night of 15 December 1969 after falling from the fourth-floor window of the police station, where he had been interrogated for three consecutive days and nights. At a hastily arranged press conference, the police claimed that the alleged culprit had killed himself but many refused to believe this version of the story, especially when Pinelli was subsequently cleared of all links to the bomb. Pinelli, an innocent man who had died in police custody, became a martyr for the political left, and his death a symbol of the abuse of state power. In his popular play, *Morte accidentale di un anarchico* [*Accidental Death of an Anarchist*] (1970), Dario Fo offered the public an extreme, satirical version of Pinelli's death, which put all the blame on the police.

Large demonstrations were held in Milan, in commemoration of the victims of the Piazza Fontana massacre and in defence of democracy. Journalists, writers, and filmmakers joined the campaign for justice and an alternative explanation for the massacre began to emerge. A multi-authored book, published one year after the event, suggested that the bombs had in fact been part of a secret plan to undermine democracy: a shady conspiracy of neo-fascists and secret service agents. The terrorist attacks, according to the co-authors of the volume, were a 'strage di stato' [state massacre], designed to escalate the political conflict and to legitimate an authoritarian coup.[1] Despite mounting evidence, the public prosecutors refused to consider this hypothesis, and inconclusive trials dragged on for decades. Only in the 1990s was a more thorough investigation finally carried out, but by then many

Italians had lost faith in their public institutions.[2] The massacre of 12 December 1969 and its aftermath had radicalized the Italian left, and especially the young, whose political ideals were shaped by the student protests and mass strikes of 1968. As journalist Corrado Stajano explains, 'Piazza Fontana e quel che ne seguì fu un evento che fece da cesura alla vita di tutta una generazione' [Piazza Fontana and that which followed was an event which marked a turning point for an entire generation].[3] In a matter of weeks, the optimistic atmosphere of the affluent 1960s had evaporated, and a bleaker and more violent mood took hold of the country: a sense of threat and of political urgency that came to dominate public debates, but also the work of many writers and artists, for years to come.

How did Italian artists of the early 1970s respond to this new climate of pessimism and fear? How did approaches to collaborative and intermedial art differ from the previous decade? As we saw in Chapter 4, the protagonists of Italy's *neoavanguardia* — Luciano Berio, Umberto Eco, and Edoardo Sanguineti, among many others — shared a confident belief in the gradual emancipation from obsolete social and aesthetic norms. Much of their early work, from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, was motivated by the conviction that cultural and social renewal could be achieved through a progressive transformation of the country's public institutions: universities, museums, publishing houses, state theatres and, perhaps most importantly, national radio and television. By the late 1960s, this idea had become unfashionable and more extreme voices called for a complete abolition of all hierarchies of social and cultural privilege. As we are going to see in this chapter, the cultural scene of the early 1970s was dominated by radical artists and thinkers, who treated the conventional distinctions between media as irrelevant to political struggle, and therefore as obsolete. Many of these cultural innovators had little or no access to public funding. Some had publicly sworn never to work again for state-funded institutions, while others held political views that stood in the way of collaboration with national radio and television. Without public funding, they had to keep a firm eye on costs and find new, affordable ways to produce and share their work. This had profound implications for intermediality. While experimental artists of the late 1950s and early 1960s had celebrated new technologies, specialist knowledge and the figure of the erudite, disruptive polymath, the new decade saw a growing interest in 'poor' materials, performance, and spontaneous creativity and public participation. Accessible techniques and affordable materials meant that groups could travel lightly and reach destinations beyond the traditional centres of cultural production. It also meant that performances could take place outside the contested spaces of public institutions, draw on diverse media and forms of expressions, and combine these in new and unexpected ways. Last but not least, simplicity and spontaneity served to achieve collective co-authorship.

5.2. Revolutionaries and Bystanders

New forms of intermediality and creative expression originated from the student protests of the late 1960s. During the fateful months of spring 1968, student protests and large occupations blocked activity at many Italian universities, from Trieste and Trento to Palermo and Catania. Frustrated by the strictures of an education system that had seen little change since the Gentile reform of 1923, the students rebelled against outdated curricula and rigid social norms, and demanded active participation.[4] Protests spread quickly beyond the gates of the university. Moving from lecture halls into factories and public squares, the students organized strikes, led protests, and joined picket lines.[5] They also targeted secondary schools, government institutions, and the cultural establishment at large. Unlike the contemporaneous student movements of France and Germany, which remained largely confined to the university, Italy's *sessantotto* [Sixty-Eight] took the shape of a wide anti-authoritarian protest: a broad alliance of radical social reformers, artists, workers, and the young.[6] In the cultural sphere, the prestige of time-honoured institutions was dismissed by the protesters as an expression of social inequity. Riots occurred during the opening night of La Scala, in Milan, in December 1968. Earlier in the year, art students and young filmmakers invaded the Pesaro film festival, while other groups staged protests in Piazza San Marco against the Venice Biennale.[7] Amidst ongoing controversies, the festival finally opened its gates in June 1968, but many pavilions remained closed and several artists covered their works or turned them around in solidarity with the protesters.[8] Other cultural events, like Milan's prestigious architectural Triennale, failed to open at all.

As historian John Foot has pointed out, 'the late 1960s and 1970s in Italy were a time of confrontation, violence, and bloodshed. Yet this was also a period of epochal and peaceful reform, which saw Italy's institutions dragged into the twentieth century'.[9] Over the span of less than a decade, many of the foundations of private and public life in Italy were transformed beyond recognition, as lawmakers voted to reform family law (1975) and the prison system (1975), legalized divorce (1970) and abortion (1978), abolished psychiatric hospitals (1978), established a modern national health system, and introduced major new rights for workers. Many of these changes were not driven by the traditional left, but by new political movements and campaign groups that had emerged from the student protests of 1968. Both the Catholic Church and the Communist Party lost influence over Italians, and the seemingly immovable political order of the post-war era suddenly appeared brittle. At the national elections in May 1972, the collective share of the two largest parties, *Democrazia Cristiana* [Christian Democracy, DC] and *Partito Comunista Italiano* [Italian Communist Party, PCI] shrank to a mere sixty-six percent of the total vote, while protest parties surged on the left and on the extreme right.[10] A sense of unpredictability and opportunity swept the country, enabling new forms of conviviality and social organization, but also causing new tensions and political divides.

When student protests spread across the country like wildfire, the PCI was torn over how to respond, and heated debates also raged within the Italian cultural scene. Some established writers and artists welcomed the protests, but others, also on the

left, were troubled by what they perceived as a worrying lack of class consciousness. The most paradigmatic expression of this attitude is probably Pier Paolo Pasolini's provocative free-verse poem, 'Il Pci ai giovani' [The PCI to the Young], which notoriously defended the police ('figli di poveri' [sons of the poor]) against the student protesters ('figli di papà' [spoiled brats]). Written in March 1968, when a group of student activists clashed with the police in Rome outside the School of Architecture, this poem mocked the revolutionary rhetoric of the *sessantottini* [protesters of 1968] in the face of their bourgeois backgrounds. As Pasolini remarks, the student activists were raised in a position of social privilege, during years of prosperity and economic growth. Consequently, most of them lacked any first-hand experience of the inequalities which they proclaimed to attack.[11]

Other emergent and iconic figures of the left saw the protests as an important opportunity: a unique chance for a revolutionary transformation of the arts, and of society. Filmmaker Marco Bellocchio, who had gained early fame at the age of twenty-five for *I pugni in tasca* [Fists in the Pocket] (1965), felt the need to relinquish any personal ambition, and to put his talent at the service of the revolt. As he recalled in an interview to Massimo Girelli, in 1988:

> C'era l'esigenza, ma anche l'obbligo, di un impegno personale totale. [...] avevo deciso persino di rinunciare a essere uomo di cinema, ad essere artista in proprio. Avevo deciso di fare unicamente del cinema di propaganda, a servizio del popolo.[12]
>
> [We felt a need, but also an obligation, to be personally committed in an absolute manner [...] I even decided to give up being a filmmaker or to be an artist in my own right. I decided to make only propaganda films, in the service of the people.]

A more established artist, the avant-garde painter and sculptor Enrico Baj, shared Bellocchio's conviction that art had to be political. From Paris, the founder of the *Movimento Arte Nucleare* [Nuclear Art Movement], had polemicized for years against what he saw as a dangerous tendency, among contemporary painters and sculptors, towards naively celebratory and political vacuous forms of abstractionism.[13] In 1972, when his native city Milan proposed to hold a large retrospective exhibition, Baj requested that his work be put on display in the *Sala delle Cariatidi* [Hall of Caryatids], a highly symbolic space in the Royal Palace, which had been damaged beyond repair during a British aerial attack on Milan in August 1943, and which still remained in ruins when, in 1953, Pablo Picasso chose it as the location for his anti-war masterpiece, *Guernica*. Baj's own project for the Hall — a large modular composition, made up of twelve removable panels, each three metres by twelve — was an homage to Picasso, a tribute to anarchism, and a stark reminder of the political importance of the arts. In direct response to Piazza Fontana, Baj named his work *I funerali dell'anarchico Pinelli* [The Funeral of the Anarchist Pinelli], a reference both to the recent tragic events in Milan and to Carlo Carrà's futurist painting *I funerali dell'anarchico Galli* [The Funeral of the Anarchist Galli] (1911). Twenty-two figures, cut out of wooden shapes, were assembled by Baj in the manner of a triptych. At the centre of the painting, a screaming figure — the railway worker Pinelli —

could be seen falling to his death. To his left, eleven anarchists and Pinelli's two daughters, Claudia and Silvia, bore silent witness. To his right, seven policemen, with medals on their chests and wheels for eyes, gesticulated wildly, while Pinelli's wife Licia appeared in a corner, on her knees, her mouth and eyes wide with shock and fear. The opening of the exhibition was planned for 17 May 1972, but on the morning of Friday, 17 March 1972, Luigi Calabresi — the policeman in charge of Pinelli's interrogation — was shot in the back of the head outside his flat in Milan, presumably by members of the extreme leftist group, *Lotta Continua* [Continuous Struggle]. Fears surged that the conflict would escalate, and the exhibition of Baj's work was cancelled.[14]

While Pasolini attacked the students, and Baj chose to side with the protesters, other artists went conspicuously silent. In July 1968, Italo Calvino refused to accept the prestigious Viareggio Book Prize, and insisted with the organizers that the news of his rejection should be treated as strictly confidential:

> Ritenendo definitivamente conclusa l'epoca dei premi letterari rinuncio al premio perché non mi sento di continuare ad avallare col mio consenso istituzioni ormai svuotate di significato.[15]
>
> [I believe that the age of literary awards is over, forever, and I therefore do not intend to accept this prize, because I do not want to provide support for institutional forms that are completely lacking in meaning.]

Calvino had moved to Paris in 1967, but continued to observe the cultural scene in Italy with meticulous interest. In December 1968, he joined Gianni Celati and Guido Neri in Bologna to discuss plans for a new multidisciplinary literary and cultural journal, *Alì Babà*, which would range across cultures and media. Following the intention of its makers, *Alì Babà* would address the students' demands for greater equality and social justice but resist their dismissive attitude towards culture at large. According to Calvino, Celati, and Neri, artists still had a role to play in the society of the future, but they had to invent new forms of creative practice that would speak directly to lived experience: 'la ridefinizione della letteratura come luogo di significati e di forme che non valgono solo per la letteratura' [the redefinition of literature as a site of meanings and forms that are not only relevant to literature].[16] As Monica Francioso has pointed out (drawing inspiration from the work of Jennifer Burns), this brief reflection already contains, *in nuce*, many of the ideas that would become characteristic of Calvino's *oeuvre* of the 1970s and early 1980s: 'a shift from the ideological and monolithical discourse of the 1950s and 1960s [...] to a much more fragmented, less party-political and much less ideological form of *impegno*'.[17] Yet Calvino quickly abandoned the project of a new journal and decided that the time was not ripe, after all, for a re-invention of literature. In a letter from Paris to the translator and literary scholar Michele Rago, he confessed that:

> In fondo mi trovo nella posizione ideale dello spettatore: succedono cose che mi interessano profondamente, che corrispondono in linea generale a quelle che auspicavo [...] nella quale non si chiede — anzi si esclude — la mia partecipazione. È uno sgravo di coscienza assolutamente distensivo; cosa potrei chiedere di più.[18]

> [Basically, I find myself in the ideal position of being a spectator: things are happening that interest me profoundly, that correspond in general terms to what I wanted to see happen [...] and my participation in them is not called for, in fact it is ruled out. This is something that appeases my conscience and allows me to relax fully; what more could I ask for?]

The arts, as they had been understood by Italians for decades, appeared to be on the verge of collapse. Until now, aesthetic practice had been understood as a thoughtful, self-reflective juxtaposition of different personal, societal, and ideological perspectives, resonant in wider society thanks to the cultural mediation of established institutions: universities, print media and television, the Catholic Church, museums, political parties, publishing houses. Outside this contested infrastructure, new spaces and different modes of intermedia encounter quickly began to emerge.

5.3. Performance, Politics and Provocation

The history of Italy's most well-known and influential post-war avant-garde movement, *Gruppo 63*, offers an interesting and revealing example of this shift. Unlike Pier Paolo Pasolini and Italo Calvino, the writers and artists of *Gruppo 63* quickly expressed solidarity with the students, and used their cultural influence to support the protests. In June 1967, a new multidisciplinary cultural journal, *Quindici*, was founded in Rome, under Alfredo Giuliani's editorship. Initially conceived as *Gruppo 63*'s latest official outlet, the journal quickly developed into a mouthpiece for the *sessantottini*.[19] When Nanni Balestrini replaced Giuliani as general editor in March 1969, *Quindici*'s interests and activities veered away from the *neoavanguardia*'s characteristic concerns — a heady mix of experimental literature, abstract painting, music, philosophy, avant-garde theatre, and so on — and came to focus almost exclusively on the perspectives of the student movement, with essays on Vietnam, Che Guevara, and the need for radical reform in secondary and higher education.[20] During the summer of 1969, Balestrini and Mario Perniola proclaimed in the journal that art, in all its forms, was irredeemably bourgeois and elitist and had to be abolished.[21] This was too much for Giuliani who, by then, had already resigned from the editorial board of *Quindici*, and was complaining about a new 'ortodossia del dissenso' [orthodoxy of dissent].[22] The controversy over *Quindici* caused considerable tension, and provoked a split that ultimately led to the dissolution of *Gruppo 63*.

As Renato Barilli and Angelo Guglielmi have pointed out, in one of the earliest retrospective accounts of the *neoavanguardia*, published in 1976, *Gruppo 63* included three different political and cultural currents — later re-named by Barilli as the 'tre anime del gruppo' [the group's three souls].[23] The first, associated with Sanguineti and Balestrini, viewed art in explicitly political terms and sought the proximity of the student movement and, subsequently, of *operaismo* [workerism] and the far left.[24] The second, led by Angelo Guglielmi, clung to a purely aesthetic *neosperimentalismo* [new experimentalism], in the manner of the early 1960s, and defended the legitimacy and importance of cultural institutions. Finally, Barilli cast himself as

the advocate of a supposedly midway position.[25] Further afield, more extreme views also held sway. At one end of the political spectrum, Mario Spinella campaigned to unite *Gruppo 63* around a neo-Marxist creed and defined the group's position as an 'estrema sinistra rivoluzionaria e democratica [...] per cui si tratta di sovvertire i significati tradizionali entro cui si svolge ancora oggi la vita politica, culturale e sociale italiana' [extreme revolutionary and democratic Left [...] which struggles to subvert the traditional meanings of Italian political, cultural, and social life].[26] At the opposite end, Giorgio Manganelli declared that literature and the arts must never be placed in the service of any political ideology, and had to serve instead to exacerbate the ambiguities and contradictions within *every* possible set of linguistic and ideological conventions:

> Pertanto io non credo ai tentativi, che si fanno, di ideologizzare l'avanguardia. È una operazione sostanzialmente conservatrice. Credo, al contrario, che oggi sia urgente affermare che la letteratura è per sua natura refrattaria a qualsivoglia contestazione ideologica.[27]
>
> [Therefore, I do not believe in the attempts that are being made to ideologize the avant-garde. This is a fundamentally conservative operation. On the contrary, I believe that it is important, now, to affirm that literature is by its nature recalcitrant and adverse to any ideological contestation.]

By the early 1970s, these political and ideological tensions among the members of *Gruppo 63* had contributed to an erosion of the *neoavantguardia*'s communal struggle towards progressive cultural renewal and had largely discredited the group's utopian vision of a diffuse, collective creativity that was not bound by disciplines or restricted to any specific artistic media, and that emerged spontaneously, through serendipitous encounter. Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, avant-garde artists had proclaimed that aesthetic experimentalism, per se, possessed a political value, because it was inspired by 'un lievito rivoluzionario contro le strutture e le istituzioni del sistema borghese' [a revolutionary ferment against the structures and institutions of the bourgeois system].[28] This position now appeared naive, especially to those, like Balestrini, who embraced more direct forms of political protest. In 1971, Umberto Eco officially declared 'the death of the Gruppo 63'.[29]

Outside the official cultural institutions, creative practice took on new and diverse forms, often in the context of political and social protest and artistic provocation. While some leading novelists and poets, as we have seen, were anxious about the relation between politics and the aesthetic, theatre artists tended to have fewer worries, and were happy to reach new and wider audiences. In August 1972, director Mario Ricci — whom we encountered in the first part of the previous chapter — took his theatre crew, the *Gruppo Sperimentazione Teatrale* [Experimental Theatre Group] from Rome to Munich. The Southern German city had won its Olympic bid in 1966, and in preparation for the Games theatre architect Werner Ruhnau had proposed the creation of a *Spielstraße* [Avenue of Games], in close proximity to the Olympic Stadium. Inspired by the work of the Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga, this space would host more than 220 visual artists and performers from every part of the world. Six theatre companies — from Sweden,

Japan, France, Italy, Argentina, and the USA — were invited by the organizers of the 1972 Games to prepare performances that would commemorate particular Olympiads of the past.[30] While Jérôme Savary's *Le Grand Magic Circus* poked fun at Pierre de Coubertin, and German theatre director and political activist Frank Burckner conjured images of an imaginary post-apocalyptic Olympiad of 2000, Ricci's provocative choice fell on the Berlin Olympic Games of 1936, which he wished to commemorate with a large mural depicting Adolf Hitler. Unsurprisingly, this proposal was rejected by the organizing committee in Munich. Ricci therefore opted for the 1932 Olympiad, held in Los Angeles, and set his actors to work on the creation of 140 identical, large cardboard boxes, each two metres wide and one metre high. Sixty of these boxes were painted in such a way that, if assembled in the form of a single 'super-billboard', they would show on either side the images of figures associated with the United States of 1932: Mickey Mouse, Al Capone, a 10-million dollar bill, and a woman with a sash running from her waist over her shoulder, with the word 'Depression' on it in large letters (Fig. 5.1).

As Ricci explained in his notes, these images were not intended as historical references, but rather meant as a playful critique of capitalism and consumer culture:

> Anche se le OLIMPIADI 1932 sono avvenute a Los Angeles, non si vuole qui fare riferimento particolare alla situazione americana dell'epoca ma piuttosto ad una situazione più generale [...]. Ed inoltre, proprio per lo spazio e tempo limitatissimi [...] più che informare, in senso critico, si vuole dare 'sensazioni-critiche'. Questo progetto prevede uno spettatore atipico; più che uno spettatore un 'passante' il quale può entrare in contatto con lo spettacolo per tempi difficilmente calcolabili, da un minuto a mezz'ora, ad esempio. La meccanica della nostra rappresentazione farà si che, anche chi resta un solo minuto abbia la sua piccola 'sensazione'.[31]
>
> [Although the 1932 OLYMPICS took place in Los Angeles, we do not want to refer here in particular to the American situation of the epoch, but rather to a more general situation [...]. And furthermore, precisely because of the very limited space and time [...] rather than informing, in a critical sense, we want to provide 'critical-sensations'. This project envisages an atypical spectator; not really a spectator but rather a 'passer-by' who may come into contact with the show for periods of time that are difficult to calculate, from one minute to half an hour, for example. The mechanics of our representation ensures that even those who stay for just one minute will experience their own little 'sensation'.]

Every morning, Ricci's actors began their performance promptly at 10 o'clock, dressed in identical blue overalls. In complete silence, they built a large maze and then, with the remaining boxes, the billboard. As American theatre scholar Michael Kirby recalls, 'the spectator had the feeling that he was watching a highly drilled worker team. When the labyrinth was constructed, spectators were invited to [...] walk through the maze. They were handed fake money (10-million dollar bills) as they entered'.[32] In the early afternoon, the second part of the performance resumed, literally, with a collapse: Ricci's crew demolished the carefully constructed labyrinth of cardboard boxes and, finally, toppled the four-metre-high and sixteen-metre-wide wall. From the 'ruins', actors in a variety of grotesque costumes emerged and distributed clothes to the audience. 'You might be given a "free

Fig. 5.1. '*Los Angeles Olimpiadi 1932', Claudio Previtera, Carlo Montesi*, Munich, July 1972; photo: Luigi Perrone; courtesy of Filippo Ricci and Luigi Perrone

jacket" by a very attractive Italian woman in a Mickey Mouse costume', remembers Kirby, 'or a "dress" from a lady wearing a potato sack with a shoulder sash reading "Depression" '.[33]

Chigo de Chiara — an Italian journalist and playwright who had earned national fame in the early 1960s for his collaboration with composer Ennio Morricone — praised the political undertones of Ricci's theatrical provocation: 'la fame degli immigranti, l'affarismo gangster e la polizia che si interessa assai più dei manifestanti che di Al Capone' [starving immigrants, gangster capitalism and the police, who are much more interested in the protesters than in Al Capone].[34] In the late afternoon of each day, this polemic reached its apotheosis when two actors, dressed as Superman and Pierre de Coubertin, stalked members of the audience and tried to 'sell' them second-hand Bavarian clothes, which Ricci and his crew had bought wholesale in Prato:

> [Abiti] bonariamente e generosamente spedit[i] in Italia per 'vestire' i poveri italiani: calzoni corti di cuoio con bretelle colorate, cappelli con la piuma...ed altri simili orrori dei quali si faceva, e si fa ancora, ricco mercato a Prato (ed lì che noi li comprammo! [*sic*]). Questo mercatino non piaceva molto ai tedeschi e così ogni giorno ci si doveva difendere da loro contestazioni più o meno violente.[35]
>
> [These [clothes] had been sent to Italy by good-natured and generous people to 'dress' the poor Italians: short leather trousers with coloured suspenders, hats with feathers ... and other similar horrors, which were then, and are still sold

> for a profit in Prato (and this is where we bought them!). The Germans were not particularly keen on this sale and so every day we had to defend ourselves against their more or less violent protests.]

Aside from a few irritated Bavarians, audiences reacted positively to the performance, which was also praised in the German press.[36] But not all critics were impressed by the work of the *Gruppo Sperimentazione Teatrale*. In a review for the Italian daily *Paese Sera*, young theatre critic and future novelist Franco Cordelli dismissed Ricci's project as 'francamente deludente' [frankly disappointing] and remarked that political clarity had been achieved at the expense of artistic *finesse*. According to Cordelli, 'Ricci esce da un teatro di puri significanti per entrare in un teatro di significati' [Ricci abandoned a theatre of pure signifiers to enter a theatre of concepts].[37] Just like in Calvino's remarks on *sessantotto*, political sympathy was overshadowed by a deep-seated fear that ideological fervour might compromise aesthetic form, and that a surplus of *impegno* [political engagement] would risk diminishing the prestige of avant-garde art, which a previous generation of artists had achieved.

In the end, Ricci's carnivalesque critique of predatory capitalism was not brought to a halt by disapproving theatre critics or indignant passers-by. Rather, like in the case of Baj's *I funerali dell'anarchico Pinelli*, political art became a collateral victim of political violence. Just before dawn on 5 September 1972, Palestinian terrorists broke into the apartments of the Israeli team at the Munich Olympic Village, took several hostages, and ultimately ended up killing eleven Israeli athletes. Four Arab guerrillas and a Bavarian policeman also died during the final standoff between the terrorists and German special forces. Billed by Germany as 'the smiling Games', the 1972 Olympics had suddenly become the site of the most shocking tragedy in the Federal Republic's brief history. A ceremony was held at the Olympic Stadium, and the IOC swiftly declared that the Games would continue, 'to demonstrate that the Olympic ideal is stronger than terror and violence'.[38] The activities at *Spielstraße*, by contrast, were immediately cancelled. For nearly five decades, cultural commentators have speculated about the symbolism of this decision, with some voices accusing the organizers of opportunism or cowardice and others arguing that the early 1970s, with their recurrent episodes of bloodshed and brutal political conflict, were simply not a period for playfulness and creative invention.[39] But were Franco Cordelli and others right to decry a decline of creativity? Had the arts fallen victim to political extremism? In the context of our present inquiry, we must consider this question by exploring the differences between the intermediality of Ricci's *Spielstraße* project and the cultural achievements of the early 1960s, which were discussed in the previous chapter.

5.4. From Collaborative to Collective Creativity

As we have seen, the popularity and success of *Los Angeles Olimpiadi 1932* depended largely on the visual impact of Ricci's installation and on the spontaneous interaction between his sixty 'attori-operai' [actor-workers] and members of the audience. By contrast, Ricci's engagement with music and the spoken word appears surprisingly underdeveloped, or even unimaginative. In the preparatory notes for his Munich project, the Italian theatre director specified that the first part of the performance would take place in complete silence. With regard to the second part, he remained vague about the choice of music:

> Poca musica leggera, molti folk-song e musica jazz (New Orleans ecc); comunicati commerciali, notizie di Borsa, notizie politiche e sociali, ecc. Mentre la parte della colonna sonora rimane tipica dell'epoca, le notizie in generale assumono un aspetto più rarefatto, meno collocabile con l'epoca in questione. Si vuole dare qui più che 'l'informazione' derivanti da queste notizie, le 'sensazioni' che queste notizie danno. Il metodo usato sarà quello delle immagini musicali, e quelle parlate, cosicché le parole saranno a volte 'quasi cancellate' dalla musica e viceversa.[40]
>
> [Some pop music, many folk-songs and jazz (New Orleans etc.); commercials, news from the stock market, political and social news, etc. While the part of the soundtrack remains typical of the era, the news in general takes on a more rarefied aspect, less traceable to the era in question. Here, we want to give more than 'the information' deriving from this news, the 'sensations' that this news give. The method used will be that of musical and spoken images, so that at times the words will be 'almost cancelled out' by the music, and vice versa.]

Ricci's *nonchalance* about sound would have been unthinkable a decade earlier, during the early years of post-war experimental theatre, when every aspect of an intermedial project was meticulously considered and carefully choreographed. As we saw in the previous chapter, Edoardo Sanguineti, for example, wrote his libretti for *Passaggio* [Passage] (1963) and *Esposizione* [Exposition] (1963) directly in musical notation, in order to have perfect control over the relation between music and the spoken word. Similarly, in Ricci's own *movimento numero uno per marionetta sola* [movement number one for solo marionette] (1963), the voice of television presenter Riccardo Paladini was pre-recorded and his speech written in advance. In comparison, the apparent lack of attention to sound in the preparatory notes for *Los Angeles Olimpiadi 1932* might appear, at first sight, as an example of the superficiality that had been deplored by Cordelli: a convenient display of radical postures which disguises a lack of genuine aesthetic creativity. And yet, Cordelli's critique is misplaced, since it overlooks an important dimension of Ricci's work of the early 1970s: the director's growing interest in collective creativity. This crucial aspect of Ricci's project is in fact borne out by a recollection of American actress Deborah Hayes, who joined Ricci's theatre company in the 1960s and who recalls her experience at *Spielstraße* as follows: 'Someone has an idea for a starting point, usually Mario [Ricci], and we begin to work simultaneously on the scenic objects and the action'.[41] Again, it is helpful to compare Hayes's recollections to Anna

Halprin's very different experience with Berio and Sanguineti in the early 1960s, which was discussed in the previous chapter. During the rehearsals for *Esposizione*, in 1963, the six dancers led by Halprin were not given any say in the final shape of the performance. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 4, they were not even allowed to hear Cathy Berberian's vocal performance until the opening night at *Teatro La Fenice*. By contrast, Ricci's intentionally vague remarks about the music to be used for *Los Angeles Olimpiadi 1932* must be understood as a deliberate opening to creative interventions (spontaneous or planned) by other members of the *Gruppo Sperimentazione Teatrale* — a shift from collaborative to collective intermedia authorship.

Similar creative strategies can be found in a more well-known art project, which dates back to the same period. In the autumn of 1972, theatre director Giuliano Scabia received a letter from Franco Basaglia, the influential radical psychiatrist who had recently been appointed director of the psychiatric asylum in Trieste. In this letter, Basaglia invited Scabia to run a theatre workshop with patients and hospital staff, as a way of breaking down institutional barriers within the asylum, and between the city of Trieste and the 'city of the mad'. Scabia accepted with enthusiasm and arrived in Trieste in January 1973. He would spend three months in the asylum and give shape to one of the most widely remembered public art projects of the early 1970s: *Marco Cavallo* [Marco Horse]. This work consisted primarily of an enormous, blue, wooden and papier-mâché statue of a horse (Fig. 5.2), which the patients and hospital staff built together with Scabia, and with Basaglia's cousin, the painter Vittorio Basaglia. A young Friulian painter from Gorizia, Federico Velludo, also volunteered to join the workshop. The statue was named Marco, after a horse that had regularly dragged the laundry cart across the hospital. Here is how Scabia, in his diary, recalls the origin of the project, during the third day of the theatre workshop:

> Oltre a me, Vittorio [Basaglia] e Federico [Velludo] ci sono cinque o sei ricoverati, uomini e donne. Mentre parliamo qualcuno disegna, altri ascoltano. Siamo imbarazzati perché non sappiamo che parole usare, e i malati sembrano indifferenti. Un'anziana signora, Angelina, sta disegnando un cavallo con un corpo abbastanza geometrico, e la pancia suddivisa in piccoli rettangoli: dice che vorrebbe far entrare nel cavallo delle cose, ma che non ci riesce. Quando si parla dell'oggetto grande da costruire dice: 'Facciamo un cavallo'. C'era un cavallo fino a due mesi fa in OPP [Ospedale Psichiatrico Provinciale di Trieste]. Trasportava in su e in giù il carrettino coi fagotti della biancheria. Ma ormai era vecchio e stanco. Avevano deciso di ammazzarlo. L'ha salvato una petizione di tutto l'ospedale, malati infermieri e medici. Hanno ottenuto che venisse venduto. L'ha comprato, si dice, un farmacista che l'ha portato in un paesino del Friuli. Il cavallo si chiamava Marco. Marco Caval. [...] La storia del cavallo Marco ci viene raccontata a pezzi, un po' da tutti.[42]
>
> [In addition to myself, Vittorio [Basaglia] and Federico [Velludo], there are five or six patients, men and women. While we speak, somebody draws, others listen. We are embarrassed because we do not know what words to use, and the patients seem indifferent. An elderly lady, Angelina, is drawing a horse with a fairly geometric body, and the belly divided into small rectangles: she says

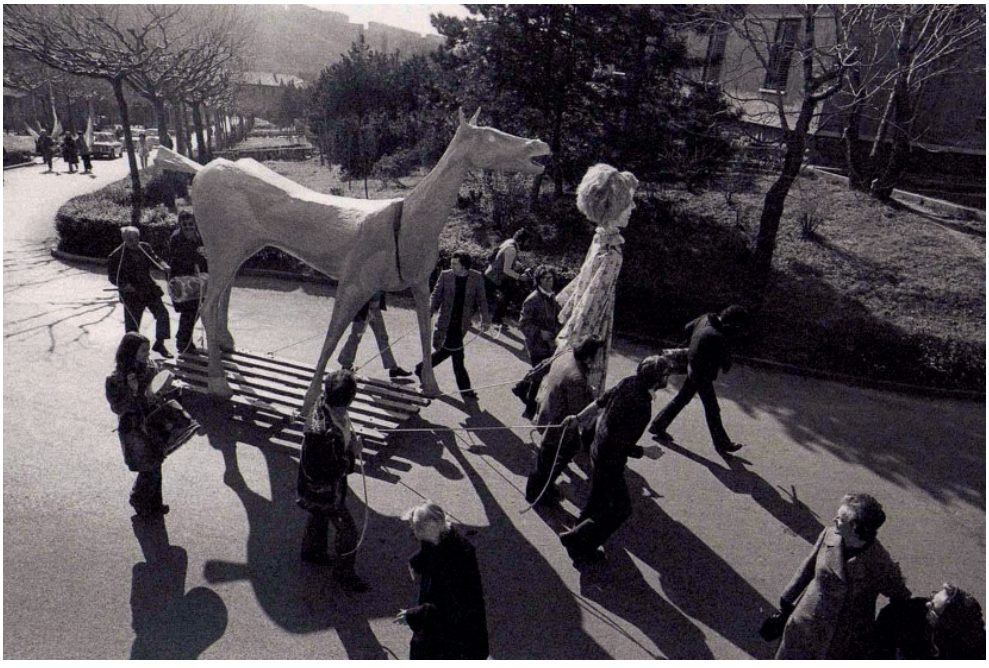

Fig. 5.2. *Marco Cavallo in corteo a Trieste*, 25 February 1973; photo: Claudio Ernè; courtesy of Dipartimento Salute Mentale Trieste.

> she would like to get things into the horse, but that she can't. When we speak about building a large object she says: 'Let's make a horse'. There was, until two months ago, a horse in the OPP [Provincial Psychiatric Hospital of Trieste]. It used to carry a cart with the bedsheets back and forth. But it had become old and tired. They had decided to kill it. It was saved by a petition which had been signed by everybody in the hospital: patients, nurses, and doctors. They made sure that it was sold. They say that it was bought by a pharmacist, who took it to a small town in Friuli. The horse was called Marco. Marco Caval. [...] This story of Marco, the horse, is told to us in pieces, a bit by everybody.]

When the steel gates of the Trieste Asylum were removed in March 1973, patients and local residents took part in dismantling them, and the four-metre-tall horse was carried out into the streets, and paraded in triumph across the city. Basaglia and Scabia had informed the press, to make sure that the performance would be recorded for national and international audiences.[43] As social psychiatrist Tom Burns explains, the performance, for Basaglia, was not simply a way of attracting public attention. He wanted 'to change society as much as to change mental healthcare. His approach to deinstitutionalization was marked as much by its theatricality as by its politics'.[44]

At the time of the Marco Cavallo project, both Basaglia and Scabia had already gained considerable notoriety in their respective fields as innovators and outspoken critics of the establishment. The Venetian psychiatrist had started his ambitious mental health reform in 1961, in the border town of Gorizia, where he had refused

to give permission for the tying-up of patients, had allowed them to see relatives and friends, and had organized open meetings in which patients and staff collectively discussed the running of the institution. In 1968, this experience of radical reform became famous thanks to a best-selling, co-authored book, *L'istituzione negata* [The Institution Denied], edited by Basaglia, which spawned similar debates and reforms in other parts of Italy.[45] Meanwhile, Scabia, a poet with a university degree in moral philosophy, had developed an interest in experimental theatre and concrete music during the early 1960s. He had attended the second meeting of *Gruppo 63* and worked with the avant-garde composer Luigi Nono. In June 1967, Scabia took part in the famous *convegno di Ivrea* [Ivrea conference] which brought together experimental theatre makers from all over Italy, in response to a manifesto that had been signed by twenty-five actors, directors and theatre groups.[46] This manifesto called for a new theatre, free from the cultural and political pressures of state funding, but nevertheless capable of reaching large and diverse audiences:

> Non vogliamo dar vita a un teatro clandestino per pochi iniziati, né rimanere esclusi dalle possibilità offerte dalle organizzazioni di pubblico alle quali riteniamo di aver diritto; rifiutiamo però un'attività ufficialmente definita come sperimentale, ma costretta ad allinearsi alle posizioni dominanti. Il teatro deve poter arrivare alla contestazione assoluta e totale.[47]
>
> [We do not want to create a clandestine theatre for a few initiates, nor to be excluded from the opportunities provided by the public institutions, to which we believe we are entitled. But we also reject any activity that is officially defined as experimental, and which is forced to align itself with the dominant positions. Theatre must be a site of absolute and total protest.]

Like the members of *Gruppo 63*, the signatories of the *manifesto di Ivrea* [Ivrea manifesto] — journalist Corrado Augias; film directors Giuseppe Bartolucci, Marco Bellocchio, and Liliana Cavani; actor and director Carmelo Bene; singer Cathy Berberian; theatre directors Leo De Berardinis and Franco Quadri; painter and illustrator Emanuele Luzzati, among numerous others — insisted that they had a duty to be radical *and* a right to be in charge of the nation's cultural life and public institutions. This position would soon appear problematic. In the context of the escalating political conflicts of the early 1970s, it became untenable. By the time he received Basaglia's letter, Scabia had already left Milan's *Piccolo Teatro* [Little Theatre] in protest, and had declared that he would never again work for a state theatre.

A comparison between the Marco Cavallo project and Scabia's earlier collaboration with Luigi Nono illustrates the importance of the shift from collaborative to collective authorship. Scabia's creative partnership with Nono appears in many ways similar to Berio's and Sanguineti's collaborations of the early 1960s, which we discussed in the previous chapter. Scabia met the composer in 1961, during a performance of his earliest experimental opera, *Intolleranza 1960* [Intolerance 1960], and was enormously impressed. He spontaneously volunteered to write the libretto for Nono's next project, an opera that would expose the health and safety risks of the modern factory.[48] The result of their joint efforts, *La fabbrica illuminata* [The Illuminated Factory], was first performed in Venice during the 1964 Biennale Music

Festival.[49] Commissioned by RAI, but subsequently censored by the Italian state broadcaster, it included sounds that Nono had previously recorded at the Italsider steel plant in Genoa and that were juxtaposed in the final version of the opera with a live soprano voice and textual fragments from two poems by Cesare Pavese.

La fabbrica illuminata boosted Nono's international fame and brought Scabia to the attention of the Italian cultural scene. Like Sanguineti's and Berio's collaborative works of the early 1960s, it challenged century-old aesthetic conventions, broke down barriers between media, and focused on social contents and political messages that had never previously been shown on the Italian stage. On the other hand, it firmly maintained the traditional roles of the composer, the librettist, the choreographer, and the performer. The steel workers at the Italsider plant in Genoa had no control over how the noises of their factory would be recorded, electronically transformed, or shared with theatre audiences. By contrast, the patients and hospital staff of the Trieste asylum were actively involved in the making of Marco Cavallo and in the public parade of 1973: each and every one of them was a co-author of Scabia's performance.

5.5. Art for the Coming Dark Age

Before we move on, it is important to consider a further characteristic of performance art in the early 1970s, which relates directly to the focus of this volume. As we saw in Chapter 4, experimental artists and theorists such as Luciano Berio, Umberto Eco, and Edoardo Sanguineti shared a fascination with new technologies and media, which they often explored in collaboration. Established in 1955, the Milanese *Studio di fonologia musicale* [Studio of Musical Phonology] served as a powerful national emblem for this communal passion, and was also one of its most productive venues. Like their Futurist precursors, the neo-avant-garde artists of the late 1950s and early 1960s believed that creativity went hand in hand with technological progress. Their experimental practice focused on new and tantalizingly innovative forms of mediation, including electronic music and computer poetry.[50] In this context, partnerships between artists, across media, were seen as intrinsically positive, since they widened the individual artist's range of creative expression. But collaborations also occurred for practical reasons. Indeed, the decision to work in pairs or small groups was often due to the complexity of the medium. For example, when experimental poet Nanni Balestrini decided, in December 1961, to use an IBM 7070 computer for the composition of his first electronic poem, *Tape Mark 1*, he had to rely on the expertise of a computer engineer, Alberto Nobis, who 'translated' Balestrini's combinatory rules into a symbolic language, 'autocoder', using 322 punch cards. This operation took place in the basement room of a Milanese bank, *Cassa di Risparmio delle Provincie Lombarde*, where the computer was kept, and was observed with great curiosity by an exclusive audience of avant-gardists and intellectuals, including Eco and Berio.[51]

By contrast, performance art of the early 1970s, such as Ricci's *Los Angeles Olimpiadi 1932* and Scabia's *Marco Cavallo*, relied on simple techniques and inexpensive, everyday materials: cardboard boxes, paint, wood, papier-mâché, second-

hand clothes, and so on. This choice was in part dictated by practical needs. Multi-track tape recorders and data processing machines were expensive and Italian theatre companies of the 1970s were poor, and not only in the programmatic sense of Jerzy Grotowski's seminal book, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968).[52] 'Poor theatre', for the Polish director and his Italian friends and disciples — Eugenio Barba and Mario Biagini, among others — consisted in the co-creation of affordable, unique, and unrepeatable events. 'Low-tech intermediality' served to abolish barriers between cultural elites and wider audiences, and to achieve new forms of inclusivity. It also helped to challenge artificial distinctions between performers and audiences, and between professional and amateur artists. For example, people with very different skills and abilities contributed to the making of Marco Cavallo, and in this way created a new, shared space outside the closed gates, rigid hierarchies, and contested protocols of the asylum.

Artists of the early 1970s had many reasons for working with 'poor' materials, and in inclusive and accessible spaces. Some of these reasons, as we have seen, were economic. Others take us beyond the realm of the creative arts, or rather, lead us to think less narrowly about artistic practice. In the aftermath of 1968, many individuals and groups no longer thought of themselves as cultural innovators, in the traditional sense of term. Rather, they claimed to be advancing the world revolution, like Marco Bellocchio, or they rehearsed countercultural survival strategies, which seemed apt for a country on the brink of destruction, and with no room for grand dreams of progress or growth-driven consumption. Expertise, disciplinary training, and differentiation between artistic media were considered reactionary. In Florence, the radical architecture collective UFO provides a good example of these attitudes. Founded in 1967 by five students of architecture — Lapo Binazzi, Riccardo Foresi, Titti Maschietto, Carlo Bachi, and Patrizia Cammeo — this group provocatively described their practice as 'terrorismo urbanistico' [terrorist urbanism]. It gained notoriety during the student protests of 1968, thanks to large, zeppelin-shaped hot air balloons with Situationist slogans, the so-called 'urboeffimeri' [urbo-ephemerals].[53]

At the time of the Munich Olympics, UFO worked on a large, itinerant project, 'Il Giro d'Italia è per davvero un progetto d'urbanistica' [The Giro d'Italia is in truth an urban planning project], which took place consecutively in several Italian cities and combined a range of different media: performance, song, photography, and the nascent medium of video art, among others. Individual events included 'attraversamento del Centro Storico' [crossing of the historic City Centre] and 'esercitazioni nel tratto del territorio A-B' [exercises in the area of territory A-B], both of which were carried out during the summer of 1972. In preparation for the former, the group gathered at Piazza Santo Stefano, in Bologna, where some UFO members played a game of Ring Taw with bottle caps, while others waived red flags and chanted left-wing protest songs. 'Esercitazioni', by contrast, consisted of a bicycle ride in the Tuscan hills, which was recorded on Super8 film, and during which members of the collective unsuccessfully tried to 'occupy', break open, and even carry away a tool-shed owned by ANAS, the Italian state company responsible for the construction and maintenance of motorways.[54] As UFO co-founder Lapo

Binazzi has pointed out, this apparently clownish performance was more than mere Dadaist slapstick. According to Binazzi, it served to disrupt the cultural logic of consumer capitalism by 'dimostrare come gli oggetti e anche le idee, specialmente quelle buone, siano accessori del capitalismo ritenuti a torto espressioni insostituibili dell'attività umana' [demonstrating how objects and even ideas, especially good ones, are accessories of capitalism, and wrongly considered irreplaceable expressions of human activity].[55] 'Esercitazioni' can therefore be understood as an exploration of new forms of political activism. Just as importantly, it manifested an interest in recording and sharing lived experience in new ways, and through different media.

UFO's situationist performance art was motivated by an environmentalist, utopian desire to leave industrial civilization behind. Since the nineteenth century, the modern city had been a catalyst for new forms of artistic creativity: a space of serendipitous encounter, filled with immeasurable promise. This continued to be true for Italian artists during the years of the economic boom, as we saw in the previous chapter. Binazzi and his friends, by contrast, had come to loathe city life, which they associated with the ills of consumerism, state control, and environmental pollution. At the time of the *Giro d'Italia* project, the UFO group dreamt of a simple, rural life, and of new forms of artistic regeneration and personal fulfilment:

> Ci restano degli attrezzi rudimentali con cui possiamo fare qualcosa, un golf all'uncinetto, un ricamo, dei comportamenti rudimentali come scalare un albero, fare una nuotata, un giro in bicicletta, delle tecniche rudimentali come canalizzare l'acqua, orientarsi.[56]
>
> [We are left with rudimentary tools with which we can do something, crochet a pullover, embroidery, and with rudimentary behaviours such as climbing a tree, swimming, riding a bicycle, and with rudimentary techniques such as channelling water, orienting ourselves.]

Binazzi's claims about the beauty of pastoral life sheds light on UFO's parodic (and poignantly unsuccessful) attempts to 'claim' a locked ANAS tool-shed as shelter in the countryside. In the words of UFO's most prolific member, 'esecitazioni' reveals both a deep-seated desire to 'ricominciare da capo' [start again from scratch] and the blatant absurdity of such a desire. In a densely populated country, shaped by environmental degradation, capitalist consumption and state surveillance, the countryside offered no real possibility of escape: 'rimane il pianeta il cielo le stelle gli alberi... per ricominciare da capo. Purtroppo si scoprono delle prese di corrente a pagamento nel territorio e dei telefoni-spia, il capitale è arrivato fino lì' [We still have the planet, the sky, the stars, the trees... so that we can start again from scratch. Unfortunately, it turns out that there are commercial charging stations in this landscape, and spy phones. Capital has found its way to this place].[57] Consequently, the group's pioneering use of the nascent medium of Super8 film could be viewed as a precursor of future forms of political activism, but also, paradoxically, appeared to foreshadow emergent regimes of surveillance.[58]

Binazzi's radicalism and deep-seated pessimism were typical of the early 1970s. Importantly, they were not simply a response, at national level, to political

instability, economic crisis or extremist violence — three phenomena that are frequently associated with the apocalyptic mood of Italy's 'anni di piombo' [years of lead].[59] As we have seen, UFO's darkly playful 'terrorist urbanism' was also an early artistic expression of what German historian Joachim Radkau has described as 'the age of ecological revolution': the emergence, since 1970, of an unprecedented collective awareness of unfolding planetary environmental crisis.[60] At the height of the cold war, Italians experienced pressures and fears that were shared by many self-perceived 'peripheries' in cold-war political geography.[61] Their nation was physically remote from the global centres of political, cultural, and military power, but nevertheless brutally exposed to the military logic and devastating effects of cold-war globalization. Consequently, Italian artists and intellectuals cared about political crises at national level — such as the results of the 1972 national elections — but were equally worried about vast, transnational pressures that shaped and transformed their local habitats: political, military, and economic interests that operated on a planetary scale; weapons of mass destruction; industrialization; irreparable environmental degradation; human population growth; the risk of genocidal wars. As UFO's Situationist satire shows, it was impossible to escape these pressures. A sense of doom was intensely felt, not only in sprawling industrial cities like Milan and in political hotspots like Rome, but also in quaint historical and university towns, and even in the idyllic, seemingly timeless landscapes of rural Tuscany.

In the United States, a new generation of environmental thinkers had begun to draw attention to the state of the planet, human population growth, and the exhaustion of natural resources. Earth Day was celebrated for the first time on 22 April 1970, and biologists Paul Ehrlich and Garrett Hardin, among others, called for new modes of thinking and greater levels of environmental responsibility.[62] In Italy, neo-Malthusian fears about human overpopulation and debates about societal collapse led to the creation of the Club of Rome, in 1968, and found expression in the Club's first report, *The Limits to Growth* (1972).[63] According to the Club's co-founder, Italian industrialist Aurelio Peccei, the turn of the 1970s marked the end of an age of environmental innocence:

> Con l'anno 1969 si è chiuso un decennio importante nella storia dell'umanità. All'inizio degli anni Sessanta si era sperato che per i popoli poveri questo fosse il decennio dello sviluppo, ma molte illusioni sono presto cadute. Serpeggia anzi un'aria fin de siècle, e anche nelle società ricche e orgogliose della loro opulenza si moltiplicano i sintomi di un profondo malessere.[64]
>
> [1969 marked the end of an important decade in the history of humanity. At the start of the Sixties, people had hoped that this would be the decade of development, for the poor nations. But these illusions soon vanished. By contrast, we now find ourselves in a fin-de-siècle mood, and even wealthy societies, who take pride in their opulence, witness more and more symptoms of a profound malaise.]

In the new decade, apocalyptic fears about environmental collapse dominated everyday life, as was revealed by the editorial success of Roberto Vacca's bleak,

popular-scientific bestseller *Il Medioevo Prossimo Venturo* [The Coming Dark Age] (1971). Vacca, a Roman electrical engineer and expert in industrial control systems, had tried his luck as a science-fiction writer in the 1960s, with the novel *Il robot e il minotauro* [The Robot and the Minotaur] (1963), but only achieved national and international fame in the early 1970s, when he prophesied a complete breakdown of communication and traffic networks across the Western world. This 'coming dark age', according to Vacca, would be a combined result of population growth, urbanization, and unmonitored technological progress: three factors which, he claimed, would eventually lead to widespread system failure and the collapse of global infrastructures.

In the central chapter of his book, 'La congiura dei sistemi urbani' [The Conspiracy of Urban Systems], Vacca explained how a major catastrophe could arise from an unfortunate concatenation of seemingly minor calamities.[65] A railway accident in New York, he suggests, might cause large, paralyzing traffic jams; streets would be blocked by abandoned vehicles; air traffic controllers would not be relieved; their growing fatigue could result in a mid-air collisions; planes might fall on a network of power lines; without electricity, people would freeze; whole buildings would be destroyed if improvised fires got out of hand, and so on. Vacca firmly believed that this catastrophe — or a similar series of unfortunate events — was bound to occur sooner or later, and that system failure would inevitably trigger a wider political and economic crisis. Survivors of a major catastrophe, he speculated, might make an effort to re-build civilization, but would soon become aware of their own, tragic helplessness. Subsequent generations, according to Vacca, would no longer even attempt to re-create the technological and political achievements of the past. Instead of inheriting a world of utopian possibilities, they would find themselves trapped in a 'new dark age', where society had once again become co-extensive with the archaic confines of the clan or the city state: 'Ovviamente, il supersistema — nel quale configuriamo oggi la società — non sarà fra i superstiti, ma si frazionerà in molti piccolo sistemi scarsamente comunicanti fra loro, autarchici e dotati di una certa stabilità' [Of course, the super-system, which we now evoke to define society, will not survive, but will break up into many small poorly interconnected systems, autarchic and endowed with some stability].[66]

In brief, Vacca saw humanity on a certain path towards collapse, followed by a post-apocalyptic, neo-medieval age of poverty, superstition, and violence. Sophisticated, emergent forms of artistic intermediality, with their extensive reliance on new technologies, were just another example of the growing complexity of social systems that, for Vacca, would ultimately spell doom. He paid little direct attention to the creative arts, and showed no sympathy for environmentalists, or for leftist critics of capitalist globalization. In fact, he dismissed the burgeoning environmental movement as squeamish and unrealistic, and described the student protests of 1968 as naive and involuntarily complicit with authoritarian regimes in Russia and China.[67] Nevertheless, Vacca's sinister conjectures about post-industrial life bear a striking resemblance to the 'poverty' that was put on display by anti-capitalists such as *Gruppo Sperimentazione Teatrale* or UFO. Like these artists, Vacca

insisted on the importance of simple, shared forms of knowledge, and believed that humanity would only survive the coming dark ages and enter a second Renaissance if scientists overcame their complicity with corporate capital and their obsession with social fame. In Vacca's imagined post-apocalyptic future, the men and women of science form quasi-monastic orders, where basic, vital forms of communal knowledge are preserved. Like Ricci's and Scabia's spontaneous art collectives, they strive, in dark times, to make their knowledge accessible to all groups of society: 'I nuovo monaci dovrebbero conservare informazioni e dovrebbero ricordare i modi in cui si fanno certe cose, se accettiamo — come credo sia giusto — che il concetto di cultura implichi sia il conoscere che il saper fare' [The new monks would need to preserve information and remember the ways in which certain things are done, if we accept — as I think is correct — that the concept of culture implies both knowledge and skills].[68] After the collapse of modern society, Vacca imagined, all remaining forms of creativity (pictorial, literary, scientific, social) would inevitably converge in one place.

5.6. Conclusions

Il medioevo prossimo venturo was written as a forecast. Vacca had no doubt that the catastrophic events described in his book would happen, and that their occurrence was only a matter of time. Indeed, he dated the precise beginnings of the New Dark Age between 1985 and 1995.[69] At this level, Vacca's analysis is clearly obsolete and appears symptomatic of a peculiarly cold-war fascination with melodramatic, apocalyptic fearmongering. *Il medioevo prossimo venturo* acquires a different significance, however, if we read Vacca's book as a *scenario*: a plausible fiction about a possible, but not inevitable, near-future. As German literary critic Eva Horn has argued, the scenario was one of the most distinctive cultural forms to emerge from the early cold-war period, where it was exemplified, for instance, by two books written by North American military strategist Herman Kahn: *On Thermonuclear War* (1960) and *Thinking about the Unthinkable* (1962).[70] Unlike earlier forms of prophetic writing, scenarios did not claim to represent a known future, but embraced the uncertainty of the modern age and its attention to technology and quantitative methods. In this way, they combined the conventions of the philosophical thought experiment and the imaginative traditions of speculative writing.[71] Scenarios also created and engaged new popular audiences and thereby widened the scope of aesthetic expression and fruition. Most important, for the purpose of our inquiry, they inspired new aesthetic forms and exchanges between media.

We end this chapter with a brief reflection on one of the most interesting Italian examples of intermedia speculative writing, Superstudio's 'Le dodici Città Ideali: Premonizioni della parusia urbanistica' [Twelve Ideal Cities: Premonitions of the Second Coming of Urbanism] (1972). Written mostly by Gian Piero Frassinelli — an early member of the Florentine Superstudio architecture collective — this verbal and visual science fiction narrative first appeared in Italy on the pages of the renowned architectural journal, *Casabella*, but had been previously published in English, in 1971, with a slightly different title, 'Twelve Cautionary Tales for

Christmas: Premonitions of the Mystical Rebirth of Urbanism'.[72] As the title suggests, 'Le dodici Città Ideali' consists of twelve brief descriptions of future cities, in which the co-authors poke fun at glass-and-steel modernism, through 'a paradoxical blending of [...] two architectural paradigms, that of the safe shelter as a modernist Existenzminimum and that of the prison cell'.[73] The first city, 'Città 2000 t.' [2000-ton city], for example, is described by Frassinelli — and collectively illustrated by the members of Superstudio — as a vast, three-dimensional grid of cubic cells, each of which contains exactly one individual, who is constantly entertained with virtual images, sounds, and smells:

> La parete orientata a nord (o se questa è confinante con l'esterno, quella orientata ad ovest), è capace di emettere immagini tridimensionali, suoni ed odori. La parete opposta è occupata da un sedile capace di aderire perfettamente a qualsiasi corpo umano fino ad avvolgerlo completamente; in questo sedile sono incorporate apparati capaci di soddisfare le necessità fisiologiche (alimentari, escretorie e sessuali).[74]
>
> [The wall facing north (or, if this is an external wall, the wall facing west), is capable of emitting 3D images, sounds and smells. On the opposite wall we find a seat capable of moulding perfectly to the human body, even enclosing it completely. Incorporated in the seat is an apparatus for satisfying all physiological needs (alimentary, excretory, and sexual).]

In this city, there are no biological limits to human lives. Inhabitants can survive for centuries, in a state of apparent contentment. But no rebellious thoughts are tolerated. If any inhabitant shows even the slightest sign of boredom or frustration, the large machine takes immediate action: an enormous weight is brought down on the person, and crushes them to death. The cell is then automatically disinfected and an ovum and sperm from adjacent cells are used to create a new embryo, who will inherit the cell.

'Le dodici Città Ideali' is in many ways a typical product of Superstudio's long-standing fascination with popular culture, utopia, anthropology, philosophy, and science fiction. As art critic Gabriele Mastrigli has pointed out, the members of the radical architecture collective — founded in 1966 by Adolfo Natalini and Cristiano Toraldo di Francia — shared an omnivorous and eclectic interest in *all* forms of creative expression, and a firm conviction that these superficially different forms were in fact profoundly related:

> Raramente nella storia dell'architettura il rapporto tra scrittura e immagine è così circolare e serrato come nell'opera del Superstudio. Sospesa tra arte, letteratura, scienza e filosofia, la narrazione architettonica di Superstudio appare infatti come portatrice di valore in sé, senza alcuna necessità di rimandare ad una verità esterna.[75]
>
> [Rarely, in the history of architecture, has the relationship between the written word and the image been as circular and tight as in the work of Superstudio. Suspended between art, literature, science, and philosophy, Superstudio's architectural narratives appear in fact like a value in their own right, without any need to refer to an external truth.]

Superstudio's fascination with word and image, and, more specifically, with 'racconti di fantascienza [...] oggetti da favola ed esseri fantastici' [science fiction stories [...], fairy-tale objects and fantastical creatures], can be clearly traced in 'Le Dodici Città Ideali'.[76] Like Roberto Vacca, Frassinelli and his co-authors imagined the future in darkly apocalyptic terms. Like the members of UFO, they saw the modern metropolis as a dystopian, carceral space, which is shaped by surveillance, state control, and brutal, biopolitical violence. Unlike any of the aforementioned artists and thinkers, however, Frassinelli gave his narrative a deliberately humorous and satirical tone. Contemporaneous fears about social collapse and authoritarian biopower were transformed by Frassinelli and his peers into a kaleidoscopic game of creative possibilities, echoing the imaginary use of futuristic media and 'virtual realities' in the twelve fictional cities. Across media, this sense of open-ended, creative speculation was further enhanced by Superstudio's visual collages, which emphasized the grotesque, paradoxical scale and shape of the twelve cities. For example, the illustration for 'Città 2000 t.' consists of a grid of nine seemingly unrelated images. At the top, a large, horizontal, green-and-orange drawing shows an aerial view of seemingly pristine woods, meadows, and hills, which are, however, enclosed by enormous, rectangular walls. Below, we can observe eight smaller images, including a schematic drawing of the same rectangular grid, an abstract painting, and two sepia-toned photographs which show, respectively, a human foetus and a nineteenth-century girls' choir. In this way, the apocalyptic mood of the early 1970s unexpectedly becomes the basis for new, playful practices of creative invention.

'Per salvarci non c'è che una cosa da fare. Ciascuno riprenda in mano le redini della propria vita. Rifiuti di essere imbonito, ricoperto di cose e di idee da altri. Recuperi la sua autentica umanità, la sua individualità' [There is only one thing that we must do to save ourselves. Each of us must take the reins of our own life. Let's not be fooled, or drowned by other people's objects and ideas. Let's recover our authentic humanity, our individuality].[77] This verdict comes from Giuliano Toraldo di Francia, the father of one of Superstudio's co-founders, and one of Italy's most brilliant post-war experimental physicists. Published by Einaudi in 1978, Toraldo's little-known philosophical pamphlet, *Il rifiuto: considerazioni semiserie di un fisico sul mondo di oggi e di domani* [Objections: Semi-serious Considerations by a Physicist on the World of Today and Tomorrow] (1978) is, we believe, one of the most elegant and insightful retrospective accounts of a difficult decade. Like Aurelio Peccei and Roberto Vacca, Toraldo writes with a mature awareness of emergent global threats and existential risks. Like Mario Ricci and the UFO collective, he is no friend of consumer capitalism. And yet, Toraldo's eccentric little book expresses a nuanced understanding of contemporary modernity, and a subtle and sustained hope for the future, which — as we have seen — were largely absent from contemporaneous debates. Unlike Vacca, Toraldo firmly believed in the importance of the creative arts. And where Binazzi and the members of the UFO collective saw themselves as the tragic inhabitants of a post-apocalyptic wasteland, Toraldo praised the beauty of the Italian countryside: not an empty grid, but a rich, historically textured

landscape, which has been shaped across generations by the interactions between communities, and between human and non-human agents.

In the context of a history of intermedia, how can we summarize the cultural legacy of the early 1970s? Frassinelli's omnivorous, playful fascination with popular culture and Giuliano Toraldo di Francia's laconic, aristocratically detached praise of individualism point in the direction of creative futures that would soon come to transcend the cultural and political orientations of the period between 1968 and 1972. Between the lines of Frassinelli's and Toraldo's writing, we already sense the advent of a new decade — the postmodernist 1980s — and of a society that continues to be shaped by stark political and social contrasts, but that is no longer transfixed by political binaries (for or against public institutions, and so on). In the months and years to come, popular culture and mass media — including science fiction — would gain an unprecedented prominence in Italian society and in the arts.[78] At the same time, Italy would witness a renewed fascination with the figure of the polymath, and with innovative technologies and new media, as we will see in the final chapters of this volume. While these trends may be viewed as a break with the cultural and political orientations of the early 1970s, they would not have been possible without the radical shifts that occurred in the aftermath of 1968, which we have outlined in this chapter. The journey of intermedial art continues to twist and coil.

Notes to Chapter 5

1. Eduardo M. Di Giovanni, Marco Ligni, and Edgardo Pellegrini, *La strage di Stato: controinchiesta* (Rome: Samonà and Savelli, 1970).
2. See Benedetta Tobagi, *Piazza Fontana: il processo impossibile* (Turin: Einaudi, 2019).
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55. Lapo Binazzi, 'Non-design: dall'oggetto alla sopravvivenza', in *Contemporanea Incontri Internzionali d'Arte*, ed. by Achille Bonito Oliva (Florence: Centro Di, 1973); also in *Casabella*, 386 (February 1974), p. 16.
56. Ibid.
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64. Aurelio Peccei, *Quale Futuro? L'ora della verità si avvicina* (Milan: Mondadori, 1974), p. 15.
65. Roberto Vacca, *Il medioevo prossimo venturo: la degradazione dei grandi sistemi* (Milan: Mondadori, 1971), pp. 118–26. Vacca subsequently developed this section into an apocalyptic science fiction novel, *La morte di Megalopoli* (Milan: Mondadori, 1974). It also provided the inspiration for Herbert Pagani's environmentalist multimedia rock opera, *Megalopolis*, which was first performed at the *Festival dei Due Mondi* in Spoleto in 1973.
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67. Ibid., pp. 133–35.
68. Vacca, p. 189.
69. Vacca, p. 158.
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72. Superstudio, 'Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas: Premonitions of the Mystical Rebirth of Urbanism', *Architectural Design* (December 1971), 737–42; Superstudio, 'Le Dodici Città Ideali: premonizioni della parusia urbanistica', *Casabella*, 361 (January 1972), 45–55. For further information about the genesis of 'Le Dodici Città', see Gabriele Mastrigli, 'Oggetti come specchi: l'utopia critica del Superstudio', in *Superstudio: opere, 1966–1978*, ed. by Gabriele Mastrigli, preface by Cristiano Toraldo di Francia (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2016), pp. ix–lxxxvi.
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75. 'Oggetti come specchi', p. xii.
76. Roberto Gargiani and Beatrice Lampariello, *Superstudio* (Rome: Laterza, 2010), p. 19.
77. Giuliano Toraldo di Francia, *Il rifiuto: considerazioni semiserie di un fisico sul mondo di oggi e di domani* (Turin: Einaudi, 1978), p. 8.
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CHAPTER 6

❖

1994: Hybridity

6.1. Introduction

In Italy, 1994 is synonymous with the year in which media tycoon, Silvio Berlusconi, entered the political field, becoming Prime Minister for the first time. Berlusconi picked up Italy's reins in the wake of the collapse of the country's post-war political regime. This collapse had been prompted by the so-called *Mani pulite* or Bribesville investigations into political and institutional corruption, which had begun two years earlier. As prominent members of the ruling class were investigated by the judiciary, heads began to roll; this quickly led to the implosion of the main post-war political parties, including the ruling Christian Democrats. Berlusconi's emergence from the dust and ash which billowed up as the bricks of the old regime came crashing down marks a moment of rupture for the country, and for some a brief moment of hope. It is taken by most commentators to signal the start of Italy's Second Republic,[1] a period which would be dominated by new political parties and alliances. A fragmented bipolarization would emerge which was composed of a centre-right bloc (Forza Italia, the Northern League, and the National Alliance) and of a centre-left bloc (the highly fragmented Ulivo coalition, launched in 1996). Whether or not it heralded a new Republic, Berlusconi's influence on Italy's politics, media, and culture was to be momentous. His arrival 'epitomizes a seductive project of modernization' and provides an icon, as Anna Cento Bull tells us, of 'uncritical embracing of consumerism and media culture', which celebrated 'pleasure-seeking, consumption, personal success, prosperity and freedom'.[2]

The mediatization, or spectacularizing, of politics that Berlusconi's entry into government brought about, often referred to as 'videocrazia',[3] was the culmination of his career as a television mogul and leader of a media empire. It highlights how central the media had become in Italy in just a few decades, as well as signalling a society in which aestheticization and accumulation were growing. From the point of view of this book, Berlusconi's arrival is emblematic too of the unease that hybridity can bring: part media mogul and part politician, from the point of view of his detractors, this uneasy identity was to haunt his political career, leading to sustained criticism from his detractors for his conflict of interests. For his critics, he was a political figure with far too much power across terrestrial media.

But this chapter is not about beginnings. Nor is it about political change brought about by the collapse of one regime and the launch of another. Rather, it is about

the culmination and consolidation of artistic practices, reflecting a society that was ever more mediatized and hybridized. In the early 1990s, we see the crest of a long wave of artistic border-crossing that had reared up under Futurism in the early twentieth century, and had undergone a further surge of experimentalism in the 1960s and 1970s. Across the 1980s and into the early 1990s, the revolutionary and experimental surges of intermedial work had progressively been normalized. Exploring 1994 enables us to focus not so much on the revolutionary change of crossing borders, but on intermedial *normality*, and on the consolidation and commercialization of the vast intermedial turn of the 1960s. Television, which was so firmly implicated in Berlusconi's rise, is a key to this process.

What is surprising, perhaps, in 1994, is the astounding normality that inhered in so many forms of artistic hybridity that only thirty years previously had been regarded as odd, aberrant, or as highly unusual and experimental. Hybrid forms that were still new in the early 1960s, such as television and graphic novels, or those that had not yet been launched, even, such as music videos, had by now become part of what was being described as media saturation, or as Andrea Meneghelli suggests, 'un flusso continuo di stimuli mediatici' [a constant flux of media stimulation].[4] Art and media forms which, just a few decades earlier, had seemed radical, transient one-offs, forms which critics and artists had struggled even to name, during the 80s were consolidated as hybrid art forms, and many were gaining mass commercial appeal. While there certainly were new hybrid, experimental forms being born at this time, such as the high-profile and subversive Luther Blisset Project, it was normalization that dominated.[5] Such was the breakdown in barriers between the arts at this time, in fact, that postmodern philosopher Gianni Vattimo would say, in an article for the 1993 Venice Biennale catalogue, that across the arts there were 'violazioni di ogni specie di frontiera' [violations of every kind of boundary].[6]

The early years of the 1990s represent the culmination of analogue electronic media before the sudden rise of the digital at the end of the decade. While it is true that Italy already had its very first website (launched by a research centre in Sardinia in 1993) and was poised on the cusp of the digital revolution, Italians were still glued to earlier electronic media: the television was ubiquitous in households and in bars, while radio had 35 million listeners and, as a mobile medium, now provided Italians with a soundtrack as they travelled across town and country alike.[7] Art galleries no longer showed just paintings or sculpture, but also video installations. Pop and rock music had become unthinkable without the visual sidecar provided by American MTV or Italy's home-grown Videomusic TV channel. The rise of electronic media had gathered pace throughout the 1980s, and by the 1990s was central to the cultural sphere. Electronic media, as we shall see, are critical to the story of intermedia at this time. They forge a surprisingly stable intermedial foundation onto which the next wave of digital change would soon crash.

6.2. Dizzyingly Hybrid

By the 1990s, Italy was a transnational player on the global stage. While the home-grown influences on intermediality we have traced in this book thus far — Futurism, Gruppo 63, Umberto Eco and so on — continued to be a significant force, socio-cultural forces from outside Italy were by now a significant part of the picture. Transnational forces were increasingly taking hold. This was affecting everything from fashion and television programmes to music videos and graphic novels. The dismantling of all kinds of barriers and the merging of different planes of experience were part of what it meant to live and work in Europe in the 1990s.

'Hybridity' was a word that captured this change, and it was to become a key word in the European zeitgeist, seeping into a wide range of discourses in Italy and globally. In 1991, Bruno Latour opened his book *We Have Never Been Modern* with a discussion of the 'proliferation of hybrids'. In this book he argues that the then-current cultural discourse was 'dizzyingly hybrid' and that science and nature had been churned up with politics, economics, law, religion, and fiction, meaning that science and culture can no longer be kept apart. Historian Perry Anderson sums up the zeitgeist when he states that we live in an age where we celebrate the 'cross-over, the hybrid, the pot-pourri'.[8] The idea that things could no longer be kept apart was emerging as a dominant concept, especially across the social sciences and anthropology. In 1985, Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* had talked about the cyborg as a hybrid of machine and organism, a theme taken up in Italy a decade later in Roberto Cordeschi and Vittorio Somenzi's *La filosofia degli automi* (1994).[9] In the field of postcolonialism, the seminal critic, Edward Said, said in his 1994 collection of essays, *Culture and Imperialism*, that 'all cultures are involved in one another [...] none is single and pure, and all are hybrid, heterogeneous.'[10] The same year Homi Bhabha took up the argument in *The Location of Culture*, when he discussed 'a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy'.[11] Bhabha's and Said's deliberations on hybridity were to become central to the ensuing discourse on postcolonialism.

While debates on postcolonialism were slower to develop in Italy, a clear sign of the growing interest in cross-cultural hybridity can be seen in the editorial support for a literary genre known at this time as the 'letteratura di migrazione' [migration literature], represented by books like *Io, venditore di elefanti* (1990) by Pap Khouma and Oreste Pivetta, and *Princesa* (1994) by Fernanda Farias de Albuquerque and Maurizio Iannelli.[12] These co-authored novels, written by a migrant writer and Italian writer-facilitator, led to debates on the nature of 'Italianness', its 'purity', and its growing hybridity. They clearly point to a deep-seated concern with borders at this time that affected both national border crossings and artistic ones, as signalled in our Introduction. While in the early 1990s, crossing borders between the arts had become normalized, Italian national borders were suddenly becoming visibly permeable, as Italians were faced with a wave of migration that had begun in the 1980s. As we will see below, Italian artists, filmmakers, musicians, and cultural practitioners of all kinds increasingly looked beyond a narrow national tradition to embrace an ever wider (albeit still largely Western) set of global influences — influences which were themselves increasingly inter- and transmedial.

In the early 1990s, however, the term 'hybrid' was not yet an established term among cultural practitioners and critics in Italy. Indeed, the comment that Gianni Vattimo made at the 1993 Venice Biennale about artistic border-crossing as a 'violation' is telling. While recognizing the extraordinary frequency of artistic border-crossing in his article, he still read these crossings in terms of 'violation', in other words as aberration and rule breaking. This implies that he still saw intermediality as an experimental, or avant-garde, practice which was directed towards pushing back boundaries. He failed to see that the rules implied by the term 'violation' were no longer firmly in place at this time; that the boundaries between them were already elastic. One might argue that Vattimo (born in 1936) used a terminology that marked him out as belonging to an older generation, a generation that had not grown up as electronic media natives and was still coming to terms with a paradigm shift. However, this does not entirely explain why many other artists at this time, even those from younger generations, let slip an underlying unease with intermediality in their continuing use of the word 'contamination', which was still frequently deployed in the early 1990s.[13] This continued hesitation in the face of hybridity may reflect the Italian debate which, following two of the leading voices of postmodernism, Jean-François Lyotard and Gianni Vattimo, had been firmly focused on plurality and multiplicity, rather than on their synthesis, which was largely overlooked.[14] One might hypothesize that Vattimo's frequent skirting around the concept of 'synthesis' — seen by him as too implicated in the totalities, or grand narratives, that he believed had faded — meant that the growing hybridity was missed in the debate in Italy at this time.

Yet, using the concept of 'hybridity' to talk about the arts is, we argue, particularly apposite, especially as it was already widespread in other academic fields and by this time was seen as a feature of postmodernism by many theorists in the United States. It helps to shine a light on what was not necessarily firmly in focus at the time, but which subsequently can be seen as central, and it also draws attention to the relative stability of forms which bring together two or more arts and media. Hybridity is about a fairly stable mixing, whereby the elements fused together remain in place for at least a short duration. It is not a fleeting phenomenon. So, as a direct result of this first point, hybridity marks the relative normalization of these forms within the Italian art world. In this sense, our use of the term needs to be distinguished from the fizzy, utopic hybridity described by Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s, when hybridity was still perceived as a liberatory and transgressive force associated with an avant-garde breaking free of authoritarian positions. For McLuhan, hybridity was a 'moment of truth and a revelation from which new forms are born', something that created a 'new force and energy as by fission or fusion'.[15] By 1990, the stabilization and normalization of so many hybrid art forms renders McLuhan's definition anachronistic. Hybridity highlights the breaking down of a dialectic of 'either–or', refocusing attention on a more inclusive 'both–and',[16] which signals the growing importance of inclusive approaches within 1990s' liberal globalization. In stating the importance of 'both–and', however, we are not suggesting that hybridity represents any quest for totality, or that it shares commonalities with either the *opera*

d'arte totale or the *Gesamtkunstwerk* discussed earlier in this book. The publication of Lyotard's *La Condition postmoderne* in 1979 opened the debate on postmodernism in Italy by placing the focus on the collapse of 'grand narratives' and on language games as 'an effective weapon against all totalizing pretensions'.[17] Postmodernism is marked by the displacement of totalizing narratives, as the cultural sphere — as well as the political one — becomes marked instead by plurality, fragmentation, and decentring, and these earlier totalizing concepts can only be used as a term of negative comparison, as Vattimo states in his article for the Biennale. In this chapter, therefore, we do not read hybridity as a search for totality or for transcendent unity. Instead, we read it as a normal part of 1990s' life, as a part of mainstream culture, a sign of a late-capitalist market, and a culmination of boundary breaking in the arts which mirrors boundary breaking in other aspects of life in the 1990s, particularly the formation of new political coalitions, the Berlusconian hybridization of politics and media, and the rise of a multi-ethnic and transnational Italy.

6.3. The Proliferation of Hybrid Arts

By 1994, hybrid artistic forms were proliferating. Many had their roots firmly in avant-garde experiments of the previous decades. However, by the 1990s they were no longer considered new; they had instead become a familiar part of the cultural sphere in Italy. This is not to say that there was no longer any experimentation attached to them, of course, but rather that these hybrid forms were now very well-established.

One of the hybrid art forms that was on the rise in all Italian towns at the start of the 1990s was the art installation. This is a hybrid artform which can be traced back to the start of the 1970s and, in Italy, especially to *arte povera*. Installations — site-specific works in three dimensions which draw together various natural and artificial materials, sound and video — were simply 'ubiquitous' by the early 1990s, according to Rosalind Krauss.[18] Many of the works presented, for instance, in the high-profile *Soggetto soggetto* exhibition at the Castello Rivoli in Turin in 1994 fell into this category, as did those exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1993. Flanking installations was videoart, which was also firmly established by now, and was often exhibited alongside, or as part of, installations. Videoart had its international roots in the experimentation of Nam June Paik in the mid-1960s, and had begun to appear in experimental spaces in Italy at the start of the 1970s. By 1990, it had become a normal and expected feature of gallery exhibitions. In mixing arts and media like theatre, cinema, sculpture, dance, body art, painting, and photography, it was one of the most deliberately intermedial artforms of this time. Angela Vettese describes videoart as 'quasi una malattia che dilaga' [almost like a disease spreading] by the time we get to the early 1990s.[19] A flavour of videoart in 1994 includes works by celebrated artist Gianni Toti (*Planetopolis*) and Giacomo Verde (*Opera d'arto*). A third hybrid art form which had gone mainstream by the early 1990s was performance art. Again, this had its roots in the experimentation of the 1960s (or indeed even earlier). It had been born in body art and happenings which had already emerged

in Italy from the late 1950s. In 1994, among the more high-profile examples, we saw Bruna Esposito staging a poetic performance in the outdoor space in the newly launched Trevi art gallery in Umbria. In the same year, the Milanese collective Studio Azzurro produced *Delfi*, a performance at Porta Romana in Milan which drew together sculpture, performance, monologue, and on-stage video.

Performance art, videoart, and installations — all primarily visual arts with their roots in the experimentalism of the 1960s — seem to have been particularly suited to being integrated into the art system in the 1980s and the early 1990s. They share a sense of spectacle and movement (whether movement made by the performers or the movement of members of the public around and through installations), and they often threw immersive electronic media into the mix. This focus on spectacle and on the sensation, or sensuous impact, they have on the spectator contributed significantly to their rise. Scott Lash, in his discussions on the sociology of the postmodern, talks about the growing centrality of the spectator's immersion at this time and how visual and sensual artworks latched onto this.[20] This coincides with the rise of the middlebrow cultural consumer, in a country where ever greater numbers of Italians were being educated to upper secondary and university levels, the importance of which cannot be overstated. Hybrid art forms which failed to latch onto spectacle and spectator immersion struggled to take up a significant place in the cultural life of the 1990s. If found to be too elitist and inaccessible, they failed to flourish. We can see this in the demise of two hybrid forms which had had significant success back in the 1960s: word art and *libri d'artisti* [artist's books]. These remained rooted in verbal rather than visual language, and did not develop interactive spectacle. They seem to interpellate an elite audience. By 1994, while examples of both word art and *libri d'artisti* continued to exist, these intermedial forms were in decline. If Maurizio Arcangeli's solo exhibition of word art in Venice, Roberto Pittarello's *I libri in foglio*, or Enzo Minarelli's 'polipoesia' (as he terms his multimedia, synaesthetic poetic performances) continued to have an impact, it was a limited one. Neither word art nor *libri d'artisti* succeeded in gaining much attention in the swift-moving and commercialized 1990s.

The graphic novel, a hugely important hybrid art form by the time we get to 1994, has what we could term a 'double root' in commercial and avant-garde practice. The graphic novels we find in the early 1990s owe their existence to mainstream children's comics as well as to less commercial forms: highbrow culture in the 1960s and subcultures in the 1970s. *Linus*, launched in 1965, was the first comic to target an adult highbrow audience and was edited by respected intellectuals at the time (Oreste Del Buono and Elio Vittorini).[21] With the arrival of *RanXerox* in 1978, the graphic novel turned distinctly subcultural, mixing in elements from cinematic and literary horror. The launch of *Dylan dog* in 1986, however, lifted the graphic novel out of both the early left-wing circles and the underground. *Dylan dog* quickly became the epitome of a commercialized version of the form: by the mid-1990s it was a publishing phenomenon, selling half a million copies a month. A classic postmodern form, made up of 'citazioni dalla paraletteratura di massa' [citations from mass paraliterature],[22] the graphic novel had succeeded in

successfully monetarizing the avant-garde experiments with graphic art and graphic novels from previous decades. By the 1990s, the success of *Dylan dog*, as well as the rise of the American Marvel comics, and their cinematic adaptations, led to a rash of new and successful graphic novels, especially *Nathan Never* (1991–) and *Rat-Man* (1995–), as well as the launch of the Italian branch of Marvel, *Marvel-Italia*, in 1993.

If the success of the adult graphic novel stems from the commercialization of the form during the 1980s, it is not alone. A second hybrid artform that had come of age in the 1980s and quickly gained ubiquity, at least among the younger generations, was the music video. While the Italian music video dates back at least to cinema projections by Tullio Piacentini in the mid-1960s, it only gained ground from 1984 when Videomusic, an Italian video music TV channel, was launched. One of the first videos to be screened on the new platform was Gianna Nannini's *Fotoromanza*, directed by veteran filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni. *Fotoromanza* made explicit the bond between music video and cinema established by Piacentini, and still visible today. The voracious market for music videos, and the increasing need to use visuals to sell music, led to Italian singer-songwriters teaming up with producers to create American-influenced music videos. Jovanotti's 1994 hit 'Serenata rap' was one of these. It shows the rapper and his band suspended above Milan on a long plank, a homage to both the famous black and white photograph 'Lunch atop a Skyscraper' set in the New York of the 1930s and to the aerial scenes above Milan in Vittorio De Sica's much-loved film, *Miracolo a Milano* (1951). While Italian music videos in the early 1990s lacked the cutting-edge artistry of their American counterparts, they nonetheless demonstrated how hybridization of artistic forms was rapidly becoming a normal part of Italian cultural consumption patterns. On this note, Paolo Peverini observes that the music video is a 'serbatoio' [tank or container] holding pre-existing texts, narrative architectures, directorial styles, and editing strategies, which it mixes, or contaminates, in various ways.[23]

While the widespread presence and success of installations, videoart, performance art, graphic novels, music video, and performance could be said to define the distinct artistic hybridity of the 1990s, it is important to recognize that these forms were set down beside, or sometimes grafted onto, more long-standing intermedial forms which continued to be produced on a grand scale. The new intermedial arts, in other words, do not replace old intermedial forms, any more than new media would replace the old in the twenty-first century (see Chapter 7); instead, the quantity and variety of hybrid arts simply continued to increase. Hybridity towards the end of the twentieth century appears to be a cumulative process; while some hybrids more or less died out along the way, many, once established, remained in place. Cinema, the great new hybrid art that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, continued to have an important place within the cultural sphere, even though it had been subject to a significant decline since the late 1970s, as television took over. From ten picture house entries a year in 1970, annual average cinema going tumbled fast before stabilizing at just under two in the early 1990s. In the same period, the number of TV licences issued annually grew from approximately 10,000,000 in 1970 to approximately 16,000,000 by the mid-1990s.[24] Nonetheless,

if we consider Italian films made for the big screen as well as television serials and series produced for the small screen, the production of screen fiction in Italy was not in decline at this time. In addition, longer-standing hybrid forms like opera and theatre remained important arts in the 1990s. ISTAT statistics suggest that the number of tickets sold for theatre and music had more than doubled since the 1960s and was stable: 12,238,000 tickets were sold in 1965; 27,362,000 tickets in 1994. Moreover, theatre was undergoing a further period of hybridity during the early 1990s as video projections were beginning to be used during some performances. Finally, the rise of television, since its launch in Italy in 1954, was critical. Milly Buonanno refers to the 1990s as the era of televisual abundance, with its multiplication of TV channels, of technologies (terrestrial, satellite, and later digital), diversification of TV content and the sensation spectators had of watching a 'flux', or flow, of entertainment, rather than distinct and separate programmes.[25] In fact, Italians were watching television in the 1990s as never before: by 1994, it had become the main source of information.[26]

What we see from this whistle-stop tour is that new hybrid art and media forms did not substitute old ones, but coexisted with them, leading to ever greater diversity and fragmentation in the arts. While new names for these art forms would continue to be invented, terms such as 'installazione' [installation] and 'videoarte' [videoart] were by now well established: the terminological flux associated with their earlier and more experimental phases had, for the moment at least, more or less ended. It seemed that art in the 1990s emptied out the very idea of aesthetic autonomy, as all art forms, from books (the graphic novel) to music (music videos) to sculpture (installations), had introduced hybridity as a standard and normal element. This is not to say that all cultural forms suddenly became hybrid, of course: novels continued to be sold, as did paintings; audiences continued to attend classical music concerts and sculptures were still hewn. What is noteworthy, however, is the swift rise of hybridity and its coexistence with traditional forms, not the substitution of one for the other.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will explore the principal reasons behind the normalization of the experiments in hybridity of the 1960s and 1970s. First we will examine the role of media saturation on hybridity, and how this has transformed the idea of 'tradition'. Then we will look at the technological advancements underpinning these changes, focusing on analogue electronic media, especially television, and institutional supports, especially museums but also university programmes. And in the conclusion we will talk about the centrality of a commercialized and massified aestheticization and how this commercially orientated, post-modern zeitgeist we meet in the early 1990s, with its emphasis on plurality, accumulation, and excess, changed, seemingly forever, how the arts functioned on the peninsula.

6.4. Media Natives, Media Saturation and the Birth of a Hybrid Tradition

One medium seems untouched by all the hybridity described above: the novel. And, on the surface at least, 1994 was the year of the novel. Two extraordinary literary events exploded onto the publishing scene. Susanna Tamaro published *Va' dove ti porta il cuore*, a book attacked by the critical establishment, but an overnight success among readers. Alberto Rollo describes it as swarming into women's magazines, proliferating in talk-shows and insinuating itself into the structure of TV serials.[27] Another new writer on the literary scene, Enrico Brizzi, also achieved success with *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo*, an instant bestseller which quickly gained cult status. While these two were major literary sensations, the field was lively beyond this too: Niccolò Ammaniti debuted with *Branchie*; Antonio Tabucchi published his most successful book, *Sostiene Pereira*; Umberto Eco returned to fiction writing with *L'isola del giorno prima*; and Inspector Montalbano was born with Andrea Camilleri's *La forma dell'acqua*.[28] The effects of a lively literary scene as well as an explosion in readership could be clearly felt. Reading was more popular than it had ever been: literacy levels were high and ever greater numbers of young people were entering university. The numbers of books published had in fact tripled since 1967,[29] and editorial houses were attempting to respond to a new market segment discovered with Enrico Brizzi's publication: the young middlebrow reader.

However, scratching the surface of this literary liveliness reveals the extent to which the new generation of writers was absorbing the growing mediatization of culture, remediating it in their works. To see this alternative view of the novel, all one needs to do is to open Brizzi's *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* and read the words that launch its first chapter:

> Quella pseudoprimaverile domenica pomeriggio, il vecchio Alex aveva arrampicato le scale di casa con in testa il presagio, meglio, con in testa la telefoto-presagio, della sua famiglia barricata in tinello a guardare le pattonate americane via grunding. Un istante più tardi, non s'era ancora ancora sfilato il parka, aveva dovuto prendere atto che la telefoto, di un realismo agghiacciante, gli provava quanto le sue facoltà di preveggenza stessero raggiungendo, con l'età, livelli negromantici sbalorditivi: erano tutti in salotto, e tutti variamente sgomenti o assorti di fronte alle forzute vicende del Rocky IV; il frère de lait, risucchiato nel video, che già sognava di diventare pugile professionista, un giorno; la mutter, pericolosamente in bilico tra la visione di quelle forzute vicende e la lettura delle Bologna's Chronicles su Repubblica; il Cancelliere, seminghiottito dalla poltrona e inutilmente sorridente, che accompagnava gli uppercut dello Stallone nano con battutine da sistema nervoso in pezzi e imitazioni, depressive, della voce robotica d'Ivan Drago.[30]
>
> [That pseudospringlike Sunday afternoon, while scrambling up the stairs, Alex had a premonition, or better yet, a telephoto premonition. He could see his family barricaded in the living room, watching some American crap on video. An instant later, before he even slipped off his parka, he realized that these chillingly realistic telephotos showed him to what extent his faculties of clairvoyance had, with age, reached astoundingly necromantic proportions. They were all in the living room, each one engrossed in or appalled by the rough-and-tumble scenes in Rocky IV. Frère de lait was sucked into the action,

> already dreaming of becoming a pro boxer. The Matron seesawed dangerously between the images on the screen and the Bologna metro section in La repubblica. The Chancellor, half swallowed up by the armchair and smiling for no reason, accompanied midget Stallone's uppercuts with depressing imitations of Ivan Drago's robotic voice and one-liners spat out by a faltering nervous system.]

The scene the protagonist imagines — a family gathered around a television watching an American movie — is perhaps so familiar that it is hard to recognize how vast a change it represents from the world of post-war Italy. What is interesting here, however, is less how central the television is to the topography of a house and its place at the centre of a family gathering (after all, this domestic topography had been in place now for decades), or even television's hold over the dreams of the 'frère de lait', which again is hardly new. What is particularly curious is the hold on the creative imagination of the protagonist. His seeing is a mediated way of seeing. Alex's ability to imagine a scene is here mediated through photography: the picture he sees in his head as he returns home is created by an imaginary telephoto lens (a 'telefoto-presagio'). He looks in through that imaginary lens and reflects on a scene in which his family are gathered around a television, not just watching it, but somehow 'assorti', absorbed by it, sucked into it ('risucchiati').

All this signals that the media did more in 1994 than shape dreams; they provided the very tools of imagination. Literary form is carved out by perspectives arriving from television, cinema, and magazine photography: Alex's imagination is shaped by a telephoto lens, and Brizzi's setting is cinematographic and piercingly visual. In line with Jean-François Lyotard's *Discours, figure* (1971), the world described by Alex, despite his intense and inventive use of language, privileges the visual over the discursive. Also, following Lyotard, the impact of this is immersive and emotive — we are literally catapulted into a vivid and sensual world created by such visuality. However, as the book unfolds, it becomes clear that the world we are in is no longer Lyotard's. Alex is not simply absorbed by the visual. The narrative he is about to embark on is described a few pages later as a 'musical', and the girl he falls in love with 'non è una ragazza, è un intero disco di Battisti' [is not a girl, she's a whole record by Battisti]'.[31]

This novel marks more than a straightforward shift towards the visual; Alex's character is instead the result of more than a decade of media saturation: he sees, hears, and feels through the lenses provided by contemporary mass media in which the music industry, television, film, and comics are ubiquitous. Alex, and his author Enrico Brizzi, in fact belong to what Bruno Pischedda termed the 'postmoderno genetico':[32] in other words, he belongs to a new generation born in the 1960s and 1970s who have grown up as 'media natives' and have absorbed the aesthetic plurality and multiplicity that surrounded them in late-twentieth-century consumer capitalism. For these 'media natives', literature was no longer a central reference point; it was only one of the possible sources for their literary bricolage, and not necessarily the most important. Brizzi says of his own influences:

> La mia è una scrittura a-letteraria, una scrittura che definirei 'techno': come riferimenti culturali, come enciclopedia di conoscenza sono molto più vicino

> a *Supertifo, Mountain Biking* o qualunque giornale musicale che a *good ol'* Carlo Emilio Gadda o a qualsiasi altro presunto mostro sacro della nostra tradizione letteraria.[33]
>
> [My writing is a-literary; it's a writing I'd define as 'techno': in terms of cultural references, or a knowledge base, I'm much closer to *Supertifo*, *Mountain Biking* or any music magazine than *good ol'* Carlo Emilio Gadda or any other sacred monster of our literary tradition.]

Brizzi describes his writing, in other words, not in terms of literary history, but rather in relation to the techno music that had been popular in clubs across Italy since the early 1990s. He claims that he absorbed ideas from sport and music magazines too, and elsewhere admits to the influence of television.

In digesting a rich media diet, Brizzi was not alone. The new generation of writers in Italy, which was just emerging in 1994, was similarly immersed in a media-dense world. Nicolò Ammaniti, who also debuted that year, describes how his mother had tried to imbue him with a love for Russian literary classics, but one day at a friend's house he found *Carrie* by Stephen King and devoured it. From there, he describes his journey 'verso il basso: splatterpunk, Harmony, fumetti, pornografia' [towards the bottom: splatterpunk, Harmony, comics, pornography].[34] Giuseppe Culicchia, also debuting in 1994 with *Tutti giù per terra*, describes how he decided to structure his new book around album tracks after listening incessantly to the American punk band Ramones.[35] Gabriele Romagnoli's 1994 collection of short stories, *Videocronache*, proposes a 'soundtrack' to its reader, with specific songs to accompany their reading. Brizzi, Ammaniti, Culicchia, and Romagnoli all testify to influences on their writing that do not stretch back diachronically, connecting them vertically with the literature of the past; instead, they see themselves as connected horizontally, or transversally, as Marino Sinibaldi suggests, 'con l'analogo, il contemporaneo, il già visto [with the analogous, the contemporary, the already seen]'.[36]

The interviews with the new generation of writers which Luca Gervasutti conducted for his book *Dannati e sognatori* (1998) highlight the centrality of television, music, cinema, magazines, and pop culture in general to their writing, resulting not just in a high level of citations but also influencing their structure and style. Short chapters, mirroring album tracks, are common, as are fast editing techniques and jump cuts from cinema, sampling and scratching lifted from rap and hip hop, as well as signs of TV channel surfing reflected in a quick pace and agile changes of scene. Quentin Tarantino's film, *Pulp Fiction*, released in 1994, would quickly lead to a group of young authors, including Ammaniti, Brizzi, Isabella Santacroce and Aldo Nove, copying its 'cool' violence to give birth to the so-called 'cannibali', or pulp writers, with the publication of the book of short stories, *Gioventù cannibale*, by Einaudi in 1996.

On one level this was not all new, as Umberto Eco and Pier Vittorio Tondello had blazed a trail at the start of the 1980s: Eco became the first writer in Italy to bring together the avant-garde and consumerism in his double coded and citational *Il nome della rosa* (1980), while Pier Vittorio Tondello, with *Altri libertini* (1980), had paved the way for a kind of pop-cultural postmodernism, which mixed in references

to commercial media and pop culture. However, for the new generation of writers in the early 1990s, the counterpositioning of high and low cultures was no longer deliberate and experimental, as it was for Eco and Tondello. Instead, their focus on pluriformity and multiplicity seems hardwired into their cultural background. By the time we reach the new generation of writers launching their careers in the mid-1990s, the Italian literary tradition had been completely decentred, and the writers no longer seemed to make a distinction between one medium and another. As Alessandro Baricco said in *La repubblica* in 1994:

> Ai giovani che vogliono scrivere consiglierei di studiare prima come inizia un fumetto, come è fatto uno slogan pubblicitario, consiglierei di immergersi nella commedia sofisticata americana, di passare da Balzac a Kubrik, d'imparare la tecnica del cinema hollywoodiano infallibile creatore di storie.[37]
>
> [To those young people who want to write, I'd suggest they first study how a comic begins, how an advertising slogan is made. I'd advise them to immerse themselves in the sophisticated American drama, to go from Balzac to Kubrick, to learn the techniques of Hollywood cinema, which is an infallible story-maker.]

While Enrico Brizzi and the generation of media-native novelists provided some of the most dramatic and self-aware cases of media saturation at this time, they were not alone. Reflection on media saturation among many kinds of artists was spreading fast. Gianni Versace's extravagant Pop Art dresses (1991), for instance, had bold patterns that sewed together copies of Andy Warhol's most famous works (Fig. 6.1). As Richard Harrison Martin notes, Versace conflated 'James Dean and Marilyn Monroe, trumping Warhol to the later cultural exaggeration and excess' and showed fashion as a 'sordid scavenger and beautiful correspondent, both at once'.[38] Versace thus entered the debate on the commodification, remediation, and recirculation of the arts and culture more broadly, and gave it a decidedly transnational flavour.

In the field of cinema, Maurizio Nichetti had, with *Ladri di saponette* (1989), played around with the peculiar relationship between films screened on TV and the adverts which interrupted them, often brutally. He reveals how a film's narrative is repeatedly assaulted and fragmented by interruptions from television adverts until the borders between the two media break down. Nanni Moretti's *Caro diario* (1993) provides further insights. In the film's second episode, set in the beautiful Aeolian islands off Sicily, Nanni documents a media saturation so total that it has reached, and wrapped its tentacles around, some of the wildest and most far-flung places in Italy. In the film, Gerardo, an intellectual friend of Nanni's who has retired to the islands to study James Joyce's *Ulysses*, initially refuses to watch television; when he suddenly capitulates, he is transformed overnight into a TV addict. Moretti documents an ever-present television which invades people's homes, their bars, and even the ferry on which he and his friend cross between the islands. The effects of a spreading televisual culture are captured in their encounter with the mayor of the island of Stromboli, who wants to commission the famous Italo-American cinematographer Vittorio Storaro to choreograph the soundtrack and visuals for

Fig. 6.1. Gianni Versace Couture, *Evening Dress*, Spring/Summer (1991). Printed silk jersey, beads, rhinestones, with faces of Marilyn Monroe and James Dean @Chicago History Museum.

the island's sunsets. The idea that even nature should be buffed and 'improved', aestheticized, and commercialized reflects Berlusconi's brand of television as well, with its attractive and colourful variety shows brimming with perfect bodies.[39] Nichetti and Moretti were not media natives, however, like Enrico Brizzi and his generation of writers. Both filmmakers retained an intellectual and ironic detachment from the flood of mass media that had infiltrated everything.

What we see in these examples taken from literature, cinema, and fashion is the death — after a long decline — of an artistic tradition rooted in a single art form. In its place we find the consolidation, instead, of what we might call a *hybrid tradition*. Any sense of a single artistic tradition underpinning the creation of artworks has been eroded.

It is not that this was new. Cinema had been adapting and citing from many arts since its inception; novels had always remediated painting, music, and other arts. Italian fashion had integrated the visual arts as far back as the 1930s when Elsa Schiaparelli, who frequented the surrealist milieux in Paris, incorporated surrealism into her designs, even creating a skeleton dress together with Salvador Dalí. What changed at this point is that not only has this kind of interchange become normalized and no longer exceptional, but an artform which did not dip its toes in multiple streams became anachronistic. In the 1980s, Italy's Transavanguardia movement[40] could still look back towards a single-art tradition, but by the early 1990s such an approach would have looked distinctly conservative and out of pace with the times.

6.5. The Role of Mass Electronic Media: Television

The rise of mass electronic media — television especially — is central to the normalization of intermedial practice in Italy at this time. The process of integration of the electronic media into the art system had begun well before the 1990s, of course. However, 1994 stands at the apex of its rise, just at the point where digital media are poised to overtake it. While radio has an important place in this story, television dominates this period.[41] At the time, the public broadcaster RAI was flanked by Berlusconi's Mediaset (Canale 5, Italia 1, Rete 4), and together these provided most of Italy's television. For Valérie Joelle Kouam, by the mid-1990s television became the main source of information in Italy.[42] Milly Buonanno designates the 1990s as the period of televisual abundance, a period when the television dominated all other media and where home-grown Italian programmes were relaunched and at last became an important facet of the market.[43] Television was itself a hybrid medium, broadcasting a wide range of diverse art forms: from cinema to theatre, from variety shows to painting, from body art and dance to videoart and documentary. It therefore provided new spaces for a wide variety of arts, remediating them. In 1994, for instance, RAI broadcast televised versions of plays by Luigi Pirandello, Dario Fo, and Ugo Betti,[44] as well as short films by the experimental videoartist Antonio Rezza (*De civitate rei*, *Evolutio*, *Il piantone*), and a wide variety of feature films after their cinema run. Italian television drama was also, argues Buonanno, remediating recognized literary forms like the feuilleton and the serial novel, as well as adapting

novels and short stories. Television also provided a home for music with the launch of the Videomusic TV channel in Italy in 1984.

But what is particularly important, as far as our story of intermediality is concerned, is the way in which television stitched these art forms together, intercutting them with political commentary, adverts, talk shows, variety shows, comedy sketches, and so on. According to John Corner, in this way television created an internal 'meta-coherence' which drew together parts which were thematically and logically unrelated into a flow which appeared coherent.[45] This process was then compounded by the way television was consumed by viewers, as they zapped between channels — a mode of consumption which further normalized variety, hybridity, and multiplicity within a flow of divergent sounds and images. This concept of 'flow' is a useful one here. Raymond Williams was the first theorist to describe the process of watching broadcast television as a flow which brought together disparate elements into what became seen as an evening's viewing.[46] While the concept of 'flow' is not without its critics and detractors (including Stuart Laing and Milly Buonanno), 'watching television' is a curious background activity which brings together words, music, sounds, and images into a single space, and quickly undermines any real sense of watertight art forms.[47] Prior to the mainstreaming of the internet in Italy, it was television, with its remediation of multiple arts into electronic signals, that did much to reduce a clear sense of boundaries between art forms.

RAI 3's *Blob*, created by Enrico Ghezzi and Marco Giusti, was first broadcast in 1989. It is a wonderful example of these processes taken to a satirical and meta-televisual extreme. In 1994, *Blob* was being broadcast almost every evening at 8 pm. A fast-moving satirical programme, it took zapping to its logical extreme in creating a montage of clips from across television programming, which were cut and then pieced together to create socio-political satire. The brunt of its satire often fell on the very medium of television, especially Mediaset, Silvio Berlusconi's brash brand of television. Named after the classic American science-fiction movie, *Blob* (Irvin Yeaworth, 1958), in which a slimy alien mass suffocates everything in its path, the programme was a kind of *bricolage*, a remixing of scraps of pre-existing media. *Blob* used a montage of diverse, and often clashing, clips as well as captioning superimposed on the clips to provide original ways of (re)reading the televisual raw material. A soundtrack and some special effects provided the viewer with further interpretative keys. It was a sophisticated programme which required its audience to have a wide-ranging knowledge of culture, politics, and current affairs in order to make sense of it. *Blob* thus provided an instance of a highly self-conscious interpretation of televisual hybridity, of mixing, and the kind of postmodern plurality which by then had entered the mainstream on the peninsula. As hybrid excess, *Blob* sheds light on a general explosion at the time in which electronic and paper-based media multiply and fragment the various ways of seeing, the *Weltanschauung*.

In other words, it was the electronic mass media — especially television — which enabled the decentring of any single artistic mode and provided a model for mixing diverse elements within one space, long before the digital media did so. Television

was a key player in the normalization of intermedial activity in Italy. And given the importance of Berlusconi's Mediaset in Italy during the 1990s, the entrepreneur was implicated in the rise of intermediality at this time.

6.6. New Homings for Hybrids: Exhibition Space and Infrastructure

In 1991 Bruno Latour claimed that when he read his daily newspaper the arts, economics, politics, and science blended together with 'dizzying hybridity'. However, he went on to argue that, despite this, the old mono-disciplinary structures remained in place, as if nothing had changed.[48] While his claim has some truth to it, nonetheless it does not ring entirely true, as far as Italy's cultural infrastructures in the early 1990s are concerned, as they were in the process of swift transformation. And as the infrastructure changed, artistic hybridity accelerated.

The rise of spaces tailor-made for the distribution and dissemination of intermedial art underpinned and enabled the process of normalization which we have been documenting here. With the help of these supports, many creations which, several decades previously, had been considered highly experimental were now absorbed into the artistic mainstream. Structural supports are therefore a critical part of the journey we are tracing: intermedial art can only thrive where structures are put in place to support its development and enable it to reach its public.

Underpinning the flood of installation art and videoart that engulfed Italy by the early 1990s there was an archipelago of small private exhibition spaces that had been established for contemporary art. The greater choice available for hybrid arts parallels what art-house cinema had enjoyed in the mid-twentieth century, with the rise of alternative cinema spaces and small and sympathetic production houses. Reflecting a museum building boom across Europe and the United States, a wave of new exhibition spaces for contemporary art had been opened across Italy in the mid- to late 1980s, such as Castello di Rivoli (Turin, 1984); Studio Casoli (Milan, 1985); Sala 1 (Rome, 1985); MUSEION (Bolzano, 1985); Galleria in-Arco (Turin, 1987); Careof (Milan, 1987); Galleria Massimo de Carlo (Milan, 1987); Mart (Rovereto, 1987); Studio Guenzani (Milan, 1987); and Fondazione Mudima (Milan 1989). These were joined by further galleries which were opened at the start of the 1990s, now often by women, including Galleria Valentina Moncada (Rome, 1990); Studio Stefania Miscetti (Rome, 1990); Viafarini (Milan, 1991); Galleria Emi Fontana (Milan, 1992); Galleria Monica De Cardenas (Milan, 1992); Studio d'Arte Contemporanea Pino Casagrande (Rome, 1992); Galleria Raucci/Santamaria (Naples, 1992); and Trevi Flash Art Museum (Trevi, 1993).

These new, or revived, art spaces reflected international trends, being founded on the model of a multifunctional white cube in place of formal gallery spaces.[49] Formal gallery spaces had been implicitly designed for disciplinary separation: they hung paintings and showed sculpture. The 'sacral' white cube, on the other hand, provided artists and curators with a space where installations, film projections, and videoart could be assembled and shown with relative ease alongside painting and sculpture. These galleries were designed from the outset as polyvalent spaces

that could support a variety of art forms at a time when film and projection were becoming the dominant art forms in galleries.[50] Rosalind E. Krauss in her influential article, 'Le *musée* sans murs du Postmodernisme',[51] discusses how these new galleries responded to the reconfigurations described by André Malraux as the 'museum without walls'.[52] Krauss explains that the traditional gallery had been laid out in *en filade* rooms through which the viewer walks in a designated order. This traditional structure was founded upon procession, and on setting up comparisons between rooms, especially in terms of their chronology. This traditional display had been replaced by cubic or irregular white spaces, often arranged in clusters and dominated by the reigning idea of 'sudden openings', like open balconies, internal windows, and gaps in partition walls which provided 'a constant decentring through the continual pull of something else, another exhibit, another relationship, another formal order: the serendipitous discovery of the museum as flea-market'.[53] In other words, the chronological and disciplinary organization of visual art gave way, during the 1980s, to clashes and contrasts, to disciplinary multiplicity, to epistemological openness, and to the sensation of choice that belonged to the neoliberal marketplace. The 'sudden openings' of white cube galleries discussed by Rosalind Krauss, with their emphasis on serendipitous discovery on the part of the viewer, drew into sharp relief the postmodern aesthetic of pastiche, variety, the collapsing of high and low cultures, and indeed the collapsing of other categories through which art had been traditionally viewed, including disciplinarity.

The flexibility of these new multimedial spaces enabled them to cross further boundaries between the visual arts, music, and literature too. Concerts, performances, and readings now took place within their walls. The new galleries therefore increased intermediality not just because they encouraged intermedial forms like the installation, but because during performances various arts could be easily conjoined in the same space at the same time. So, for instance, Sala 1, an important small gallery in Rome, began hosting Animato, a contemporary music festival, from the early 1990s. For Sala 1's 1994 edition, artist Enzo Cucchi set up an art installation, called 'Nuvola' to accompany the concert. He suspended a cloud of white cotton material, sewn together by the sisters of an adjacent convent, above the heads of the audience as they enjoyed contemporary music.[54] This event is particularly curious, since Enzo Cucchi had, just a decade earlier, been a key player in the Transavanguardia movement, a highly influential movement which aimed to return to the materiality of painting. Here, he was working instead with a hybrid installation which accompanied — or was accompanied by — music. The Transavanguardia, had in fact fallen victim to a cultural shift in the opposite direction, away from the materiality of a single art form (even where this was renewed through the Transavanguardia's postmodern eye). Cucchi was caught up, in other words, in the epochal shift towards mainstreaming hybrid art forms as he drew contemporary classical music and visual art together in a single installation.

Art was also beginning to break boundaries between gallery space and public space by travelling outside the gallery too, providing artists with new venues

for installations and bringing sculpture, light art, and installations directly into dialogue with the architecture of Italian urban spaces. As art left the gallery and spread through the city, it could be blended in new ways, interacting with the wider public as well as with pre-existent arts. There were several high-profile examples in 1994, such as Mario Merz's projection of a light sculpture onto the Vanvitelli railway station in Naples, and Cesare Pietroiusti's *In che cosa posso esserti utile?*, in which the artist asked the public to suggest 'useful actions' which he might do during a few months at the end of 1994. However, in the early 1990s, artists still had to work very hard to occupy city space, since the shifting of art out of the gallery and onto the public landscape was only just beginning.[55] As city-based art and land art continued to develop, it increased the decentralization of art and intensified the sense that art was eclectic and diverse.[56] The shift of art outdoors was also clearly instrumental in ensuring that the contemporary hybrid arts reach a large public that a single framed oil painting, for instance, cannot. This too supports their normalization.

Art did not just begin to seep out from galleries across cities and public spaces, but also entered private homes through exhibition catalogues and video documentation which captured and remediated exhibitions and performances. These supports, which emerged from the growing reproducibility, marketability, and commercialization of art, further normalized intermediality. By the early 1990s, catalogues had become an integral part of the increasingly commercial exhibition apparatus. The catalogue was by then a glossy book of photographs and text which accompanied exhibitions, reproducing sculpture, installations, electronic art, and painting in two dimensions on its pages. These played their own part in erasing the borders between the arts, since, for instance, a tiny painting and oversized installation could appear together at the same size and on the same page. Video documentation was also well-embedded as normal practice among body artists, video artists, performance artists, and others who were involved in recording and cataloguing their transient performances and installations in a longer-lasting electronic form. These pre-digital forms of documentation played an important part in allowing often transient, dematerialized forms of art to achieve a second life in a concrete and material form.

Nonetheless, outside of the new galleries and their attendant apparatus, Bruno Latour's observations often hold. In the main, the magazines which captured Italy's cultural production remained strikingly disciplinary. In the mid-1990s, most established cultural magazines in Italy remained more or less dedicated to a single artistic field: *Aut aut* (1956–) and *Nuovi argomenti* (1953–) for literature; *Domus* (1928–) for architecture and design; *Flashart* (1967–) for the visual arts; *Cineforum* for cinema (1961–). In 1994, these magazines, and many like them, remained true to their disciplinary history and identity. While in the early 1990s we see the arrival of a few new magazines dedicated to new hybrid arts or to mixed media both in mass and elite culture — *Micromega* (1986–), *Kult* (1991–), *Neural* (1993–), and *Olis* (1994–) — in general terms magazines took some time to reorganize themselves into new structures that would reflect and direct the growing reality around them. While important steps would be made in the late 1990s with the arrival of magazines like *Fucine mute*, which talked about graphic art, music, cinema, and theatre, it is

really only towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century that new multimedia magazines flood in. And, of course, it is especially with the explosion of websites dedicated to multiple and hybrid arts that the intellectual and academic infrastructure began to catch up with what had been happening in the arts for decades.

Universities also trailed behind the transformations across the arts. In the 1990s, academics were giving little, if any, attention to intermediality. Disciplinarity remained a cornerstone of their functioning. The creation of the innovative DAMS Faculty at the Università degli Studi di Bologna in 1971, which was dedicated to cinema, music, and arts in general, seemed to signal change. It had the involvement of two of the great postmodernist thinkers, Umberto Eco and Renato Barilli. However, this was not immediately followed by other similar faculties. The arrival of faculties and courses along the lines of Bologna's DAMS would in fact be delayed until the late 1990s and early 2000s. Nonetheless, it is worth noting here that change in the art world was driven by the presence of postmodern thinkers like Gianni Vattimo in Turin (with whom Alessandro Baricco studied) and Umberto Eco at Bologna (with whom Enrico Brizzi studied during Eco's inaugural media course in 1993). Baricco's and Brizzi's interest — as electronic media natives — in plurality, multiplicity, and pop culture were supported by their teachers, and this provided the building blocks of a writing tradition which was plural and hybrid. After all, with Umberto Eco as his supervisor, the young Brizzi was encouraged to discuss contemporary pop music in his undergraduate thesis, an opportunity available only rarely in universities elsewhere in Italy in the early 1990s. This is precisely the music which Brizzi would then weave into his first novel.[57]

To sum up, the structural supports for artistic hybridity had developed very substantially by 1994, but were still rather patchy. The new polyvalent, and increasingly commercial, galleries were important players, but, inevitably, academic supports like academic journals and university courses were slower in taking stock of the changes at play and took much longer to reflect upon them. The disciplinary boundaries signalled in journals, magazines, and university courses were clearly still structuring discourse in the mid-1990s despite the swift rise of debates on hybridity, interdisciplinarity, and postmodernity in Italy and across Europe.

6.7. Postmodernism and the Aestheticization of Society

By the 1990s, television broadcasting had spread its tentacles into both private and public space, moving into homes, bars, and ferries; radios disseminated their soundtracks through the Walkman, car radio, and home devices; art works now spilled out into new galleries and spaces in the city and beyond. What we were witnessing was an extraordinary, and heavily commercialized, aestheticization of society. The rise of electronic media was key to this change, as Gianni Vattimo notes:

> Quella che di fatto già viviamo nella società della cultura di massa, in cui si può parlare di estetizzazione generale della vita in quanto i media [...] hanno assunto nella vita di ognuno un peso infinitamente più grande che in qualunque altra epoca del passato.[58]

> [What we are actually already living in is mass-media society, in which we can talk about a general aestheticization of life, as the media [...] have taken on an infinitely heavier weight in all of our lives than they have in any other era in the past.]

Vattimo's claims that the mass media were foundational to a generalized aestheticization of culture is essential for understanding artistic hybridity in the first half of the 1990s. It is an observation which reflects a postmodern outlook that developed in the wake of the publication of Jean Baudrillard's pessimistic *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981). Baudrillard's text drew attention to the role of television especially, as well as other media, in the creation of a postmodern culture which creates a 'hyperreal' which has replaced the real. It is a theme taken up by Mike Featherstone in one of the important books on postmodernism of the early 1990s, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. Featherstone describes postmodern lifestyles as rooted in eclectic aestheticism. He sees contemporary spaces like cities and tourist spots as spaces in which the 'stroller' (which resembles Walter Benjamin's *flâneur*) moves through an 'ever-changing landscape in which objects appear divorced from their context and subject to mysterious connections which are read on the surface of things'.[59] The idea that objects have been decontextualized, removed from their material supports and recombined, is succinctly expressed in the words of video artist Gianni Toti in 1991:

> La pittura è uscita dai quadri, la letteratura dalla pagina, il cinema dagli schermi, l'arte elettronica dai monitors delle video-installazioni, tutte le arti stanno uscendo dalle cornici e dalle quadrature per rientrare in un grande spazio in cui si uniscano gli spazi fisici, i corpi e le immaterializzazioni, le nuove realtà cibernetico-virtuali.[60]
>
> [Painting has left picture frames, literature has left the page, cinema has left the screen, electronic art has left video-installation monitors; all arts are leaving their picture frames and mental frames to re-enter a large space in which all physical spaces, bodies and dematerializations, and the new cybernetic-virtual realities, are brought together.]

Toti's more optimistic analysis, which is strongly influenced by a lifetime of creative work with electronic media, clarifies the link between the end of a reliance on material supports (picture frames, pages, cinema screens, television monitors) and the ability of those art works to be recombined in new realities once freed from their original material base. This means that Andy Warhol's ten screen prints of Marilyn Monroe (1967) no longer existed just in frames in a museum; they could be reproduced, reprinted on material, and made, by Versace, into an extravagant evening gown. Trip hop was not just consumed at a concert, but was recorded on a CD; it became mobile so that it could be listened to on a Walkman or in a car, providing a soundtrack to all the images that passed the window. It might then insinuate itself into the structure of a novel.[61] Television provided a melting pot of images, sounds, and ideas that could be reworked into other forms.

In the 1990s, the removal of art from its material supports was brought about through electronic media (especially television), but was also supported by the dev-

elopment of white cube galleries and the wider gallery apparatus, which insinuated themselves like rhizomes throughout the city. It is much harder to hybridize a painting in a frame than it is to hybridize it once it can be printed, photocopied, screened on television, and circulated throughout mass society, and beyond elite consumers. What we are seeing in the 1990s is the outcome of a decade or more of postmodern decentring as well as the arrival of what Rosalind Krauss would call the post-medium condition. As Rosalind Krauss would state, 'Every material support, including the site itself — whether art magazine, dealer's fair booth, or museum gallery — will now be levelled, reduced to a system of pure equivalency by the homogenizing principle of commodification, the operation of pure exchange value from which nothing can escape.'[62]

On one level, everything that leaves the frame can be reassembled to fit together in multiple, and perhaps infinite ways. However, the policing of what fits — and what does not fit — together within boundaries has not gone away. It has just changed hands. In the era of Berlusconi, who stood as an emblem of the media-orientated, commercialized, neoliberal market, policing was no longer concentrated in the hands of a literary, artistic, or academic elite. It had shifted away in large part from the academy (which was still largely focused on disciplinary forms of art), and was now in the hands of the market. The mechanics of neoliberalism placed the power to decide what fitted together and what did not largely in the hands of consumers. This put the choice of what kinds of hybridity were acceptable or not in the hands of the big businesses which drove consumption.

One of the most significant changes which arose from this power shift was the increasing focus of the cultural industry on market segmentation. Categorization, when put in the hands of big business, was no longer assigned along the lines of artistic media, as had been the case in the past, whereby art critics, cinema critics, literary critics, and so on policed their own art worlds. Now, market segmentation stepped in. Market analysts divided art and media consumption on the basis of categories such as age, income, personality, and behaviour. These categories cut across a range of artistic media and disciplines. So, when Enrico Brizzi, for instance, interpellated his audience of readers, he was consciously addressing a particular market segment presumed not just to be readers, but also consumers of the kind of music, television, products, design, and fashion linked to the lifestyle and generation of his potential readers. The mechanics of neoliberal marketing was a significant factor in breaking down disciplinary silos, in other words. By segmenting and cutting consumers into new categories they facilitated the creation of groups based on age, on income and so on, rather than on individual inclinations for reading, attending galleries and so on.

1994 appeared as the culmination of a wave of intermedial normalization, as experimental practices of the 1960s and 1970s and technological advances were gradually institutionalized, made acceptable, and became part of a consumer experience. It was a process which had its roots in the 1980s. During the 1980s, avant-garde cultural practitioners like Umberto Eco shifted their attention away from elite experimentation and towards an acceptance, and even an embrace, of a

middlebrow public. Emblematic of this change is Umberto Eco's *Il nome della rosa*: its so-called 'double coding' aimed to hold onto an elite reader by means of erudite clues while courting a middlebrow one through a rattling good story. As Eco states:

> Il fatto che l'avanguardia si sia normalizzata non significa che certi modi di discorso abbiano perso capacità di provocazione, di approfondimento, di trasformazione linguistica. Significa però che non si rivolgono più a una élite marginale, ma a un pubblico più vasto.[63]
>
> [The fact that the avant-garde is normalizing does not mean that certain modes of discourse have lost their capacity for provocation, investigation, and linguistic transformation. It means, however that they no longer address a marginal elite but a vaster public.]

While the absorption of the avant-garde intermedial practices of the 1960s and 1970s into the mainstream, the mass mediatization of Italian society, and consumerism created a distinct hybridity by the mid-1990s, it is worth balancing these observations by noting that many areas of cultural practice still remained untouched by these kinds of intermediality. Most classical music concerts, for instance, were not overhung by cotton sheets made by visual artists, nor were they accompanied by video screens. Most books were not *libri d'artista* or graphic novels; they continued, instead, to be consumed as objects which had not undergone substantial change for centuries. In fact, from the start of the 1980s, we see a progressive return to the story, to narrative, even among more experimental works, after its erasure during the years of high modernism. Films were still being shown on cinema screens. In many of the important historical theatres in Italy's cities, plays did not substantially question the proximity of theatre to either cognate or distant arts. However, what is clear when we take stock, as we have done in this chapter, is that intermediality had gained significant ground since 1972, entering mainstream spaces and becoming a normal part of everyday life. In the words of Gianni Vattimo, 'Il progresso diventa routine' and 'la novità non ha nulla di "rivoluzionario" e sconvolgente, è ciò che permette che le cose vadano avanti nello stesso modo' [progress becomes routine and the new has nothing 'revolutionary' and disturbing, and this means that things can go ahead in the same way as before].[64]

6.8. Conclusion

Hybridity is not a neutral category. It is, according to postcolonial critics like Homi Bhabha, Ella Shohat, and John Hutnyk, politically charged.[65] So, reading intermediality through the lens of hybridity also means questioning its political import. To return to the point where we began this chapter — to the birth of the Second Republic, to Berlusconi, and to multi-ethnic Italy — we can now position the normalization of intermediality into a political frame.

In the 1990s, hybridity was a feature of both the political sphere and the changing Italian ethnic spaces. The development of hybridity in these spaces was far from smooth. It was not just a case of putting diverse things together and letting them get on with it. 1990s' Italy was a highly fractured society in which institutions

and ideologies which had previously forged social cohesion had weakened.[66] The new political alliances that emerged from the collapse of the First Republic were quickly revealed as fragmented and heterogeneous, both on the right and the left of the political spectrum. The new bipolar political system was marked in the 1990s by 'personal, political, organisational and group rivalries between the coalitions' various fragments',[67] a lack of steadiness which would be symbolized by the frequent political party name changes, and lead to a high level of conflict within the coalition blocks which made it difficult to set policy objectives and measure their success.[68] The new ethnically hybrid social spaces that were emerging at this time were similarly fractious and contested. As Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan argue, 'Interactions tend not to be neutrally received and accepted, but rather have been and are frequently contested and contentious spaces of mediation and interaction'.[69] The Lega Nord [Northern League] party 'resist[ed] hybridity and tried to perpetuate an imagined authentic Northern Italian culture'; the contact zones between the new migrants to Italy and native Italians were uneasy, with informal segregation and surveillance.[70]

The normalization of intermedia in the 1990s played out against the conflictual, messy alliances between the new political allies of the Second Republic and against the uneasy contact zones that brought together and kept apart the newly arrived migrants and resident Italians. Boundaries were reforged and hybridization in these fields was in its early stages. For intermedia, much of the experimentation with boundary breaking had already taken place in the 1960s and 1970s, and the once-radical associations were becoming commercialized. A lot of the political, and even subversive, forces seen in the forging of new 1990s political alliances and contact zones has been lost along the road of intermedial normalization. This can certainly be read in the light of the *riflusso*, that societal shift towards 'political restoration' that took place in Italy after the student and workers' movements of the late 1960s failed to deliver their objectives. The normalization that we see in the relatively stable intermedial hybridity of this time can be seen to reflect many of the aspects of the *riflusso*: a hedonistic mixing of different artistic media that seemed often to put political collectivity to one side, and embrace the commercial success that might be found in a graphic novel which combined comics and literature, or performances that took on the televisual spectacle that Berlusconi's influence had seen flooding through Italy. Again, we reiterate that there were cases of subversive intermedial political experimentation in Italy in the 1990s: both the Milanese collectives, Studio Azzurro, and the Luther Blisset Project, for instance, were knowingly subversive, experimental and political. However, much of the intermediality that inhered in the period was associated with the absorption of commercial mass media, and had therefore lost its political edge.

It makes a lot of sense to talk, as we did in the Introduction to this book, about waves of intermedial experimentation, one of which had crashed down on Italy in the 1960s, and one of which was just bubbling under the surface in 1994 and would soon crash down again. The launch in 1994 of the first large internet provider in Italy (Video On Line), which had as its objective to push forward the development of

the Internet in Italy, a country which in that period was still defined as 'scarsamente alfabetizzato dal punto di vista informatico' [barely computer literate] was a sign of what would become the next wave of intermediality.[71] In the following year, Windows 95 was launched, making computers more user friendly, and the World Wide Web was privatized, which was to make it more accessible. While the rise of the digital was not the only thing behind the next developments in intermediality, it would prove, nonetheless a game changer. Digital intermediality will provide the focus of the following chapter.

Notes to Chapter 6

1. Critics do not entirely agree on whether there has in fact been a Second Republic. Paul Furlong in *The New Politics of Italy: In Search of a Second Republic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), for instance, takes the rather bleak view that the period after 1993 is one of dissolution, and that the same socio-political challenges and obstacles persist. In his view, Italy in 1994 is very far from making a new start.
2. Anna Cento Bull, *Modern Italy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 33.
3. Michele A. Cortelazzo, *Annali del lessico contemporaneo italiano: neologismi 1995* (Lecco and Milan: Esedra, 1996). The idea of Berlusconi's *videocrazia* has been questioned, however, as ultimately, even at the peak of his media career, with control over six of seven television channels, he would still lose three elections. See Annalisa Cappellini and Francesco Grillo, 'Making Sense of Italy's Second Republic: When Politics Become a Soap Opera', *openDemocracy*, 8 April 2013 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/making-sense-of-italys-second-republic-when-politics-become-so/> [accessed 21 January 2021].
4. Andrea Meneghelli, 'Il cinema italiano e le nuove leve letterarie', *Annali d'Italianistica*, 17 (1999), 203–16 (p. 206).
5. The Luther Blisset project was born in 1994. It took the name of a British footballer of Afro-Caribbean origin and shared this name throughout an informal network of activists and artists across several countries, who used it in order to hide personal authorship; this was seen by the network as a kind of guerrilla warfare on the mainstream culture industry which depends on the concept of authors, authority, and copyright. The project closed in 1999 after five years, and its ideators subsequently took the name of Wu Ming, the collective discussed in the following chapter. Their use of alternative network technologies like FidoNet makes them precursors to the digital turn that would define intermediality in Italy the early 2000s.
6. Gianni Vattimo, 'Oltre il confine dell'estetico', in *XLV Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte* (Venice: Marsilio, 1993), pp. 565–66 (p. 565).
7. Raffaello A. Doro, 'La radio dalla stagione delle radio libere agli anni Novanta: sviluppo e consumo culturale nella società italiana', in *Consumi e mass media*, ed. by Francesca Anania (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013), pp. 83–128.
8. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Post-modernity*, cited in Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), p. 1.
9. Donna Haraway, *A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989); Roberto Cordeschi and Vittorio Somenzi, *La filosofia degli automi: origini dell'intelligenza artificiale* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1994).
10. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. xxix.
11. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 4.
12. Pap Khouma and Oreste Pivetta, *Io, venditore di elefanti* (Milan: Garzanti, 1990); Fernanda Farias de Albuquerque and Maurizio Iannelli, *Princesa* (Rome: Sensibili alle foglie, 1994).
13. Contamination is mentioned repeatedly, especially by visual artists. See, for example *Anni '90, arte a Milano: artisti e artisti designer nella città*, ed. by Rolando Bellini (Milan: Associazione

Interessi Metropolitani, 1995). Umberto Eco also refers to mass media as 'contaminazione' and 'marmellata' (cited in Monica Jansen, *Il dibattito sul postmoderno in Italia* (Florence: Franco Cesati, 2002), p. 216).

14. In the US, hybridity was a feature of postmodernism and proto postmodernism from the outset. Hans Bertens notes how Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: Doubleday, 1966) demonstrates a preference for elements which are hybrid rather than pure and Charles Jencks (who Bertens sees as the guru of American postmodernism) in the early 1980s says that one of postmodernism's stylistic variables is hybridism (alongside complexity, eclecticism and so on). For a detailed and accurate analysis of the intellectual and literary debate in Italy on postmodernism, where plurality rather than hybridity is central, see Jansen.
15. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* [1964] (Berkeley, CA: Gingko, 1994), pp. 65–66.
16. Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 89.
17. Bertens, p. 130.
18. Rosalind E. Krauss, *'A Voyage on the North Sea': Art in the Age of the Post-medium Condition* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000).
19. Angela Vettese, 'Esiste una nuova arte milanese?', in *Anni '90, arte a Milano*, ed. by Bellini, pp. 64–69 (p. 68).
20. Scott Lash, *Sociology of Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 175.
21. Simone Castaldi, 'Adult Fumetti and the Postmodern: Poetics of Italian Sequential Art in the 1970s and 1980s', *Word & Image*, 20.4 (2004), 271–82.
22. Fausto Colombo, *La cultura sottile: media e industria culturale in Italia dall'Ottocento agli anni novanta* (Milan: Bompiani, 1998).
23. Paolo Peverini, 'Forme del digitale tra videoclip e cinema', in *Immagini migranti: forme intermediali del cinema nell'era digitale*, ed. by Luciano De Giusti (Venice: Marsilio, 2008), pp. 162–63.
24. Milly Buonanno in *L'età della televisione: esperienze e teorie* (Rome: Laterza, 2006) notes how in this period television became the main leisure activity in the West.
25. Buonanno discusses 'flux' in terms of a 'sequenza di materiali eterogenei' [sequence of heterogeneous materials] which appear onscreen as 'una corrente ininterrotta: news, rubriche d'attualità, talk show, film, serie, e ogni altra tipologia di contenuti [...] mescolati alla pubblicità, alle televendite, e a materiali promozionali diversi' [an uninterrupted flow: news, current affairs programmes, talk shows, films, series, and other kinds of content [...] all mixed with adverts, telesales, and various kinds of promotional material] (Buonanno, *L'età della televisione*, p. 31).
26. Valérie Joelle Kouam, 'Il regime mediatico in Italia, 1994–1995', *Cahiers d'études italiennes*, 11 (2010), 171–81.
27. Alberto Rollo, 'La spirale dell'ironia e il cuore in cattedra', cited in Meneghelli, p. 204.
28. Susanna Tamaro, *Va' dove ti porta il cuore* (Milan: Baldini e Castoldi, 1994); Enrico Brizzi, *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo: una maestosa storia d'amore e di 'rock parrocchiale'* (Ancona: Transeuropa Edizioni, 1994); Niccolò Ammaniti, *Branchie* (Rome: Ediesse, 1994); Antonio Tabucchi, *Sostiene Pereira* (Milan: Fetrinelli, 1994); Umberto Eco, *L'isola del giorno prima* (Milan: Bompiani, 1994); Andrea Camilleri, *La forma dell'acqua* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1994).
29. ISTAT, cited in Peter Hainsworth, 'Literature and Society 1950–2000', in *Italy: Fiction, Theater, Poetry, Film Since 1950*, ed. by Robert S. Dombroski (New York: Council on National Literatures, 2000), pp. 29–52.
30. Enrico Brizzi, *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo: una maestosa storia d'amore e di 'rock parrocchiale'* [1994] (Milan: Baldini Castoldi Dalai, 2004), p. 16. Translation: *Jack Frusciante Has Left the Band: A Love Story — with Rock 'n' Roll*, trans. by Stash Luczkiw (New York: Grove Press, 1997).
31. Enrico Brizzi, op. cit., p. 23.
32. Bruno Pischedda, 'Modernità del postmoderno', *Belfagor*, 52.5 (1997), 579–88 (p. 588).
33. Enrico Brizzi, cited in Luca Gervasutti, *Dannati e sognatori: guida alla nuova narrativa italiana* (Pasian di Prato: Campanotto, 1998), p. 55.
34. Nicolò Ammaniti, cited in *Dannati e sognatori*, p. 56.
35. Giuseppe Culicchia, cited in *Dannati e sognatori*, p. 24.

36. Marino Sinibaldi, *Pulp: la letteratura nell'era della simultaneità* (Rome: Donzelli, 1997), p. 21, cited in Jansen, p. 234.
37. Alessandro Baricco, cited in Carla Benedetti, *L'ombra lunga dell'autore: indagine su una figura cancellata* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1999), p. 107.
38. Richard Harrison Martin, *Gianni Versace* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997). The connection between fashion and the art world is a fascinating and evolving one, which would lead to widespread recognition of the 'high' art of Italian fashion design in exhibitions like that dedicated to Gianni Versace seen at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1997. But in the mid-1990s it was still pop and rock music which provided many of the key points of reference for fashion: the fashion industry enjoyed citing the grunge aesthetics of Nirvana and Goth bands, especially after the release of Alex Proyas's *The Crow* (Miramax Films, 1994), based on the comic book series by James O'Barr and signalling a dark, neo-gothic aesthetic.
39. We also see the mediatization of culture and nature reflected in another film during this period in the fantastical capture of the moon and its chained appearance on television in Federico Fellini's *La voce della luna* (Penta Film, 1990), a film which captures the alienated wanderings of a character — in this case the visionary fool Ivo — through a hyperreal, postmodern landscape.
40. The Transavanguardia (known outside Italy as the Post-Expressionists) was a movement led by Mimmo Paladino (1948–), Emilio Cucchi (1950–), and Sandro Chia (1946–), which 'reworked the artistic language and the style of the historical avant-garde, as well as that of the past in general'; Zygmunt Barański and Rebecca West (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). The movement concentrated on the materiality of painting.
41. Radio shares with television a seamless movement between art forms during the broadcasting day and contributed significantly to the intermediality of the 1990s. Radio, like television, is a connective medium: one that brings together a wide range of music, news, advertising, storytelling, radio plays, and comment into a single identificatory flux. Not only does a radio station move effortlessly between art forms during the course of a day, but listeners can also flick easily between different programmes — as they do with television — by simply changing stations. In other words, radio provides a model for porous boundaries between oral and aural art forms just as television does for visual forms. The place of radio in disseminating rock and pop music, with its attendant fashion and lifestyles, played an important role in creating a new and distinctly hybrid tradition for writers and other artists (as per the discussion in the previous section). While my focus here, for reasons of space, is on television, the electronic media *par excellence* of this period, see the following to trace the story of radio in the 1990s: Raffaello A. Doro, 'La radio dalla stagione delle radio libere agli anni Novanta: sviluppo e consumo culturale nella società italiana', in *Consumi e mass media*, ed. by Francesca Anania (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013), pp. 83–120; Franco Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia: un secolo di costume, società e politica* (Venice: Marsilio, 2001).
42. Kouam, pp. 171–81.
43. Buonanno, *L'età della televisione*.
44. However, from the mid-1980s to the millennium, RAI's policy of commercialization reduced the space for theatre, and especially for opera on television. Live opera practically disappeared from the small screen over this period, and where it was screened, opera was banished to late-night television. See, Emanuele Senici, 'L'opera alla televisione italiana fin de siècle (1976–2000)', *Musica Docta: Rivista digitale di pedagogia e didattica della musica*, 7 (2017), 51–64.
45. John Corner, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 63.
46. Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Routledge, 1974).
47. Buonanno, *L'età della televisione*.
48. Latour, p. 1. Latour's analysis primarily deals with the relations between the sciences and humanities rather than intermedia *per se*.
49. The white cube spaces were launched in the 1920s, and then revived in the 1980s. See Rosalind E. Krauss, 'Le *musée* sans murs du Postmodernisme', in *Cahiers du Musée nationale d'art moderne*, special issue: *L'Œuvre et son accrochage*, 17/18 (1986), 152–58.
50. Steven Jacobs, *Framing Pictures: Film and the Visual Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

51. Krauss, 'Le *musée* sans murs', p. 158.
52. André Malraux, *Le musée imaginaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).
53. Krauss, 'Le *musée* sans murs', p. 188.
54. Francesca Capriccioli and Mary Angela Schroth, *Mémoires (1967–2007): cronistorie d'arte contemporanea* (Rome: Gangemi, 2008).
55. The British Festival in Rome, for instance, failed to gain permission to project a light installation created by Peter Greenaway in the Piazza del Popolo due to Berlusconian bureaucratic issues which delayed it until 1996. Luisa Ceretto, 'Il testo è un'immagine: conversazione con Peter Greenaway', *Primi Piani, Rivista di cinema e letteratura*, 1 (2000) <https://primipiani.wordpress.com/numeri-della-rivista/i-peter-greenaway/il-testo-e-unimmagine-conversazione-con-peter-greenaway/> [accessed 28 January 2021].
56. Johanne Lamoureux, 'The Museum Flat', in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. by Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 81–93.
57. Enrico Brizzi, 'Eco? Veniva in Dr Martens. E a lezione si rideva molto', *Corriere di Bologna*, 21 February 2016 <https://corrieredibologna.corriere.it/bologna/notizie/cultura/2016/21-febbraio-2016/eco-veniva-dr-martens-lezione-si-rideva-molto-24078479069.shtml> [accessed 26 January 2021].
58. Gianni Vattimo, *La fine della modernità* [1985] (Milan: Garzanti, 2012), p. 63.
59. Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London: Sage, 1991), p. 23.
60. Gianni Toti, 'Tecnologie di domani per nuovi linguaggi', *Revista Sans Soleil: Estudios de la Imagen*, Especial Gianni Toti, 3 (2011–12), 88–92 (p. 92).
61. It goes without saying that this process has been going on for a long time, as Walter Benjamin's, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), originally published in German in 1935, testifies. However, the rise of electronic media from the 1960s has intensified the process described by Benjamin.
62. Krauss, *'A Voyage on the North Sea'*, p. 15.
63. Umberto Eco, cited in Rocco Capozzi, *Scrittori, tendenze letterarie e conflitto delle poetiche in Italia (1960–1990)* (Ravenna: Longo, 1991), p. 93.
64. Gianni Vattimo, *La fine della modernità: nichilismo ed ermeneutica nella cultura post-moderna* (Milan: Garzanti, 1985).
65. See Homi Bhabha and Ella Shohat, 'Notes on the "Post-Colonial"', *Social Text*, 31/32 (1992), 99–113 <https://doi.org/10.2307/466220>; John Hutnyk, 'Hybridity', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28.1 (2005), 79–102 <https://doi.org/10.1080/0141987042000280021>.
66. Paul Ginsburg, *Italy and its Discontents, 1980–2001* (London: Penguin, 2001).
67. Sergio Fabbrini, 'The Transformation of Italian Democracy', *Bulletin of Italian Politics*, 1.1 (2009), 29–47 (p. 30).
68. Ibid.
69. Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, 'Introduction: Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Culture', in *National Belongings: Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Cultures* ed. by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 1–19 (p. 3).
70. Ibid., pp. 2–4.
71. Andrea Corda, '1994–1996: un biennio cruciale nella storia di Internet e del giornalismo on-line', in *Storia e Futuro: Rivista di storia e storiografia*, 31 (2013) <http://storiaefuturo.eu/1994–1996-un-biennio-cruciale-nella-storia-di-internet-e-del-giornalismo-on-line/> [accessed 26 January 2022].

CHAPTER 7

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2007: Convergence

7.1. Introduction

In 2007, *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins's highly influential book on the convergence of old and new media, was published in Italy, just one year after its publication in the United States. This publication marks the next crucial step in our journey tracing intermedia in Italy, signalling Italy's belated, and sudden, embrace of digital platforms, platforms which were to provide exciting new spaces for the arts and media to collide. Digital technology is central to this new step, as artists experiment with the possibilities it offers as well as testing its limitations. However, while digital technology dominates the narrative in this chapter, our story is not one of straightforward technological determinism. The drive towards intermedial practice will prove more deep-rooted and complex than this.

While the first personal computer was sold as early as 1975 and Italy's first website launched in 1994, it was only at the start of the twenty-first century that websites and other digital platforms really became established as critical meeting points for intermedial experimentation.[1] This is not to deny the many cases of digital and computer-orientated experimentation that had gone on before this, as recently observed by both Emanuela Patti and Eleonora Lima;[2] it is simply to note that the impact of the digital on artistic practice, however tantalizing and important, was limited, and it remained a rather niche pursuit prior to the new millennium. While Italy was initially slow to use digital media,[3] once Italian artists stepped onto these platforms, they were to have an extraordinarily important place in the story of intermediality we are endeavouring to tell here.

One of the reasons why digital space became so political at the start of the millennium leads us back to Silvio Berlusconi and the domination of electronic media (television especially) and print media mentioned in the previous chapter. During the five years of Silvio Berlusconi's centre-right coalition (2001–06), online space increasingly became a place where left-wing political players, minorities of all kinds, and radical artists found a way to voice their views. What had happened was that in establishing the powerful media company Mediaset in 1993, Berlusconi effectively created a media duopoly in Italy.[4] When he became Prime Minister for the second time, in 2001, he was then able to exercise control over both Mediaset and Rai, giving him power over six of the seven main television channels in Italy. Airing oppositional material on television — Italy's most important medium

— quickly became difficult as key oppositional voices were expelled from the airwaves or blocked from entering them in the first place.[5] Berlusconi also had an exceptionally wide influence over a swathe of old media, including radio, and book and magazine publishing.[6] With large parts of old media under the thumb of a single media tycoon/politician and with the peninsula ranked only forty-second in the world for press freedom by Freedom House in 2005, media spaces outside television were frequently viewed as creative and liberatory spaces of experimentation and left-wing counterculture. Digital spaces were seen as new and radical, and many artists and activists embraced them.

This utopian embrace of digital culture in the first decade of the millennium may now seem naive, since in recent years social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter/X have been repeatedly called out as anti-democratic, but is easy to forget how exciting early digital media seemed when it was first adopted. The claims made for freedom and for bottom-up democracy by bloggers, like Beppe Grillo when he launched his enormously successful blog in 2005, have been subject to increasing scrutiny. Fifteen years later, social media is seen as polarizing its users and creating echo chambers.[7] Furthermore, it has been widely accused of creating and circulating fake news, fuelling populism, and manipulating the outcomes of both the Brexit referendum in the UK (2016) and the election of Donald Trump in America (2016). Here, we will attempt to recapture the utopic moment when websites and other digital platforms appeared to point to a happier, freer, and more democratic future, a unique moment of optimism which, from our standpoint in 2020, can be seen to have been confidently poised right above the cliff edge of a global economic crash in 2008 that would radically change the mood in Italy and across the Western world.

2007 is the year in which the concept of 'convergence', which had been circulating among artists for some years prior to this, was explicitly discussed. The publication of the Italian translation of Henry Jenkins's book and the launch of the *Manituana* website by the well-known writers collective, Wu Ming, was what opened this debate in Italy. As discussed in the Introduction to this book, Jenkins's understanding of convergence comprises both the idea of multiple media converging on various digital platforms and the idea that they flow between platforms. Convergence is a much more mobile and transient concept then, than hybridity, which points to a more stable merging.

Wu Ming's *Manituana* website is an almost textbook example of how Jenkins's ideas about convergence were received and reconceived in Italy. 2007 is also the year in which some fascinating experiments in convergence in other fields took place. *Global Stage*, for instance, by veteran Italian filmmaker Carlo Lizzani, used digital technology to connect cinema, theatre, dance, mime, and drawings together in a utopic transnational space. Two architects at the Brera Academy in Milan created *Macchine per fare le bolle* [Machines for Making Bubbles] inside the three-dimensional virtual world on the international digital platform *Second Life*, often seen now as a precursor to the metaverse. Their work draws together architecture, sculpture, performance, video documentation, gaming, and narrative.

The *Manituana* website, *Global Stage*, and *Macchine per fare le bolle* will act as three brief exemplary artistic projects through which we will explore convergence. They provide glimpses of how Italy was responding to, and shaping, the global shift towards media convergence that had emerged in the late 1990s. They also illustrate the utopian drive that so often appears to resurface when the concept of the unity of the arts emerges explicitly in debates. We have already seen in this book how this artistic totality was appropriated by the political right in Fascist Italy. Here, in this chapter, we will see how it was taken forward by artists, especially by artists on the political left who transported a fundamentally capitalist and mainstream American model of convergence into a peculiarly Italian, and often countercultural, context in a country where the Internet was being seen as a viable alternative to mainstream Berlusconi-dominated media, itself — as we argued in the previous chapter — intermedial. Exploring convergence allows us to glimpse how artists responded to, and drove, change as their art collided with digital technologies. It enables us to see how the material differences between the arts were challenged, as art objects were dematerialized into the digital language of numbers. It highlights the changing conception of space, as multiple arts could now appear together in new ways in a digital space. The Italian model of convergence deserves debate because it highlights how a concept — convergence — with its roots in a capitalist mass-media model can be overturned and used to subvert communicative, and artistic, norms. In 2007, we see new forms of intermediality emerging as a form of political subversion again, rather than as a mass-media influenced, commercialized phenomena that we saw in the middle of the 1990s. This is not to imply that the commercialized intermedia we saw a decade previously had gone away — it had not. Rather, intermediality, with its ever-changing combinations of art and media, was being reintroduced in the early 2000s as part of a new digital and political phenomenon.

7.2. Cultural Convergence: Wu Ming's *Manituana*

By 2007, Wu Ming had been working across multiple media and with digital technology for some time. While the collective was born in 2000, since the mid-1990s its members had been working, as we saw in the previous chapter, under another name: the Luther Blisset Project. This small group of politically orientated Italian writers had a long-standing interest in what they referred to as 'communication warfare', taking some of their inspiration from Berlin Dada events and Futurist soirees, as well as from pop culture and Mexican Zapatistas. In other words, the radical communication of their ideas was central to their sense of purpose, and they had been looking, from the outset, for novel ways to break communicative conventions. For some time, they had been interested in creating international networks of artists. The Luther Blisset Project had put together a community of contributors through early computer Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) like FidoNet (1984–), used by computer enthusiasts and hackers to communicate with each other. Using both BBS and the national network of occupied social centres, the Luther Blisset Project successfully established what they referred to as a hoax, encouraging artists and activists across a range of artistic fields to publish their work under the

Fig. 7.1. Landing page, Wu Ming's *Manituana* website (2007) @Wu Ming Foundation.

shared pseudonym of footballer Luther Blisset. This was an exercise in the creation of an international, cross-media collective identity which had garnered success and notoriety: hundreds of people used the name, and it piqued journalistic curiosity.

It was really, however, only at the time of their contact with Henry Jenkins that their interest in networks, digital activism, and writing collided with the digital in a way that would radically change their own work as writers and would create Italy's most well-known instance of transmedial writing. In 2016, Wu Ming 1 wrote an email to Jenkins, outlining what he saw as the 'commonalities' between what their collective had been doing and the work described by Jenkins in *Convergence Culture*. Wu Ming 1 explained to Jenkins how his theory reflected 'the things we've been doing and theorizing for more than twelve years, albeit with a more radical/activist edge (multitudinous authorship, crossmedia storytelling, world making, identity games, RPG guerrilla warfare, old/new media collision, copyleft-orientated practices, media hoaxes, and so on)'.[8] After this initial contact, two things happened. Firstly, Wu Ming wrote the Preface to the 2007 Italian translation of Jenkins's book. Given the importance of Wu Ming in Italy at this time, this meant that critical attention in Italy would be firmly drawn towards Jenkins's ideas. Secondly, they took the critic's ideas and translated them into what might be considered a kind of online laboratory for convergence: the website for their collectively written historical novel, *Manituana*, which narrates the story of the American revolution from the point of view of the indigenous Americans i.e., the losing side.

This website <www.manituana.com>, created together with programmer Andrea Alberti, is, in Clodagh Brook and Emanuela Patti's words, an 'estensione multimediale' [multimedial extension] of the eponymous novel. It was published

in parallel to the book, and can, according to Emanuela Piga, be read as a fully fledged digital work of art.[9] The website is the first in Italy to bring together book and book trailer, spinoff stories written by fans, music, and visual illustrations, including maps. In other words, it draws together various arts and media — both old and new — onto a single platform. Nonetheless, the centre of its practice remains literary, and the website draws attention from the outset to its foundation in literature. It does this both through the typography of the landing page that leans heavily on literary forms (the use of italics; the flourishes on initial capitals which mirror writing with an ink pen) and through the addition of the page's subheading, 'romanzo' [novel] — see Fig. 7.1. Moreover, the old black and white map and etchings of indigenous Americans that appear on the landing page could easily belong to nineteenth-century book illustrations. The landing page itself is designed as a webpage which has in its central space a piece of parchment or old paper, a crease down its medial line so that it resembles a book cover, perhaps, or an old book open on one page. It is clear from this landing page that Wu Ming is trying to recreate some sense of the 'thingness', or materiality, of a book on a dematerialized digital platform. They attempt to capture some of the history of the literary object through traditional typography and lithography. If the arts converge on this digital space, in other words, precedence is firmly being given to one of them.

The website's tabs, nonetheless, draw attention to the way that <manituana.com> draws together arts into one space (merging) as well as indicating further platforms where the narrative develops (flow), thus conjoining the two directions that convergence commonly takes, according to Jenkins.[10] While the first tab on the far left is titled 'il libro' [the book], and is therefore given due prominence in terms of the natural left-to-right bias of Western perception, this is followed by tabs labelled 'trailer', 'notizie', 'racconti ammutinati', 'luoghi', 'visioni', 'suoni', 'cronologia', 'livello 2', and 'Pontiac' [trailer, news, mutineer tales, places, visions, sounds, chronology, level 2, Pontiac]. Inside these tabs we find, for instance, a book trailer, links to Google Maps (where some of the places in the book can be explored), a photograph of a stuffed doll made by a schoolchild in the likeness of one of *Manituana*'s characters, and a computer game. Under the tab *Pontiac*, downloadable MP3 files combine a musical soundtrack with readings of narratives which expand upon a tiny fragment of *Manituana*'s world (the Proclamation Line of 1763). If the arts converge temporarily at one point (the website), the site itself sends its visitors from here to multiple platforms — to music devices, YouTube, and offline debates. With its focus on content migrating across multiple platforms, the site shares much with Jenkins's conception of flow.

On the site, Wu Ming state their aim as 'raccontare storie con ogni mezzo necessario, partire dal romanzo per esplorare un universo narrativo e renderlo accessibile da diversi sentieri: non solo il libro, ma anche fumetti, video, musiche, pagine web' [the idea is to tell stories by every means necessary, beginning with the novel in order to explore the narrative universe and render it accessible from different paths, not just the book, but also comics, video, music, and web pages]. While there is clearly a marketing element behind this, the website appears to be driven not so much by economics as by the desire to explore *Manituana*'s narrative

universe and create different media pathways into it. Its users are not treated as consumers, but as loyal fans of the book, the most loyal of whom can enter the website's gated and (intellectually) guarded 'Level 2' by answering questions related to the novel. Nor does the website provide items to buy, like games or toys. In fact, the central product (the novel *Manituana*) can be downloaded without payment following so-called copy-left principals. In line with Wu Ming's left-wing political views and Italy's nascent sharing economy, the Italian product is therefore far less consumer-orientated than the mass-media products like *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, and *American Idol*, created by global franchises and discussed by Jenkins. It is a form of convergence that is rooted in a bottom-up consumerism brought into a countercultural Italian context in which left-wing principles of collective production hold sway. This creates a version of convergence that fits well into Italy's quality global art production: i.e., elite pop culture produced by artists on the political left.

There are parallels to be drawn here between the *Manituana* website and art-house cinema in the 1960s. Mid-century art-house cinema saw experimental forms of filmmaking develop in Italy and across Europe, as prominent cinematic auteurs took a commercial form (cinema) and re-inscribed it, intermedially, within high-art practices. At this time filmmakers such as Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, Marco Bellocchio, Carmelo Bene, Lina Wertmüller and Pier Paolo Pasolini, while retaining elements of cinema's original Fordian production methods, emphasized its connection to theatre, to music, and to the visual arts in order to valorize the product, re-inscribing pop culture into a hybrid pop-elite form that is not dissimilar to that seen on the *Manituana* website. This hybrid form provides its audience with a range of viewing pleasures as well as proving enduringly lucrative.[11] Unlike popular Italian cinema, which is considered too local and culturally specific to travel, art-house cinema gains access to a significant global market reserved for high-quality art products.[12] There are also parallels that can be drawn with Umberto Eco's concept of an intertextual cult classic, a concept cited in Jenkins's book, and almost certainly noted by Wu Ming in their reading of *Convergence Culture*. Eco's idea of cult objects is firmly rooted in the notion of world-making. It is about creating a work which goes beyond a single book; a story cannot be 'fully explored or exhausted within a single work or even a single medium',[13] and it transcends linear narrative as it shifts towards complexity. Eco's idea, like that of Italy's cinematic modernism of the 1960s, is all about creating complex art, while finding ways to hook in a readership that is smaller, perhaps, but highly *loyal*, an audience which enjoys a cult cultural product because it has the intermedial competence to pick up references to other works.

While Jenkins's discussion of convergence is focused on mass culture, those who use that culture are often, for Wu Ming, 'una minoranza di ascoltatori' or 'una nicchia underground' [a minority of listeners; an underground niche]. If, for Jenkins, convergence is both a 'top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process',[14] for Wu Ming the emphasis is almost entirely on the latter, and they see their work as questioning the authority of the author (top down)

and instead empowering the reader.[15] However, here too they re-position Jenkins when they read consumers of culture as distinctly countercultural appropriators. In their Preface, Wu Ming draw attention to pop culture, distinguishing between trivial and degraded pop culture on the one hand and 'quality' pop culture, on the other. While they clearly refuse to read quality pop culture as elitist, they nonetheless align trivial culture, upon which they frown, with Berlusconi's Mediaset television channels. This underscores the politically oppositional nature of the concept of intermedial convergence for the collective. They do not read it as a money-making bolt-on created by marketeers (the top-down approach), but instead as a new, and already intrinsic, part of making culture in the twenty-first century:

> The Italian debate is more focused on technological convergence (the newer-than-latest monstrously gimmicky multi-function cell phone) than on transmedia culture. In the rare cases when this aspect is taken into account, the focus is always on corporate strategies, on how the potentates of entertainment are trying to move their content to new platforms, like candies from an old dispenser to the new one. No pundit says a word about this very same interest being shared, practiced and (often 'illegally') subverted by the public.
>
> People move stories, sounds and images across territories all the time, but nobody seems to acknowledge that this 'smuggling' responds to a new aesthetical model, a new way to tell stories, inform, sabotage, and have fun. It's just marketing. And if you're a writer you've got to write a *real* book, one that's made of paper. Everything else — websites, booktrailers, blogs, extra features and outtakes etc. — is promotional material, a spurious appendix that smells like money.[16]

In seeing their own intermedial work as radical and subversive, they ignore the roots of their own intermediality in the normalization and aestheticization of the hybrid 1990s. Instead, Wu Ming appear to step over the 1990s, to recuperate the experimental flavour of intermediality of the 1960s and 1970s. They use the lessons provided by Umberto Eco and cinematic modernism to provide the gateway for Jenkins's ideas of 'convergence' to travel within Italy. On the *Manituana* website, they draw a wide variety of arts together to create a complex, innovative, and encyclopaedic world with characters and episodes that seem designed to take on a life of their own beyond their original novel. The international subject matter (the American civil war) and the rapid translation into English and other languages of *Manituana* makes this a transnational work that confirms Wu Ming's emphasis on attaining a place in the global market through the creation of loyal followers. Their intermedial project is an essential part of this cultural-economic process, and, according to Emanuela Piga, this supports the claim that there is a 'forte legame tra interattività e consumismo' [there is a strong link between interactivity and consumerism].[17] In other words, while Wu Ming's work is experimental and participative, the creation, which appears deliberate, of a cult universe (i.e. the endless universe of *Manituana*, with its many characters, maps, narratives, and spinoffs) makes us question their motivation in the bringing together of the arts in their world-making. It brings *Manituana* closer to the commercial hybridity of the 1990s than its makers would care to admit.

So, it appears that the intermediality of *Manituana*'s websites arises from a tangled web of motivations and causes. There are economic motivations linked to improving the impact and sales of literary products in an increasingly visually orientated world. There are ideological ones, especially Wu Ming's reclaiming of Jenkins's convergence for their own countercultural political purposes and their unshaken belief in the democratizing force of the digital. There are also political ones: under Berlusconi the mainstream mediasphere is far from open to them, so the internet, as it was conceived back in 2007, provides a deregulated and freer space. Then, there are technological motivations. The creation of a website is an obvious next step for a technologically aware group who had already had a positive experience of the underground networked communication provided by the BBS platform back in the 1990s. Finally, the drive towards world making appears to be a deep-seated drive in artists attracted to intermediality, including Wu Ming. The result of all these factors is the deconstruction of artistic borders, which become ever easier to cross, as well as the involvement of 'everyday people', often transnationally, in co-creation across a range of arts.

7.3. Global Convergence: Carlo Lizzani's *Global Stage*

In 2007, veteran filmmaker Carlo Lizzani (1922–2013) created *Global Stage* at the Rome Film Festival, a performance inspired by an African creation myth (*Dunia Sigui Kan*), an ecological tale which narrates the catastrophic damage to the environment that humans can do when they wield too much power over it. This performance, which was the first of its kind in the world, drew together two distinct and distant stages — one in Rome and the other in Ouagadougou, capital of Burkina Faso. Performers in West Africa and in Italy converged virtually in the same space by means of a satellite link which transported video and audio signals from the live performance in Burkina Faso onto the three-dimensional virtual Roman set in which pre-recorded and live performances were mixed.[18] The Roman stage presented spectators with a split space in which they could watch the live actors performing on stage against a blue screen while simultaneously seeing, projected above them, a screening of the final performance which brought together live performances on the Roman stage, pre-recorded material produced in Italy, and live dancers projected in by satellite from Burkina Faso (see Fig. 7.2). So, what encouraged the artists to actively push art forms to converge? And what are the implications of this convergence on intermediality? The discussion in this section takes its inspiration from what Jenkins termed 'global convergence', i.e. the hybridity that takes place when media content circulates globally.

If we look first at how the convergence of the arts and media came about in this project, the first observation to be made is that the source of the idea for *Global Stage* does not lie, strictly speaking, in the figure of filmmaker Carlo Lizzani, but instead with the European Space Agency (ESA). The ESA was exploring how satellite technology could be employed in the fields of culture and entertainment and had set up a project called ISIDE to 'develop, implement and validate a satellite-based

Fig. 7.2. Still from Carlo Lizzani's *Global Stage* (2007).

system of N-(Networked) cinema'.[19] Carlo Lizzani grasped the opportunity, and the funding that went with it, and worked with the producers, Digital Pictures, and with the ESA to create *Global Stage*, a highly experimental piece. While we reject technological determinism in this book, technology here nonetheless has a central and determining role. A second observation is that this project could not have been made without a major shift in the Italian film industry towards an expanded notion of cinema, now often referred to as 'post-cinema' or, perhaps more accurately, what Richard Grusin calls 'the cinema of interactions'.[20] By 2007, film could 'no longer be disconnected from other media',[21] being tied to home video, video games, advertising hoardings, video art, DVDs, and so on. Cinema, which for many critics is the first true intermedial medium, with its fusion of theatre, literature, dance, photography, painting, and so on,[22] in the early twenty-first century underwent a further intermedial shift in which its relations with other media strengthened.

At this time cinema was reconnecting with early forms of cinema and experimenting with new technologies, as it travelled through a period of redefinition and a renewal of its language.[23] The rise of post-cinema meant that *Global Stage* found a ready-made distribution space that it would not have found ten years earlier. Because film festivals had become increasingly accepting of, and interested in, forms of cinema that went beyond the classic narrative theatrical release, a pavilion dedicated to multimedia communication, satellite links, small electronic devices, and video games could be erected at the Rome Film festival, and *Global Stage* could be easily collocated within this. In other words, the presence of new infrastructures, whether technological — such as satellite links — or distributive — such as the multimedia pavilion — were critical to encouraging artistic experiments which went beyond traditional screenings. Without these, *Global Stage* could not

have been made and might never have been distributed, at least as an international event.

Nonetheless, we would not want to suggest that *Global Stage*'s intermediality results solely from technological and infrastructural changes. While it is clearly a product both of technological change and changing attitudes towards the medium of cinema, its intermediality has deeper roots. These roots lie especially in Lizzani's own ideological and artistic groundings as a filmmaker with a longstanding interest in cultures outside Europe. Not only did his communist-inspired documentary, *La muraglia cinese* [Behind the Great Wall] (1959), provide the first colour footage of China available in the West, but he also imagined that *Global Stage* might pave the way for further global connections and throw down bridges to 'altri paesi emergenti che soffrono di dittature o condizioni difficili' [other emerging countries that suffer dictatorships or difficult conditions].[24] His global interests appear to stem from his left-wing militancy, especially within the Italian Communist party, and a strong, and related, desire to defend society's marginalized members that goes right back to the neorealist principles seen in his earliest feature film, *Achtung! Banditi!* [Attention! Bandits!] (1951). These interests in a global and interconnected world undoubtedly underlie his response to the call from the European Spatial Agency to use satellite technology.

What Lizzani created in response to the call stems too from his wide-ranging artistic interests. As a versatile and multifaceted film director, he carried with him a vast knowledge of cinema, photography, literature, and twentieth-century painting. Some of this was gained in his earliest years (his father was a photographer), and some developed from his interactions with the people closest to him in later life: his wife was an artist, and he recounts that they often visited art galleries together. He also notes the importance of café culture, citing especially the Caffè Brera and Latteria Pirovini in Via Fiori Chiari, Milan, frequented by young intellectuals and artists.[25] Here he met painters like Ennio Morlotti (1910–1992), writers like Umberto Eco and Elio Vittorini (1908–1966), and the founder of Milan's Piccolo Teatro, Giorgio Strehler (1921–1997). Bruno Torri describes Lizzani as a 'lettore onnivoro, uno studioso che vuole perlustrare le più svariate aree culturali: dalla filosofia all'antropologia, dalla sociologia alla semiologia, dalle diverse forme artistiche alla fisica moderna ad altro ancora' [an omnivorous reader, a scholar who scoured the most disparate cultural areas; from philosophy to anthropology, from sociology to semiology, from various artistic forms to modern physics, and more besides].[26] While, ultimately, Lizzani only produced two really intermedial works — *Global Stage* and *Roma città prigioniera* [Rome, The Captured City] (1995) — these works perfectly demonstrate the attraction of intermediality to Italian artists like Lizzani who had such wide-ranging cultural knowledge and interests.

Global Stage results from the convergence of new media technology (a satellite link) with old media and art forms (film, theatre, mime, dance, music, verbal storytelling, drawings, a pre-cinema slide show). A pre-recorded virtual setting is firmly rooted in sketches from filmmaker Federico Fellini's dream notebook: Fellini's encounter with the Jungian analyst Ernst Bernhard had led him to

document his dreams in 'large notebooks with colourful sketches made with felt-tip markers'.[27] So, Jungian psychoanalysis, steeped in archetype and Western myth, comes to life in these drawings. To the left of the stage stand life-size sketches of trees. To the right, a white wall has a cut out, like a window, through which one can see a film of an ever-changing African landscape. Beneath the performers' feet is a painted floor, whose orange swirls and palm-like tree speak to the Fellinian dreamscape as well as to an iconic African one. At the back of the virtual set, a second film is projected in traditional, if reduced, cinematic format. This second film presents talking heads interspersed with still sketches from Fellini's notebook, the latter distinctly resembling a pre-cinematic slide show. The stage set is therefore grounded in the golden age of Italy's auteur cinema, while also referencing pre-cinema (the slide show). It draws on Jungian psychoanalysis, steeped in archetype and Western myth, and mediated through Fellini's drawings. The homage to cinema does not stop there, however, nor is entirely steeped in nostalgia. In the film projected at the back of the set, alongside Fellini's drawings, we see the award-winning Burkinabé actor, Sotigui Kouyaté, narrating the African creation tale (in French) as well as the talking heads of well-known people from the contemporary Italian film industry, including actors such as Alessio Boni, the filmmaker Cristina Comencini, and film critic and screenwriter Tullio Kezich.

The impact of the collision of arts and old media with satellite technology in *Global Stage* had several important consequences. Firstly, the new technology enabled a transient transnational fusion which carried with it, and staged, an ideological framework that aimed to break down barriers between nations while maintaining difference. Onto the virtual pre-recorded cinematic background described above, the live performances converged. On the Roman stage, there was an Italian female performance artist who narrated and mimed the story, as well as two African singers seated in traditional dress, playing traditional instruments. Projected in from Burkina Faso via satellite were two male dancers who performed the story, dancing and miming its events. They appeared as three-dimensional filmed characters, pixels recomposed, which joined the flesh and blood actors on stage. Both sets of performers — in Rome and in Burkina Faso — were acting live. For thirty minutes, therefore, Lizzani's piece made it hard for spectators to distinguish between what was in Africa and what was in Italy, what was live and what was recorded, between ancestral time and contemporary ecological concerns. The fusion of African myth and Italian/Jungian cinematic mythmaking drew the geographically distant closer, positing a universal project in which all artists could play a part (in protecting the planet) despite, or even because of, their differences. *Global Stage* also demonstrated that Africa was not a distant place: there were people of African heritage present on the Roman stage joining those beamed in through satellite. The message was one of converging cultures, where diversity is retained and where fusion is temporary, rather than of cultures merging in one (i.e. hybridity). It was through different but complementary artistic approaches that transnational teams of artists together provided answers to major social issues, in this case to climate crisis.

The second consequence of *Global Stage*'s convergence is that, in bringing together

the world of cinema with the world of the stage, it questioned the traditional binaries of presence–absence and live and filmed which had, for more than a century, enabled us to distinguish between theatre (live) and cinema (recorded). Not only was the performance laced with nostalgia for a grand auteur of the golden age of Italian cinema — Federico Fellini — and studded with a constellation of voices from Italy's contemporary cinema industry, but the 'final' version of the event was projected on a screen above the stage. This version incorporated the satellite images from Burkina Faso absent from the stage below. In effect, the entire event was centred on a problematized meeting of live and recorded media. A set of live performances was beamed in through satellite link, and therefore they were not materially present; at the same time, unlike pre-recorded film, the performers from Burkina Faso were live, despite being absent. They were, in other words, temporally present and spatially absent.

Moreover, to further blur media boundaries, what remains of the *Global Stage* project today is a filmed recording available on Vimeo which provides a record only of the resultant film and shows nothing of the split stage at the Rome Film Festival or the peculiar mix of material and virtual objects and performances.[28] To resolve the many ambiguities that arise in Lizzani's work, we can return to its title (*Global Stage*), which appears to define the work as theatre rather than cinema. From there we can situate Lizzani's work in the context of the concept of 'intermedial theatre', an art form which 'may be both physically based and on-screen' and where 'experiences may be both actual and virtual; spaces may be both public and private; bodies may be both present and absent'.[29] However, while this rather contested taxonomy goes some way to resolving the live–recorded binary, it remains the case that Lizzani's work can be read by its consumers either as theatre (of a virtual intermedial kind) or as cinema (with its staging at the film festival; its multiple references to the Italian cinema industry; its circulation on Vimeo).

The problematizing of the binary of live and recorded, and the use of material from both theatre and cinema, creates profound questions around both the meaning of the medium of cinema and that of theatre and puts their categorization and the differences between them into question. If Wu Ming question and experiment with the medium and meaning of the book in a digital age, pushing out its material boundaries as it converges with multiple arts within the frame of a website, Carlo Lizzani inevitably questions the boundaries of theatre and cinema as he puts screens and stages into dialogue with the global satellite system. In this blurring, and redrawing, of boundaries, *Global Stage* acts as a beacon of twenty-first-century convergence.

So, like Wu Ming's websites, the intermediality in this project arises from a tangle of motivations and it results in wide-ranging consequences. Technological and economic motivations underlie the choice of satellite technology, as explained above. Like Wu Ming too, the ideological motivations are also strong. The consequences of convergence are intriguing. The networking that the satellite facilitates between different parts of the earth enables an innovative model of social relations to be born, a new transnational paradigm of knowledge exchange, co-creation and cultural co-presence which is quite astounding. This networked

technology enables a communicative exchange between continents to take place in real time. It also points to the increasing difficulty in categorizing media, and even the pointlessness in trying to do so, as media travel towards the era of what Rosalind Krauss has called the 'post-medium condition'.[30]

7.4. Technological Convergence: Brera Virtual Lab

Global Stage's merging of two-and three-dimensional performances was part of a wider trend towards a three-dimensional virtual space that by 2007 was emerging worldwide. At this time, *Second Life*, a virtual environment, was being heralded by the global media as a revolution (an obvious precursor to the metaverse which has similar claims made for itself at the time of writing). In March 2007, the *Observer* newspaper dedicated a double-page spread to it which it titled 'This year's hottest destination: Cyberspace'. *Second Life* quickly polarized the media. Some viewed it as a societal threat which would lure its users away from the real world into an addictive virtual and three-dimensional universe. Others saw it as a tremendous opportunity for making highly creative parallel virtual worlds, communicating with others within them and, potentially, making a great deal of money. Countries quickly bought land (with Linden dollars, the currency used in *Second Life*) and established embassies, campuses, virtual businesses, cinemas, galleries, shops, brothels, concert venues, political parties and so on. By its peak in 2009, 17 million people globally had created an avatar and journeyed into *Second Life* to interact with the new spaces and the *Second Life* economy totalled $567 million US dollars.[31]

Second Life, which was launched in California in 2003 as a flat and empty space, by 2007 was a global phenomenon crowded with buildings and landscapes created by its users. Italy had a small but significant presence within this space, rooted in its rich architectural heritage, its art, fashion, and lifestyle, and spurred on by business opportunities which had led companies like Armani, Alice, and TIM to buy up virtual real estate within it. *Second Life*'s 'Parioli' quarter, modelled on Rome, was founded in 2006 by Bruno Cerboni and had become extremely popular, as had 'Corso Como', a reproduction of that eponymous street in Milan. *Second Life* by now also had virtual versions of Mantua, Assisi, Venice, the Cinque Terre, and even some Palladian palaces promoted by the Province of Vicenza. Architecturally, these cities represent the reign of pastiche: virtual architecture had been completely set free of the requirements of urban planning. Piazza di Spagna, for instance, overlooked the sea, and Milan's many monuments butted up improbably against each other.[32]

At the Brera Academy in Milan, long-time collaborators Stefania Albertini and Giampiero Moioli became involved in the creation of virtual worlds. In 2006 they invented their first virtual sculptures on 'Lifelog island' in *Second Life*. In 2007, they created three 'macchine per fare le bolle' [bubble-making machines], inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's drawings. They called them *Macchina simpatica*, *Acquario verticale* and *Circumfolgore* [the likeable machine; the vertical aquarium; and *circumfolgore*: the war machine]. These virtual sculptures were subsequently captured by Moioli in a short documentary video, 'Le macchine per fare le bolle'

Fig. 7.3. Still from Stefania Albertini and Giampiero Moioli, *Le macchine per fare le bolle* (2007).

(2007), in which Moioli's avatar, Giugiogia Auer, walks, sits, and flies around and inside their aerial sculptures, exploring and contemplating them, accompanied by a soundtrack of bubbles, running water, rudimentary human sounds, and an Indian sitar (see Fig. 7.3). In Moioli's video, virtual sculpture and architecture meet third-person narrative, performance, and animation in experimental digital space, now rendered in two dimensions. The following year, Moioli and Albertini's virtual 'machines', were recreated in material form and exhibited at the Castello Visconteo in Pavia in an exhibition titled *La macchina per fare le bolle, la circumfolgore ed altri congegni* [The bubble-making machine, the *circumfolgore*, and other devices]. In other words, the bubble-making machines, born in the virtual three-dimensions of *Second Life*, migrated to the two-dimensionality of video before (re)appearing in three-dimensional materiality at the Pavia exhibition, illustrating Irina Rajewsky's concept of medial transposition, as discussed in our Introduction.

For Moioli and Albertini, there was a constellation of factors that drew them towards developing a project on the *Second Life* platform. The first factor, of course, was that the platform existed; once again, technology proves itself a critical enabler. *Second Life*, along with other 3-D platforms like Blender and OpenSim, is distinct from the vast majority of internet spaces which exist in just two-dimensions. Its three-dimensionality provides a virtual creative space for the many sculptors, architects, landscape designers, and indeed any artists or performers, who need to work with volume. Having access to a virtual space to work on volumetric art transformed the artists' practice as well as bringing significant practical advantages. It enabled the artists to create three-dimensional models of whatever they wanted to think or imagine before any financial outlay was necessary.[33] Using an avatar, these artists, as well as their colleagues and students at the Brera Academy, could walk

or fly around the models, seeing how they related to each other in space and what they looked like from different angles. Based on the feedback from such flights, the form of artistic objects could be adjusted with relative ease, before the artists began work on material versions, where such adjustments would be more difficult and costly to make. The ease with which these virtual artworks could be created and then adjusted meant that Moioli and Albertini considered volumetric design in a virtual world as a particularly practical and useful tool, one that they recognized as also having a marked didactic element, given the integration of e-learning elements like Sloodle.

Moioli and Albertini believed that the new digital space would increase creativity, and they made similar utopian claims about their chosen technology to those expressed by Wu Ming and Lizzani. Moioli claimed that work on the platform would lead to a 'sviluppo esponenziale della creatività' [exponential development of creativity].[34] When the duo established Brera Virtual Lab the following year (2008), the collective's very title — with its reference to a laboratory — points to the centrality of interdisciplinary experimentation, linking science/technology (lab) with art (Brera) in a creative virtual space. While this creativity is rooted in real-life architectural principles based on the laws of physics, unlike many of the creations on the *Second Life* platform,[35] it does nonetheless provide for a new space which is immersive and world-making, as they develop an island to house their virtual art and construct the world in three-dimensions. They describe this as liberating the artists from material reality, even if they continue to work with the laws of physics and plan sculptures which will have a presence in real off-line spaces. But this space liberates them too from disciplinary policing. While *Second Life* was, and still is, not free of pressures to conform, the sculptors could certainly transgress and experiment here in a freer way than they could offline.

Finally, interactivity was critical in attracting artists to these digital platforms. Moioli flags the range of communicative channels available inside *Second Life*. Not only are there spaces for constructing virtual sculptures, but there are also channels for communicating via social media, uploading web pages, sending mail and images, and screening films at which other avatars can be present. The virtual environment itself provides an opportunity for making the artwork responsive, so that it interacts with the presence of the avatars. However, it is also the very process of creating online sculptures and spaces which is collaborative. Moioli describes how he wanted to create 'una comunità progettuale intermediale, porre l'attenzione sull'importanza del lavoro di equipe e cominciare ad incoraggiare la progettazione di Gruppo, creando una comunità capace di comunicare e lavorare insieme anche a distanza [a project-based intermedial community, focusing attention on the importance of teamwork and starting to encourage group planning, creating a community which could communicate and work together even at a distance].[36] In establishing this kind of working ethos, Moioli and Albertini enact Pierre Lévy's concept of collective intelligence in which, 'none of us can know everything; each of us knows something; and we can put the pieces together if we pool our resources'.[37] Moioli goes on to say, in fact, that working groups are critical, as only when artists work together can the complexity of technology be faced.

So, the question now is how (or indeed whether) the convergence of the digital within the artistic practices of Brera Virtual Lab actually led to the foregrounding of intermediality.[38] The short answer to this is yes. The three-dimensional virtual environment acts as a performative space in which sculptures can be explored from multiple perspectives. They can be walked around, flown around, and gazed upon by an avatar. Unlike the material sculptures created for the exhibition in Pavia, these virtual sculptures become props in a performance in which fictional, nomadic characters (the avatars) interact with them.[39] No longer fixed in the white or black cubes of a museum, they are exhibited on a fictional, virtual island. Just as we saw with Lizzani's work, this puts into question the discrete, independent, and material nature of the medium, as it is re-placed and therefore re-conceived not as a sacred and finite object, with medium specificity or essence, but instead it becomes 'an expanded system of overlapping relations'.[40]

While this all implies convergence in the sense of 'merging', another form of convergence is explicit in their work, and this brings us to the final point. Moioli and Albertini have taken an ancient form of art (sculpture) and rendered it digital and immaterial in an example of what Jenkins had called technological convergence. Not only this, they have created a flow of interrelated, but not identical, content across a variety of platforms (*Second Life*; Vimeo; an art gallery in Pavia). In this flow, their work ranges through art and media forms, especially filmmaking, sculpture, and design. While these forms do not converge necessarily in the same space at the same time to create a single intermedial form, they do converge as flow across platforms, and as such break down barriers between them.

7.5. Conclusion: The 'Achievable Utopias' of Convergence

For the story we are attempting to tell in this book, 2007 has proved to be an intriguing year. The case studies we have examined here mark an intensification of intermedial boundary crossing and a renewed sense of experimentation after several decades in which intermedia had progressively shifted from the avant-garde fringes of creative practice to its normalized centre, as we traced in the previous chapter. This is not to say that all art converged digitally at this time (it did not), or that media-specific artforms vanished (they did not), or even that 'convergence' was any kind of programme or movement in Italy (it most certainly was not). While some of Italy's writers dabbled in transmedial storytelling (Wu Ming, Kai Zen, Simone Sarasso and Daniele Rudoni, for example), in 2007 most of Italy's most important writers (like Andrea Camilleri, for instance, or Dacia Maraini) were still using websites as simple commercial add-ons to their books, rather than integral parts of their creation, distribution, and consumption. Similarly, most filmmakers continued to make films, whether digital or analogue, without necessarily embarking on experimental intermediality. 2007 marks a time when it was still experimental to dabble in the kinds of practices we have been outlining here, a time when going online was still a choice, rather than a necessity or compulsion.

In this conclusion, we draw the threads of this chapter together, summarizing and building on the findings to understand better why convergence takes place

in this way at the start of the century, as well as exploring some of its wider implications for artistic practice. There are very many factors at play. Some factors emerged at the start of the twenty-first century, but others had already debuted decades before; one, in particular (the desire for world-making), appears, from our findings in this book at least, to be so deeply rooted in human endeavour as to be an intrinsic feature of it. Others, such as economic factors, appear to affect some of the cases presented here (Wu Ming) more than others. As we cannot look at all the possible factors in this conclusion, we highlight just three of these that we find particularly striking.

The first, and most obvious point to make, is that the rise of technology was a key enabler of change. Each space we have looked at in this chapter — whether material (the stage) or immaterial (a website; a 3-D virtual environment; digital film) — highlights how technology is critical in allowing multiple arts to 'incline together', or converge, in the early years of the twenty-first century. By then, obstacles such as the high costs associated with the first arrival of the digital in the 1980s had been overcome and websites had become part of the fabric of life for many users. While digital experimentation had first emerged on the fringes of the art world as early as the mid-1990s (digital storytelling; net.cinema; net.art),[41] it was only with the arrival of the so-called Web 2.0 in the early years of the millennium that the digital started to become mainstream.[42] It is in these years that Facebook (2004) and YouTube (2005) were launched, Beppe Grillo's first blog post was published (2005), and Twitter was born (2006). In was in these years too that the Internet became a mainstream form of media in Italy; by 2007, 20 million Italians had access to it. At the same time, satellite communications were attempting to extend their influence. Although satellites were first launched in 1957 (with Sputnik), the early 2000s offered growth in telecommunications, data communications, and broadcasting. Satellite broadcasting became a feature of Italian life with the launch of Sky TV in 2003.

The translation of sound, image, and video signals into the digital language of numbers via terrestrial and satellite communications at the start of the millennium marked a profound change. It enabled every digital network to bring together content of any kind with relative ease. Vuk Ćosić, the Slav artist, notes how the computer became the medium that absorbed everything, re-elaborating it from within its unifying language.[43] The computer was suddenly seen as a meta-medium which was able to 'inglobare, specchiare and rielaborare tutte le altre forme culturali' [incorporate, mirror, and re-elaborate all other cultural forms],[44] breaking away from the linearity that, according to Marshall McLuhan, was ushered in by the printing press, and moving towards an all-at-onceness which is non-hierarchical and layered. Through digital communications every communicative artefact — music, sculpture, painting, theatre, cinema — lost its specific expressive materiality, with wide-ranging effects. Two such effects stand out, as far as our argument here is concerned. Firstly, the rise of the digital vastly increased the quantity of platforms which facilitated interchange between a range of arts and media (a vast array of websites; satellite links; social media). Secondly, through these platforms, but also beyond them, the digital substantially increased the ease and naturalness with which

diverse arts could interact with one another, especially because the costs of such interactions were vastly reduced, and material obstacles diminished. These two changes together have had a transformational effect over convergence of the arts.

However, in line with Henry Jenkins, we do not read the digital as simply a case of technological determinism, in which convergence emerges automatically from available technological opportunities. Instead, we read it as a *cultural force* facilitated by technological change. The convergence we see in this chapter needs therefore to be read as an expression of forces which technological developments reflect and enable. And this brings us to our second point: that these highly intermedial spaces represent a deep-rooted utopian urge towards world-making. The convergence of arts and media in Italy is closely aligned with a global trend towards the creation of alternative, utopic and interconnected worlds, built on a model of mobile and often transnational cooperation rather than conflict,[45] and dominated by the ideals of immediacy and 'a participatory folk culture which gives average people the tools to archive, annotate, appropriate and recirculate content'.[46] These utopic elements are embedded in the three cases explored in this chapter.

As far as the most literal meaning of 'world-making' is concerned, all the art discussed in this chapter shares a marked sense of transnational connectedness, which expands geographical boundaries, replacing national with global space. While Carlo Lizzani's project is the one that most obviously foregrounds the global with its harmonious, intercontinental dialogue, even *Macchine per fare le bolle* is positioned in a global space. The project, situated on the *Second Life* platform, butts up against a kitsch mix of national and imaginary cityscapes and landscapes, providing a perfect space for its avatars' international and deterritorialized nomadism. Then, Wu Ming's *Manituana* not only re-thinks the history of another continent (America), but uses Google Earth to explore the sites of the narrative, and is written by a collective whose name signals Chinese culture. The sense of a rooted territorial Italy has been displaced in all three case studies by a fluid and often extra-territorial inhabiting, which cherishes the nomadic, the transient, and the networked and leans on idealized co-habitation of a world marked not by conflict, but by harmonious co-operation and co-habitation. It is a deterritorialization that is implied too in the emerging metaverse, which is under discussion at the time of writing, and which will force us to question again the place of the national — i.e., of Italy — in spaces which seem ever more intensely networked.

Less literally, however, all the examples we have explored in this chapter also share a fascination with the world-making implicit in total works of art, works, in other words, which encompass everything. While this has long been a goal of certain artists — we can find it in the Futurist's *opera d'arte totale*, discussed earlier in this book, or in Jorge Luis Borges's wonderful short story, 'The Book of Sand' (1975) — the digital totality brought about by convergence provides the perfect tools for creating a complex world in which multiple arts can cohabit. Moreover, these digital spaces are relatively cocooned and separated from public spaces where conventional rules and limitations apply. This can be seen in the desire for an alternative world free of political meddling (Wu Ming), of the necessity of physical materiality (Brera Virtual Lab; Wu Ming), and of national boundaries (all three examples explored in

this chapter). The digital, and the intermediality it brings, is used to escape both disciplinary forms, and the disciplinary policing that comes with those forms. This can be read in part against the backdrop, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, of the dominance of Berlusconi in the mainstream mediasphere: the internet, as it was conceived back in 2007, could provide a deregulated space which felt freer to its users. The attempt to overcome the limits of material creation and national space can be read as somehow interconnected, and it can be seen too as a desertion by the artists of Italian public space, at least as this was still conceived at this time: the space of mainstream art world, mainstream media, and the public piazza.[47]

The final point to make here is the importance of collaboration and co-creation in the creation of each of the works discussed. Collaboration is key to the process of making the artworks: writers work with musicians, web designers, and filmmakers; architects work with digital designers and filmmakers; and filmmakers work with performance artists and musicians as well as the set designers, lighting experts and so on. The level of cooperation needed between different kinds of artists is a sign of this converging art. However, what is perhaps even more striking is that collaboration is not just embedded in the design of these works but is also at the heart of its consumption. The spectator or consumer is moving into the heart of the artwork, a point that, as early 1912, the Futurists had declared in their *Manifesto tecnico della pittura*. This is most obviously the case on the *Manituana* website, which explicitly relies on creative input from Wu Ming's consumers. While it is less obvious in the second two cases, the subsequent circulation of the *Second Life* video, which was centred on Moioli and Albertini's sculptures and coordinated by Mario Gerosa, points to the dialogue between the creator of the artwork and its users. In *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins explains how the process of convergence creates encyclopaedic works which then make it hard for a single consumer to master them. In other words, these new, complex art forms necessarily involve consumers in collaborative practices so that together they may make sense of them and together co-create spin off story worlds. Works which are not encyclopaedic (*Macchine per fare le bolle*), but which are nonetheless situated in complex worlds (*Second Life*), seem to be subject to similar processes. The term participatory culture, which Jenkins uses in his book to explain this process of active engagement with the artwork, is in opposition to mid-twentieth-century presuppositions of the passive consumption of media. Jenkins, in fact, sees consumers of culture as no longer separate, but as participants 'interacting with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands'.[48] It is worth noting, nonetheless, that from our perspective in this book, the co-creating public at this time tends towards making more traditional, single artistic expressions, like the spin-off short stories under the 'mutineer stories' tab on the *Manituana* website. The intermedial creativity is harnessed almost exclusively, in other words, by the artists themselves, suggesting that the 'gap' between artist and consumer has not, in fact, been bridged, and artists remain in charge of complexity, as elite creators.

The implications of convergence are many. Collaborative and complex artworks that often defy categorization, or need new terminology to categorize them ('intermedial theatre'; 'net art'; 'transmedial fiction'; 'post-cinema'), emerge at the

meeting points of diverse art forms, at the points in which drops of paint merge in Jackson Pollock's drip painting, *Convergence* (1952), cited in our Introduction. There is little sense in any of the works discussed here of an innate understanding of the so-called 'purity' of a medium. The artwork is not an essence of any particular artistic discipline (although usually a single discipline — narrative for Wu Ming, sculpture for Brera Virtual Lab — does dominate), but it is the result of a converging of art forms in a particular place at a particular time, before breaking away from each other again and re-forming, perhaps, elsewhere. The space that houses these new art forms also undergoes a transformation, and this results in a rapidly evolving conception of *where* art is, and can be, positioned in society, as it leeches ever more out of artistic institutions like the museum, theatre, editorial industry and so on, and no longer has the prerogative of 'luogo deputato all'esperienza estetica' [a designated space of aesthetic experience], instead spilling into an increasingly aestheticized world, where even kettles and kitchens can be art. The idea that an artwork or a film was to be viewed exclusively in a particular setting, or music to be listened to only in a concert hall, or a narrative to be consumed only through language, was long gone by 2007.

What Henry Jenkins, a scholar of media, leaves out in his seminal work on convergence is that, among the many forms of convergence that he lists (technological, economic, social, cultural, global), he misses the way in which the *art* world (rather than media, or culture more generally) was transformed by convergence in the early twenty-first century, as the concept of art as a pure form was lost to many, if not most, of the artists working at this time. As we have seen in this book, the journey of the artistic media away from purity, and into ever-deeper intermedial dialogue, did not start with the twenty-first century, but has its roots deeply embedded in Italy's cultural history.

Notes to Chapter 7

1. See, Richard Wise's *Multimedia: A Critical Introduction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1999) for a clear history of the development of both multimedia technology and the ideas behind it. Wise posits two foundations on which the rise of multimedia was built and situates both in the 1960s. The first is the American military, which had invested heavily in computers since World War II and was behind the invention of the microchip, which would prove the cornerstone of modern computing. The second is America's counterculture, which emphasized the 'democratic and enabling potential of the computer' as well as its spiritual potential. Wise documents key moments in the development of the two strands — the computer and network technology — which would finally come together in the 1990s. He traces the development of multimedial computers: the launch of the CD-ROM (1986), which had the capacity to store up to three seconds of video; Apple's Hypercard (1987), which allowed Mac users to combine text, graphics, and sound; the various iterations of Microsoft Windows, culminating in Window 95, which was finally fast enough to rival Apple. Wise then documents key moments in the creation of the networked computer, including: its prehistory in early telecommunications; the invention of the modem (1977) through which computers could communicate over the telephone system; the rise of commercial interest in the Internet (1989); the launch of the World Wide Web as a program freely available on the Internet (1991). It is the combination of multimedia computer and network technology which paved the way, in technological terms, for the experiments we discuss in this chapter.

2. For detailed analysis, see the two recent works which consider the place of computers and the digital in the work of cultural practitioners well before the start of 2000. Emanuela Patti's *Opera Aperta: Italian Electronic Literature from the 1960s to the Present* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2022) writes the history of electronic and digital literature in Italy from the early days of computers in the 1960s. Eleonora Lima's project website 'Narrating Computing', <https://narratingcomputing.com/> [accessed 28 July 2022] and her forthcoming book with Legenda (provisional title: *A Literary History of Computing: Italian Authors Write Computer Culture*) provide a history of computers in Italian literature from the 1950s, exploring how literature contributes to the debate on computing and shapes attitudes.
3. Italians were relatively late in taking up digital technology. According to Pietro Candela's chapter, 'Il fascino "discreto" del digitale', in *Link: idea per la televisione. focus: mediamorfosi: le trasformazioni della tv digitale raccontati dai protagonisti*, ed. by Federico Di Chio (Rome: RTI, 2007), pp. 15–20, the digital was little used in the 1980s as it was considered too slow. While uptake improved during the 1990s, Candela claims that the convergence of content proclaimed in 2000 was delayed, and it was only from 2005–06 that digitalization became easier.
4. The national broadcaster, RAI, had been a monopoly since its establishment in 1954; the arrival of Mediaset in 1993 introduced competition, creating the duopoly that was to hold sway from the 1990s until, arguably, the present.
5. See Clodagh Brook, 'The Cinema of Resistance: Nanni Moretti's *Il caimano* and the Italian Film Industry', in *Resisting the Tide: Cultures of Opposition Under Berlusconi*, ed. by Daniele Albertazzi and others (New York: Continuum: 2009), pp. 110–23.
6. Christopher Cepernich, in his article 'The Changing Face of the Media: A Catalogue of Anomalies', in *Resisting the Tide*, pp. 46–56, documents Berlusconi's hold on terrestrial television (through Mediaset), as well as on cinema (through Medusa Cinema and Medusa Multisala), video (50% of Blockbuster shares), and on the publishing sector (50.3% of Mondadori, as well as *Panorama* and TV Guides). Cepernich argues that legislation did little to break the monopoly that Berlusconi had over Italian terrestrial media. However, the critic notes how Berlusconi's influence over new media was limited: Mediadigit managed the Berlusconi Group's activities in this field, but it was underdeveloped when compared to the massive footprint that Mediaset had across old media. The early 2000s were dominated by discussions of Berlusconi's conflict of interest, given his influence in television, which was still the main source from which Italians derived their information and news at this time: ISTAT's 2006 survey shows that 93% of Italians watched TV at this time, while internet usage was only 35.6%.
7. Hywel Williams and others, 'Network Analysis Reveals Open Forums and Echo Chambers in Social Media Discussions of Climate Change', *Global Environmental Change*, 32 (2015), 126–38 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2015.03.006>.
8. Henry Jenkins, 'How Slapshot Inspired a Cultural Revolution (Part One): An Interview with the Wu Ming Foundation', *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, 4 October 2006 <http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2006/10/how_slapshot_inspired_a_cultur.html> [accessed 28 July 2022].
9. Clodagh Brook and Emanuela Patti, 'Introduzione', pp. 7–32 (p. 7) and Emanuela Piga, 'Comunità, intelligenza connettiva e letteratura: dall'open source all'opera aperta in Wu Ming', pp. 55–78. Both in *Transmedia: storia, memoria e narrazioni attraverso i media*, ed. by Clodagh Brook and Emanuela Patti (Milan: Mimesis, 2014).
10. As discussed in our Introduction to this book, 'flow' and 'merging' are two aspects of media convergence. Jenkins's *Convergence Culture* privileges the *flow* of content from one media platform to another. This migratory process is what he refers to as 'transmedia' (across media), a process he defines as the 'flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want' (p. 2). The etymology of the word 'convergence', on the other hand, points more to a bending towards, or inclining towards, or *merging*, signalling a moment when arts and media converge on the same space before moving away and dispersing once again. This alternative sense of the word can also be seen in Jenkins's work on convergence.
11. See Clodagh Brook. *Marco Bellocchio: The Cinematic Eye in the Political Sphere* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

12. See Steve Neale, 'Art Cinema as Institution', *Screen*, 22. 1 (1981), 11–39.
13. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*. p. 10.
14. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, p. 37.
15. See Emanuela Patti. 'Il romanzo nella "galassia internet": sperimentazioni transmediali nella narrativa italiana del xxi secolo', in *Transmedia: storia, memoria e narrazioni attraverso i media*, ed. by Clodagh Brook and Emanuela Patti (Milan: Mimesis, 2014), 33–54.
16. Wu Ming's 'Preface' to the Italian version of *Cultural Convergence*, available at <https://www.wumingfoundation.com/english/outtakes/convergence_culture.htm>.
17. Emanuela Piga, 'Comunità, intelligenza connettiva e letteratura: dall'open source all'opera aperta in Wu Ming', in *Transmedia: storia, memoria e narrazioni*, pp. 55–77.
18. Ernesto Assante, 'Lizzani, film in due set virtuali lo spettacolo diventa globale', *La repubblica*, 15 October 2007, <https://www.repubblica.it/2007/10/sezioni/spettacoli_e_cultura/cinema/roma/lizzani-global/lizzani-global/lizzani-global.html> [accessed 28 July 2022].
19. ARTES (Advanced Research in Telecommunications Systems), 'Italy and Burkina Faso Together on One Virtual Stage', *The European Space Agency*, 2 November 2007 <https://artes.esa.int/news/italy-and-burkina-faso-together-one-virtual-stage> [accessed 28 July 2022].
20. Richard Grusin, 'DVD, Videogames and the Cinema of Interactions', in *Post-cinema: Theorising 21st Century Film*, ed. by Shane Denson and Julia Leyda (Sussex: ReFrame Books, 2016), pp. 65–87 <https://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/post-cinema/1–3-grusin/> [accessed 15 December 2021].
21. Steven Jacobs, *Framing Pictures: Film and the Visual Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 154.
22. See, for instance: Jürgen Heinrichs, and Yvonne Spielmann, 'What is Intermedia?', *Convergence*, 8.4 (2002), 5–10; Ágnes Pethő, 'Intermediality in Film: A Historiography of Methodologies', *Film and Media Studies*, 2 (2010), 39–72.
23. See Luciano De Giusti, *Immagini migranti: forme intermediali del cinema nell'era digitale* (Venice: Marsilio, 2008).
24. Assante, 'Lizzani'.
25. Vito Zagarrio, 'Tre volte nella polvere, tre volte... Intervista a Carlo Lizzani', in *Carlo Lizzani: un lungo viaggio nel cinema*, ed. by Vito Zagarrio (Venice: Marsilio, 2010), pp. 24–54.
26. Bruno Torri, 'Il teorico: cinema e altro', in *Carlo Lizzani: un lungo viaggio*, pp. 55–60 (p. 56).
27. Peter Bondanella, and Federico Pacchioni, *A History of Italian Cinema* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 258.
28. Mark Crossley and Lars Elleström in their chapter for Crossley's *Intermedial Theatre*; note the difference between filmic and theatrical intermediality. Citing Claudia Giorgi's assertion that theatre has an 'ability to integrate other media without affecting their respective materiality and mediality' (p. 18), while at the same time, of course, representing them as theatrical signifiers, Crossley concludes that although theatre's materiality may be intact, it is arguable how much of a medium remains once theatricalized. Nonetheless, he notes that not all thinkers are persuaded of this. Elleström, for instance, believes that 'theatre represents other media with less material interference or transformation than other plurimedial forms and thereby with more of the innate qualities of the original medium present' (p. 19). Ultimately, however, Crossley argues that the term 'hypermedium' can indeed be used, as long as these qualifications are borne in mind when using it. Mark Crossley, with Lars Elleström, 'Theatre (and You) as Medium and Intermedium', in *Intermedial Theatre: Principles and Practices*, ed. Mark Crossley (London: Red Globe, 2019), pp. 1–42.
29. *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, ed. by Sarah Bay-Cheng and others (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), p. 10.
30. Rosalind Krauss, *'A Voyage on the North Sea': Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000).
31. Gregory Kipper, *Augmented Reality: An Emerging Technologies Guide to AR* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2012).
32. *Second Life* is dominated in part by mimesis, as so many buildings replicate real architectural sources. However, there are also many imaginary worlds, some based on literary genres, especially fantasy, as well as on canonical texts like Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*. There are also many art galleries housing the work of artists of often dubious talent. One of *Second Life*'s most

high-profile artists at that time was the Italian Gazira Babeli. In 2007, she had a solo exhibition inside one of *Second Life*'s many galleries, showcasing some of her performative works like 'Singing Pizza' in which huge pizzas — two metres in diameter — were placed on the gallery floor. Whenever an avatar steps on one, it spews tomato sauce and sings 'O sole mio'. Babeli also used Andy Warhol's Campbell's tins and flying bananas based on Warhol's famous yellow banana for the album, *Velvet Underground & Nico*. Her mashing and remediation of pop art and performance practice earned her a substantial reputation inside the virtual world.

33. Giampiero Moioli, 'Open source, virtual reality, and mixed reality: applicazioni per l'arte, la progettazione e la comunicazione', in *Brera Academy; Virtual Lab: un viaggio dai mondi virtuali alla realtà aumentata nel segno dell'Open Source*, ed. by Mario Gerosa and Giampiero Moioli (Milan: Francoangeli, 2010), pp. 11–29.
34. Moioli, p. 13.
35. As the Italian architect, known in *Second Life* as Turboy Runo, says, Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, who was active in the first century BC, ascribes three features to architecture: *firmitas* [structure], *utilitas* [functionality] and *venustas* [aesthetics]. Runo notes how *firmitas* is not necessary in *Second Life*. Turnoy Runo, 'Architecture in SL,' 28 June 2007 <https://archsl.wordpress.com/category/turboy-runo/> [accessed 28 July 2022].
36. Moioli, p. 27.
37. Pierre Lévy, summarized by Henry Jenkins in *Convergence Culture*, p. 4. As mentioned in our Introduction, the French theorist Lévy coined the term 'collective intelligence' that was subsequently used by Jenkins in *Convergence Culture* to argue that a collaborative approach to culture was essential today.
38. The bubble-making machines are a 'remediation', following the now classic definition of that term by Bolter and Grusin in *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000). The critics define it as 'new media refashion(ing) prior media forms' (p. 273). Moioli and Albertini take their ideas of material sculpture and convert them by means of coding for a 3-D digital platform, where they become immaterial forms. However, in doing this, they do not eclipse the older art form, but reshape it, so that both forms exist and are evidently co-dependent: the virtual form of the bubble-making machines owes its existence to Moioli and Albertini's prior work on sculpture; the sculptures exhibited later in Pavia owed a great deal to the virtual experiments that preceded them. The remediation alone, however, would not necessarily lead to increased intermediality.
39. The *Second Life* versions of these sculptures are far from immaterial, nonetheless. They require a computer and an internet connection with sufficient bandwidth to support the program, as well as the presence of either *Second Life* or a similar computer program.
40. Haidee Wasson, 'The Networked Screen: Moving Images, Materiality, and Aesthetics of Size', in *Fluid Screens, Expanded Cinema*, ed. by Janine Marchessault and Susan Lord (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 74–95 (p. 75).
41. Digital storytelling began in 1992 with *The Edge of Intentions* by Joseph Bates, which used algorithms to organize narrative directions. Net.cinema and net.art began in the mid-1990s, with the focus firmly on the *process* of making art, rather than an art object.
42. It is clear that without the arrival of Web 2.0 (a term popularized in the O'Reilly Media Web 2.0 conference in 2004), the idea of an interactive website with user-generated material would not have been possible.
43. Gabriella Taddeo, *Ipercinema: immaginario cinematografico nell'era digitale* (Milan: Guerini scientifica, 2007), p. 47.
44. Taddeo, p. 37.
45. Although conflict between arts and artists does not, of course, disappear. Bolter and Grusin in *Remediation*, for instance, talk about remediation as a competition among media so as to avoid fading into obsolescence. Much was written, especially at the start of the 2000s, on the competitive relation between various media for survival.
46. Henry Jenkins, 'Convergence? I Diverge', *Technology Review*, 104.5 (2001), p. 93.
47. In *Liquid Modernity*, Zygmunt Bauman pessimistically notes the desertion of the public sphere and the move of powerful agents to the 'exterritoriality of electronic networks', 'beyond the reach of citizens' control', leaving a public space increasingly empty of public issues (p. x).
48. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, p. x.

CHAPTER 8

❖

2020: Contagion

8.1. Introduction

The writing of these conclusions is not what we expected. When we mapped out the shape of this book, we left ourselves a space here to sketch out some preliminary conclusions about our writing present: 2020. We had expected some degree of continuity. Instead, we found ourselves at what appeared to be a major point of rupture. As 2020 dawned, COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) hit, and the year began to take a catastrophic turn. On 31 January 2020, the first confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Europe were uncovered in Italy. Clusters of infections soon appeared in the north of the country, where the first hospitalizations and deaths were recorded. At first, just a few municipalities closed their doors, then, on 8 March 2020, all of Lombardy and fourteen additional provinces faced drastic measures to try to contain the spread. Meanwhile cases across Europe and elsewhere in the world escalated. On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of a pandemic. A week later, Italy made international headlines as chilling photographs of a military convoy carrying coffins from a hospital in Bergamo towards a crematorium out of town struck fear into the heart of the continent. By 21 March 2020, the Italian Government, under Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, had shut all non-essential industry and businesses across the peninsula, and radically restricted the movement of people. Italy was in what quickly became known as its first national lockdown.

The shutters came down on the culture industry. On 21 March 2020, those working in theatre, cinema, galleries, publishing houses, concert halls, music venues, and other parts of the culture industry shut their doors and went home. The creative and cultural industries, along with tourism, were the hardest hit sectors in Italy. Venue-based sectors, like museums, performative arts, festivals, and cinema were particularly battered, especially as many of the profits from re-distributed consumer demand went to huge global companies, such as Netflix and YouTube, rather than to local organizations. So, with a sudden suspension of normality and places of physical exhibition firmly shut, what happened to the intermingling of arts and media? Did the coronavirus pandemic signal a rupture in the intermedial journey we are mapping, or are there threads of continuity? Did COVID-19 create new opportunities for the arts, and has it inspired new forms of creative expression? And what will the future bring? While it is too early to answer these questions

definitely, we will endeavour to put together some preliminary thoughts about them here.

COVID-19 has been more than a virus; it is a global crisis that has caused immense human suffering. It is a vehicle of disruption, which has required each one of us to adapt to a radically changed political, institutional, technological, and social environment. It is, to quote philosopher Bruno Latour, a 'huge experiment'.[1] And, as Slavoj Žižek observes, it has had a massive effect on our behaviours:

> Avoid touching things which may be dirty, avoid embracing others or shaking hands [...] and be especially careful about how you control your own body and your spontaneous gestures: do not touch your nose or rub your eyes — in short, do not play with yourself [...] We should learn to control and discipline ourselves. Only virtual reality will be considered safe.[2]

Žižek's analysis points to one of the key reasons behind the massive move online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtuality provided a safe, clean, and accessible space. It served as a refuge and retreat from problems associated with physical contact: a 'safe' alternative to a material world that was revealed overnight as full of contaminated things. However, virtuality was not the only refuge during the pandemic. A second kind of retreat took place simultaneously: a retreat into domestic space, into the nuclear family, the life of a couple, or, for some, into solitude. At its worst, this second form of retreat brought terrible isolation, made harsher still by bereavement. At its best, it brought a pause and a moment for reflection. For many, the first lockdown even provided a stimulus for creativity: from baking to writing, painting, or singing.

Paradoxically, as people withdrew from public life and space, many also experienced a reinforced sense of interconnectedness, both virtually and at the local level. Walled into small pockets of their neighbourhoods, Italians saw an opportunity to re-connect with their immediate surroundings. After decades of commuting and international travel, the world's sailors (to use Walter Benjamin's analogy) became tillers of the earth: collecting local lore from the world directly around themselves, with all its minute interconnections.[3] Lockdown revealed the importance of local habitats, but also the numerous ways in which these habitats remained reliant on national and transnational chains of economic, political, technological, and cultural exchange, from primary goods to healthcare, information, and entertainment. At this level, the experience of the pandemic triggered an extraordinary expansion of what Michael Cronin has called microspective knowledge: attention to the material foundations of everyday life *and* to the patterns of global connectivity that underpin local attachments and responsibilities.[4] Bruno Latour, who is fascinated by interconnections, has suggested that COVID-19 gave us a model of contamination, showing us how something can go global 'just by going from one mouth to another [...], an incredible demonstration of network theory'.[5]He reads the pandemic as highly networked, and capable of 'link[ing] "all humans" by passing by way of our apparently inoffensive droplets from coughing'.[6] Germs, for Latour, enable us 'to see associations between many actors, most of whom do not have human forms'. Latour therefore sees COVID-19 as an opportunity to 'put a question mark over each [...]

indispensable connection', re-examining 'what is desirable and what has ceased to be, what chains to reconstruct, and which to interrupt'.[7]

In his last monograph, *After Lockdown: A Metamorphosis*, Latour further elaborates on this idea. The experience of the pandemic, he suggests, has broken down the illusion of 'boundary line[s] that would distinguish an organism from what surrounds it. Strictly speaking, nothing surrounds us, everything conspires in our breathing'.[8] In this way, COVID-19 marks an epistemological challenge to those self-styled 'moderns', who — in the words of an earlier book by Latour — saw man as a 'being par excellence capable of extricating itself from nature [...] thanks to its soul, its culture, or its intelligence'.[9] The pandemic, according to the French philosopher, has shattered anthropocentric illusions of human exceptionalism and has made humans aware of the stark limits of our humble, earthbound existence: we are, for Latour, termite-like in our attachment to place. Other environmental thinkers have echoed this insight, and Latour's demands for a re-thinking of political and existential priorities. According to human geographer Andreas Malm, the coronavirus pandemic, the climate emergency, and the escalating inequalities between and within nations are inextricable. They appear, at a superficial level, like different crises but 'are, on closer inspection, exactly one and the same'.[10] The new coronavirus has emerged from human interactions with non-human animals, whose habitats were ravaged by pollution, deforestation, animal trading, and urban sprawl. COVID-19 then spread through networks of globalized trade and transportation that have long threatened the survival of many non-human species. Similarly, North American journalist David Wallace-Wells has called the pandemic a 'dry run or dress rehearsal for climate change', which made people aware of the existential risks that derive from economic, social, and ecological entanglement:

> In part because of the severity of the disease and the lockdowns it produced, I do think the experience has been eye-opening. In ways that climate change hasn't really managed, COVID-19 has taught us all that we live within nature, no matter how superior we may feel to it or protected against its forces.[11]

How have artists reacted to this new, collective awareness of material entanglement, during the early months of the pandemic? How did they respond to unprecedented tensions between ancient rituals (baking, painting, writing) and new digital realms, between isolation and the experience of a digitally networked and interconnected society, between the rediscovery of the local and the constant awareness of global risks and opportunities?

In this concluding chapter, we map some of the tensions and creative strategies that have emerged across the course of 2020, and which have affected the ways that art is made, across different media. In the next part of the chapter, we pay specific attention to a new fascination with materiality, which we explore through examples from contemporary Italian literature and photography. The third part sheds further light on artistic engagement with virtuality, which has widened and become more intensive, creative, and diverse as a result of the pandemic. Here, we focus on practices of virtual art exhibitions and on the making and distribution of films during lockdown. Finally, we reflect on some key findings of this book and outline

the wider challenges and questions that these pose for academic practice in our field. Our findings raise profound questions for Italian Studies, the academic field in which we, as authors of this book, are positioned, as well as for Modern Languages and area studies more widely. We reflect on how practices of intermediality have developed as a result of the numerous, important changes that have been described in the six preceding chapters. Like any set of concluding remarks, this section leaves ample room for open-ended speculation. We are interested in raising questions that will inspire further analysis and research: an opening-up of debates rather than a closing down of critical inquiry. After all, the journey of intermedial art, in Italy and elsewhere in the world, continues to twist, coil, and mutate.

Our writing present, in 2020, is fluid and uncanonized. Any observations we make here will be in the spirit of a close-up. As we intimated at the beginning of our volume, the present, when seen at close quarters, explodes into a thousand fragments, rather like the enlarged, highly pixelated photographs in Michelangelo Antonioni's famous film, *Blow Up* (1996). It is hard to make out what we have in front of our very eyes. Our analysis of the cultural experience of the pandemic — like any account of the contemporary — is necessarily conditional, and has its origins and theoretical justification in our understanding of the artistic movements that preceded it. We are interested in the relations between lockdown art and the earlier cultural paradigms that were discussed in the previous chapters of this book. How are these earlier orientations (revolution, *Gesamtkunstwerk*, experiment, collapse, hybridity, convergence) re-enforced, transformed, or replaced by contemporary trends? Explaining the present is an arduous, perhaps impossible task, as literary theorist Peter Boxall has indicated. The contemporary is nothing but a lateral blur, which resolves itself into a picture only when we have left it behind, as it fades into distance. Looking around us, we may point with some confidence at what we take to be towering figures. But, as Boxall writes, 'these flickering shapes and quavering points of light have yet to settle into a pattern, and it will take time before we can see them clearly, in relation to each other and according to a shared perspective'.[12] What looks important to us now may not look so to our readers in some years' time. COVID-19 seems, at the time of this writing, to have marked a permanent turning point in how art is produced and consumed, but only time will tell how significant COVID-19 really was.

8.2. Materialities

As we have seen, the collective experience of mass lockdown during the early months of 2020 gave shape to an important re-thinking of the relation between the global and the local, the virtual and the materially embodied, the digital and the domestic. In this context, the COVID-19 pandemic prompted a new, heightened awareness of the intimate, physical surroundings of writers and artists, and a focus on the material conditions and contexts of everyday lives: homes, streets, neighbourhoods, gardens, and parks. Many Italian novelists and photographers turned their attention to seemingly ordinary domestic and communal settings, which they had, until now, taken for granted, but which suddenly came to appear

strange and unfamiliar. Plotlines of obligation, opportunity, and desire were brutally interrupted by the pandemic. As a result, familiar spaces that had been trivially associated with everyday life were abandoned, or transformed by new uses. As literary scholar Filippo Milani and cultural geographer Davide Papotti have argued in an illuminating study of lockdown *flânerie*, all urban environments are intimately shaped by quotidian human interactions and, without such interactions, acquire an uncanny appearance: 'il territorio *desertificato*, liberato dall'utilizzo sociale, trasforma anche gli spazi che per definizione sono *pubblici* in spazi che perdono questa funzione di apertura alla società, ma non la loro struttura fisica (che proprio per essi è stata però pensata e costruita)' [*deserted* and stripped of all social functions, even spaces that are by definition *public* lose their purpose and their openness to society, but not their physical structure (which was conceived and shaped precisely to achieve this openness)]. Stripped of their habitual functions, public and domestic spaces came to feature in lockdown art as eerie memorials to a human social world that had ceased to exist: 'lo spazio circostante, infatti, acquisisce una componente *perturbante*' [in this way, the surrounding space acquires an *uncanny* dimension].[13]

If we expand the scope of Milani's and Papotti's perceptive analysis from *flânerie* to other forms of verbal and visual first-person testimony, we can observe the emergence, in spring 2020, of two apparently antithetical tropes that are in fact closely related and mutually dependent: the city-without-us, and the home as a space of solitary confinement. Consider, for example, a collaborative project carried out by photographer Giovanni Cocco and novelist and filmmaker Caterina Serra, which led to the creation of a co-authored photographic and poetic portrait of lockdown Venice, *Displacement: a che ora chiude Venezia?* [*Displacement: When Does Venice Close?*]. Authored in early spring 2020 and published in 2021, this intermedia text is arranged as a triptych. It consists of ten photographs of Venice, taken by Cocco in 2015–16 and divided here into two groups of five. Collectively, these images provide the visual frame for a short, creative-critical essay, 'Corpo città' [City Body], in which Serra conjures a sense of loss and existential dismay. For Cocco and Serra, fear, grief, and despair have become near-universal experiences. They are shared by all human witnesses of the pandemic, not only in the *Serenissima*:

> Come stiamo? Senza il flusso beota che ora rimpiangiamo, mentre chiudiamo, bar, fabbriche, negozi, scuole e città, e ci perdiamo i riti collettivi, quelli funebri, che la vita non vale per chiunque allo stesso modo, e quelli in cui i corpi si appassionano alla vita, teatri, cinema, musei, gallerie, stanze di un qualche sapere condiviso. Rinchiusi, impauriti, mascherati, disinfettati [...] Stiamo male, stiamo dentro, ci manca il nostro stare fuori che ora non possiamo, liberi prima di ridere come prima delle cose che prima maledicevamo [...]. Ci manca qualcosa che ci aveva già stancati.[14]
>
> [How are we? Without the mindless flow that we now miss and yearn for, as we shut down bars, factories, shops, schools, and cities. We miss our collective ceremonies. The funerary rites that remind us that not all lives have the same worth, and those other rituals, where bodies exult with life: theatres, cinemas, museums, dwellings of a shared knowledge. We are locked up, frightened, masked, disinfected [...] We are unwell. We are inside. We miss being outside,

> now that we can no longer be outside. We want be free to laugh at things, as we did before, at things which annoyed us before [...]. We miss the things that used to make us feel worn out.]

In explicit contrast with the choral, collective 'we' of 'Corpo città', Cocco's photographs of lockdown Venice offer glimpses of an empty city, where *calli* and canals no longer form the predictable vistas of tourist pamphlets and holiday snapshots, but are instead portrayed in a state of almost sinister solitude. Without humans, the contemporary city reveals an unexpected resemblance with the uncanny, cerebral settings of Carlo Carrà's and Giorgio de Chirico's metaphysical paintings, as discussed in the second chapter of this book. Communal life appears to have come to a standstill, and the absence of humans conjures confused intimations of unfolding apocalypse. Cultural theorist Mark Fisher has invoked the category of the eerie to describe this evocative power of unexpected, disturbing absences: 'The eerie concerns the most fundamental metaphysical questions one could pose, questions to do with existence and non-existence: Why is there something here when there should be nothing? Why is there nothing here when there should be something?'[15]

Cocco's visual representation of Venice as an eerie city captures the mood of the early months of the pandemic, in Northern Italy, where escalating spirals of contagion and lockdown momentarily appeared to exceed the human ability to imagine. Unprecedented security and safety measures put an abrupt end to social routines and collective obligations that had governed the interactions between individuals and institutions for years, or even decades. Within weeks, the health crisis inspired new practices of care and fresh modes of wakefulness, but also exposed troubling hierarchies of power and stark social inequalities.[16] People who until then had been accustomed to the privileges of peace, affluence, and unrestricted mobility suddenly found themselves exposed to insecurity, fear, and the coercive power of new safety measures, which, according to some, violated basic principles of human dignity.[17] The creative industries, in particular, were hard hit. Furloughs and loss of revenue meant that theatres, galleries, and artists' residencies struggled, even where institutions received public support. In areas with thriving creative economies, such as Venice, the cancellations or postponements of performances, exhibitions, and cultural events were a significant blow to the livelihood of many artists, gallerists, actors, directors, choreographers, and dancers. A cultural talent drain seemed inevitable.[18]

Cocco's and Serra's project must be understood in the context of this experience. Without any contextual awareness, their images of Venice-without-us might appear predictable, or even clichéd. After all, photographic representations of empty cities have a long and distinguished history, which reaches back to the black-and-white images of Paris taken by pioneering documentary photographer Eugène Atget during the early decades of the twentieth century.[19]

As Fredric Jameson has pointed out, visual and filmic representations of the empty city are politically ambivalent. They have been employed by environmental activists and in genre cinema to conjure a sense of existential dread, but, for Jameson, they amount to little more than deliberately anti-historical visions of

Fig. 8.1. Giovanni Cocco, *A che ora chiude Venezia* (2015–16), courtesy Giovanni Cocco.

Fig. 8.2. Eugène Atget, *Rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Geneviève* (1924), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

urban life. According to the American literary scholar, the utopian imagination is most effective when it is motivated in response to a particular social situation: 'it must respond to specific dilemmas and offer to solve fundamental social problems to which the Utopian writer believes himself to hold the key'.[20] Conventional representations of the city-without-us, by contrast, achieve their extraordinary aesthetic coherence only by ignoring the complexity of actual social life and therefore leave no room for our daily experiences of society as a bewildering chaos of multiple, contradictory and indiscernible forces.[21]

It is important to note that this analysis does not apply to Serra's and Cocco's co-authored portrait of lockdown Venice, where familiar apocalyptic images of the empty city are juxtaposed, across media, with the urgently pleading, collective voice of its unseen inhabitants: the choral monologue 'Corpo città'.

> Oggi Antigone non seppellirebbe più nessuno, forse si stenderebbe per terra, gli occhi al Cielo come fosse anche lei città a guardare da sotto e farsi attraversare, [...] di sicuro occuperebbe qualche spazio precluso, o forse, depressa e frustrata, se ne starebbe mascherata appena fuori da un bar facendo finta che vada bene così.[22]
>
> [Today Antigone would no longer bury anybody. Maybe she would lie down on the ground, her eyes raised to Heaven, as if she too were a city, looking from

> below and being crossed. [...] Surely, she would occupy a precluded space. Or perhaps, depressed and frustrated, she would simply sit outside, next to a bar, wearing a mask, pretending that all was well.]

Serra's reference to Sophocles is not coincidental. Like the chorus in ancient Greek tragedy, the co-authors of *Displacement: a che ora chiuse Venezia?*, explore the dramatic tension between scenic exposure and unseen dread. They create a deliberate tension between the city's overexposed, material presence and the uncanny invisibility of its dismayed, awestruck inhabitants. Serra's and Cocco's use of visual and verbal narrative further exacerbates this tension. Photographic images of the empty city point towards episodes of violence, death, and grief that remain invisible and that can only be described and imagined 'offstage', as it were. Serra's verbal narrative mirrors and inverts this strategy by giving voice to an anonymous, collective 'we', the body politic, which remains abstract and therefore absent from the visual narrative. Where the photographs highlight material singularity without agency (the *palazzo*, the square, the canal), 'Corpo città' evokes a collective agency that cannot be represented by any single human member of the community. In this way, Antigone, the city-without-us, serves as an uncanny, symbolic marker of the unseen victims of the pandemic, rendered anonymous by lockdown and mass death.

As Beniamino Della Gala and Lavinia Torti have explained, visual representations of the empty city, in lockdown, invariably evoke and expose the gaze of a confined spectator:

> Durante il confinamento forzato, lo spazio in sé è stato il vero protagonista di questo racconto fotografico. [...] E le gallerie dei quotidiani non cessavano di mostrarcelo: fuori non c'era praticamente nulla, le strade erano deserte, le grandi città finalmente ritrovavano la possibilità di essere *osservate* dalle persone.[23]
>
> [During forced confinement, space itself was the real protagonist of every photographic story. [...] And the newspapers, with their galleries of images, showed us what we wanted: outside, there was practically nothing, the streets were deserted, the large cities had finally found a way of letting themselves *be observed* by the people.]

For some Italian photographers, the conditions of the pandemic felt like a challenge and an opportunity. As journalist Michele Smargiassi recalls, many of his colleagues defied lockdown legislation in order to take spectacular pictures of empty cities:

> *I fotografi, anche loro costretti a casa*, prigionieri quarantenici, cosa che per loro è una prigionia doppia, del corpo e dello sguardo. Nei primi giorni ricevevo da alcuni di loro messaggi scalpitanti come cavalli in Scuderia: ma io voglio uscire, questa cosa deve essere documentata, devo fotografarla! *E altri invece a dire: no, ma chi sei tu?*, che privilegi pensi di avere?, il fotografo è forse un uomo speciale, meno contagioso degli altri? Stai a casa come tutti! Ma loro no, i fotografi sono usciti lo stesso, magari col pretesto di andare a fare la spesa, i più attrezzati riparandosi dietro un tesserino professionale, e io dicevo be', siate prudenti, ma fate bene, perché questo tempo d'eccezione non potrà restare senza immagini.[24]
>
> [*The photographers were also housebound.* They were quarantine prisoners, which for them is a dual imprisonment, of the body and of the gaze. During the first days, I received messages from some, who were desperate to leave their flats,

> like racehorses in a stable: I want to go outside, this thing must be documented, I have to take pictures! *And others would say: no, who do you think you are?* What privileges do you think you have? Is the photographer a special kind of human being, less contagious than others? Stay at home like everybody else! But the photographers did not stay at home. They went outside anyway, perhaps they pretended to go shopping, and others used their press passes. And I said, be careful, but it is good that you are doing this, because this is an exceptional time and it must not remain without images.]

However, not all writers and artists shared this spirit of optimism and adventure. Whereas Smargiassi described lockdown photography as a heroic duty to posterity, and depicted the journalist as an intrepid explorer in unfamiliar, dangerous territory, the novelist and literary scholar Antonio Scurati played with similar (masculinist) tropes of danger and audacity — the pouncing lion — but reached a more pessimistic conclusion. According to Scurati, COVID-19 came as a shock to a generation of Italians who had only encountered tragedy and existential crisis in mediated forms. For more than thirty years, Scurati writes, affluent citizens of the Global North had grown accustomed to more and more sophisticated forms of televised news coverage. Continuously exposed to images of violence, death, and grief, these spectators paradoxically came to consider collective tragedy as 'unreal', revocable, and reversible. Over a period of three decades, television and social media had progressively transformed war and disaster into one more mediated event among many others. This *banalization* of violence, according to Scurati, had its historical origins in the heavily televised military campaigns of the Gulf War of 1991:

> Certo, avevamo vent'anni la notte del 17 gennaio del 1991 quando gli aerei della coalizione anti-Saddam bombardarono Baghdad in nome nostro in diretta televisiva. Ma si trattò, per l'appunto, di una 'inesperienza', cioè di un'esperienza deprivata dei tratti caratteristici dell'esperienza vissuta: la continuità, l'irreversibilità, la fatidicità. Dopo aver assistito allo spettacolo di morte e distruzione, si poteva spegnere la tv e andarsene a letto...[25]
>
> [Yes, we were twenty years old on the night of 17 January 1991, when the fighter jets of the anti-Saddam coalition dropped bombs on Baghdad, in our name, on live television. But that was in fact an 'inexperience'. I mean to say, it was an experience that had been deprived of all the important attributes of lived experience: continuity, irreversibility, fatefulness. After watching the spectacle of death and destruction, we switched off the TV and went to bed.]

The Gulf War was just the beginning, according to Scurati. In 2001, mass media transformed the 9/11 terrorist attacks from a human tragedy into a 'piag[a] dell'immaginario collettivo' [scourge of the collective imagination].[26] More recently, the same strategies were employed to create an artificial distance between the experiences of migrants and the lives of Italians, who enjoyed their summer holidays on the same beaches that had become synonymous with Europe's brutal border regime in the Mediterranean and with the suffering and violent death of innumerable refugees:

> Noi siamo stati guerrieri da salotto, bagnanti sulle spiagge dei migranti, i nostri

> drammi hanno assunto la forma di psicodrammi, la sindrome da attacchi di panico è stata la patologia tipica della nostra psiche collettiva. [...] Una reazione utile se s'incontra un leone nella savana. Solo che, nel caso del panico, il leone non c'è. Adesso purtroppo, il leone c'è. E come in una sorta di beffarda nemesi storica, ha assunto la forma impalpabile, microscopica, quasi fantasmatica, ma terribilmente reale, e potenzialmente ubiqua, dell'epidemia.[27]
>
> [We were living-room-warriors; bathing tourists on the beaches of migrants. Our dramas were psychodramas. Panic attacks were the typical pathology of our collective psyche. [...] A useful reaction if you meet a lion in the savannah. Except that, in the case of our panic attacks, there was no lion. Now unfortunately, the lion is here. And, in a gesture of antagonistic historical mockery, it has taken a form that is impalpable, microscopic, almost ghostly, but nevertheless terribly real, and potentially ubiquitous: the form of the pandemic.]

Scurati's argument can be summarized as follows: unlike previous experiences of catastrophe, the coronavirus pandemic has shaken the foundations of our collective imagination, for two reasons. First, the virus marks a potential threat to every person, across differences of class, gender, and citizenship. Secondly, it cannot be *pictured* and therefore resists the dominant logic of the society of the spectacle. On this point, Scurati's argument runs directly counter to the analysis of distinguished media theorist Michele Cometa, who, in his recent book, *Cultura visuale* [*Visual Culture*] has described the COVID-19 pandemic as a new *pictorial turn*, following the age of terrorism. According to Cometa, the experience of the pandemic has shifted public attention away from complex written arguments. In their place, charts and graphs have been awarded an almost totemic status:

> [Si tratta] in realtà [di] una serie di immagini, che in un certo senso chiudono l'era del terrore e ne aprono un'altra, ancora più inquietante e certamente foriera di un ulteriore *pictorial turn*, non può che essere legata alla contingente pandemia. È sicuro che le immagini della pandemia continueranno a ossessionarci per molto tempo.[28]
>
> [They are in fact a series of images, and in a certain sense they mark the end of the age of terror and the beginning of another, even more disturbing age. They are certainly indicative of a further pictorial turn, which is undoubtedly linked to the ongoing pandemic. It is certain that these images of the pandemic will continue to haunt us for a long time.]

Scurati, by contrast, insists that the experience of the pandemic remains essentially and fundamentally unrepresentable.

Literary testimonies of the lockdown of 2020 offer further, interesting evidence of this tension between visibility and invisibility. Like Cocco's and Serra's hybrid narrative, they also exemplify the emergence of a new, collective attention to the materiality of everyday life. Consider, for instance, novelist Paolo Giordano, who decided in February 2020 to keep a record of his experiences, so that the new insights triggered by this unexpected, unfolding catastrophe would not be lost:

> Ho deciso d'impiegare questo vuoto scrivendo. Per tenere a bada i presagi, e per trovare un modo migliore di pensare tutto questo. [...] [N]on voglio perdere ciò che l'epidemia ci sta svelando di noi stessi. Superata la paura, ogni

> consapevolezza volatile svanirà in un instante — succede sempre così con le malattie.[29]
>
> [I have decided to write, to fill that void. To keep my fears at bay and to find a better way of thinking about all this. [...] I don't want to miss out on what the epidemic is revealing about us. Once we have overcome our fears, this volatile awareness will vanish in an instant. That is what always happens when one is ill.]

Published by Einaudi in March 2020, Giordano's brutally intimate account narrates the earliest phase of the coronavirus pandemic in Italy as a paradoxical catastrophe that can be described in precise mathematical terms, but which resists conventional means of artistic expression: 'La parola "caos" ci dà l'idea di qualcosa che sfugge alla presa della matematica, della razionalità stessa. E invece no. Esistono tecniche raffinate ed efficienti per governare anche la confusione' [The word 'chaos' implies that something escapes the grasp of mathematics, of rationality itself. But no. We have refined and efficient techniques, which manage even confusion].[30] While epidemiologists can rely on sophisticated techniques of representation, according to Giordano, writers and visual artists have struggled to give meaningful form to the complex experience of the pandemic. It is hard to find the right words: 'Molto in questa crisi ha a che fare con il tempo', writes Giordano. 'Ci ritroviamo compressi e rabbiosi, come imbottigliati nel traffico, ma senza nessuno intorno' [In this crisis, a lot has to do with time. We find ourselves compressed and angry, as if we were stuck in a traffic jam, but there is nobody around].[31]

In Giordano's diary, anxieties over the limits of literary representation find expression in a deliberately rudimentary form of autobiographical first-person writing. The coronavirus pandemic, for Giordano, is a story so new that it can only be told at the level of intimate, lived experience. Consequently, his account of the pandemic unfolds like a series of snapshots from a new, unfamiliar world: a logbook, a meticulous record of emotions, rumination, and very little action. A strikingly similar approach can be found in the lockdown diary of Triestine writer Paolo Rumiz, who compares his experiences of spring 2020 to the highly regulated life of the inhabitants of a monastic charterhouse. Like a monk, Rumiz believes in the importance of self-imposed strictures which, for him, serve to elevate both the individual spirit and the wellbeing of the collective.

> Regola non è regolamento, formulario prestampato, imposizione. È autoregolamentazione intima, convinta, in un quadro condiviso di società civile. L'esatto contrario dell'ubbidienza cieca e della rinuncia della libertà. Qualcosa che riabilita persino la mascherina antivirus, ne fa un simbolo di rispetto verso il prossimo e le impedisce di diventare, come qualcuno vorrebbe, museruola.[32]
>
> [A rule is not a regulation, a pre-printed form, or an imposition. It is a form of self-regulation that stems from an intimate conviction, and that exists in the shared framework of civil society. It is the exact opposite of blind obedience or the denial of freedom. It even rehabilitates the antiviral facemask, and makes it a symbol of respect for others. It prevents the mask from becoming a muzzle, as some would claim.]

Firmly rooted in the present, Rumiz's diary ponders the interlocking temporalities of the emotions: nostalgia, regret, anxiety, and fear. His writing is rich in quotidian settings and in intimately personal detail. It features the study, the view from the window, the personal library, the kitchen with its limited stocks, and so on. From this minimal place of safety, Rumiz describes the pandemic as a condition of dwindling possibilities. The claustrophobic security of the writer's home is contrasted with the force of the pandemic, which appears like an unpredictable and intimately threatening force: a hostile ocean. Unlike Giordano or Scurati, Rumiz has no doubt about the social importance of literature. Reaching back in time, beyond the crisis of cultural institutions of the late 1960s and early 1970s — as discussed in Chapter 5 — he insists that writers can bestow symbolic meaning on the experience of lockdown by relating it metaphorically to earlier existential struggles in human history. This conviction is expressed in the title of Rumiz's diary, *Il veliero sul tetto: appunti per una clausura* [*The Sailing Ship on the Roof: Notes for an Enclosure*] and is also echoed in an emblematic passage, where the writer's home is imagined as a ship. 'Siamo barricati, con vista sul deserto della terra, del mare e dell'aria, e la casa miagola, geme come una barca e talvolta rimbomba come un pianoforte pieno di vento' [We are barricaded. We look out across the desert of the land, the sea, and the air. And the house meows and moans like a ship, and sometimes it rumbles like a piano full of wind].[33] The same peculiar, seemingly anachronistic insistence on the timelessness of human experience is echoed in Rumiz's deliberate choice of a single artistic medium: the written word. In the context of a momentous, collective shift towards intermedial and virtual creativity — which will be more fully described in the next section of this chapter — Rumiz's insistence on the social relevance of literature seems almost a provocation. Like the monks or the seafaring captains of bygone eras, the solitary writer, for Rumiz, is a figure of the past, whose experience continues to hold unexpected relevance for our tumultuous present.

A comprehensive study of Italian literary and visual lockdown diaries would serve to reveal further similarities and shared concerns. During the early months of 2020, Rumiz, Giordano, Serra, and Cocco were joined in their endeavours by writer-diarists Francesco Cataluccio, Chiara Gamberale, and Antonio Moresco, by photographer Giulio Di Meo, cartoonist Zerocalcare, and many others.[34] Collectively, their recollections of spring 2020 provide a powerful record of an unprecedented, communal experience of shock and disorientation. As in previous periods discussed in this volume, we note a strong connection between artistic creativity and experiences of crisis. In the second half of the twentieth century, this relation could be observed, for instance, at the turn of the 1970s, as noted in Chapter 5. Earlier still, it emerged powerfully after major military conflicts, as we saw with Italian Futurism and the Fascist reappropriation of the trauma of the Great War. Similarly, many lockdown diarists of the early 2020s shared a sense that modes of artistic representation had been put to an extreme test by the singular experience of the pandemic.

8.3. The View from the Sofa: Glimpsing the Future?

Exploring COVID-19 forces us to take stock of the transformation that occurred in Italy towards the end of the 1990s, one which the sudden, massive move online, created by lockdown, radically accelerated. The pandemic requires us to ask again some fundamental questions about the nature of art. During lockdown, most forms of art, for their very survival, were compelled to abandon the materiality that still largely defined them ten or fifteen years ago. In the previous chapter, we mentioned how, back in 2007, *Global Stage* threw the status of theatre into question, as its materiality was gradually challenged and eroded through its evolving proximity to cinema screens. Peggy Phelan's claim that theatre is defined by its 'ontological' privilege of being live in the present and therefore not reproducible,[35] and Lars Elleström's subsequent claim that 'theatre cannot be stored',[36] were further challenged by what happened during lockdown. Suddenly, theatre could only be experienced through a screen.

Where media theorists of the 1990s postulated performance as a natural limit to virtual creativity, the closure of venues under lockdown revealed the possibility of new forms of creative innovation, at the intersection of digital and performance art. An interesting example is offered by *Fabulamundi Playwriting Europe*, a cooperation project among theatres, festivals, and cultural organizations from ten EU countries, co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme, and managed from Rome by co-directors Claudia Di Giacomo and Roberta Scaglione.[37] In direct response to the restrictions of 21 March 2020, Scaglione and Di Giacomo decided to produce a film, 'Theatre Insights: Stories from Fabulamundi', which collates and presents some of the projects that were scheduled to take place over the following months and which had to be abandoned in their initially envisaged form because of the pandemic. The film, which is freely available online, serves as a record of the transition of theatre from stage to screen — or, for the public, from the shared space of the auditorium to the claustrophobic intimacy of private homes. Like many of the examples that we discuss in this chapter, 'Theatre Insights' defied categorizations and definitions that yoke specific art forms to their materiality.

With COVID-19, categorizations of media, we contend, require further consideration, especially as virtual experiences of 2020 have accelerated a growing interest in extended realities — what Mark Zuckerberg in 2021 would define as the 'metaverse'.[38] With the first lockdown of March 2020, the trend of ever more collaborative, complex, and intermedial art — art that challenged historic categorizations and delineations — accelerated almost overnight. Institutions and individuals that had previously paid little attention to the opportunities and dynamics of virtual exchange found themselves unexpectedly dependent on sometimes unfamiliar technologies and new forms of communication. While some found themselves struggling for visibility and attention, others appeared to relish the challenges of the new. Where technology had not already been fully embraced, those involved in the creation and dissemination of art had, at the very least, to seriously consider that embrace.[39]

As Italians, and many others across the world, sat at home in March 2020 to

consume culture almost exclusively through available domestic screens (TV, laptop, tablet, PC, phone) or radio, few may have thought how significant the change was for a medium's modality. However, Christian Caliandro, writing in Italian magazine *Art Tribune*, claimed that COVID-19 had thrown into crisis the very model of art consumption, as globalized, art-related travel suddenly halted.[40] Galleries, art fairs, fashion shows, and museums, none of which had been first created on technological platforms, rapidly needed to find ways of inhabiting virtual three-dimensional space if they were to continue their activity at all. Responding to the government's call *#IoRestoACasa, la cultura non si ferma* [*#ImStayingAtHome: Culture won't stop*] virtual viewing rooms and virtual environments were rapidly established across the peninsula. While this did little to attenuate the financial losses of museums, theatres or other venues, it meant that in seconds a global audience could be 'inside' certain spaces, such as the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, through platforms like Google 360°. Such platforms, through the use of 360° photographs of internal spaces, encouraged us to enjoy a private viewing of the paintings in a gallery's hyperreal, if rather sterile, seemingly three-dimensional rooms, without even jostling with other visitors for a view.

The substitution of virtual space for the real was for many artists simply an emergency solution. Mario Gerosa from the Brera Academy Virtual Lab referred to it as 'un virtuale necessario, da assumere come una medicina amara (per tanti) ma inevitabile' [a necessary virtual, that for many is to be taken like a bitter, but necessary pill].[41] However, with the high costs of hiring gallery space, the vast number of artworks in storage which are never seen, and the ever greater improvements in technology, it is clear that these virtual showcases set up during COVID-19 are likely to remain with us, and develop further, as alternative exposition spaces. Until 2020, websites provided little more than a virtual sidecar to the 'real' exhibition. By contrast, the future will see a more integrated partnership of real and virtual, as can already be seen with major exhibitions in Italy and elsewhere.[42] We expect that many three-dimensional exhibitions will be made available to a global public in virtual space, while also continuing to welcome perhaps smaller numbers of visitors in person. Around the corner, there is the computer-generated, extended reality (XR), which in 2021 gained significant media interest, as Facebook announced its name change to Meta. This signalled an interest in the 'metaverse', an imagined immersive space, blending virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and mixed reality (MR). Heralded as the future of the internet, the metaverse could have significant consequences for the ongoing dismantling of boundaries between art forms. After all, advances in technology and digitalization have repeatedly led to increased intermediality, as we have argued elsewhere in this book.[43]

While large, mainstream online galleries like the Uffizi have fundamentally just exported their physical collection into 360° platforms online, creating a realistic virtual copy, more experimental developments can be found on the fringes of COVID-19-related digitalization. Going beyond the bitter, if necessary, medicine of the virtual, these new expressions of intermediality sought to overcome some of the evident limitations of current 360° platforms. Let us look at the example of Bruno Cerboni's *Virtual Dante*, which uses 360° technology, but takes it a couple

of steps further. On the 700th anniversary of Dante's death, Cerboni remediated Dante's *Divina commedia* (1308–20) and Gustave Doré's illustrations (1861) in a virtual gallery which showcases Cerboni's own virtual, psychedelic paintings. These paintings are themselves 'un condensato di tutto: gli arazzi medievali, i mosaici ravennati, i gobelins, i videogiochi, la realtà virtuale, Gustave Doré' [a condensation of everything: medieval hangings, mosaics from Ravenna, tapestries, videogames, virtual reality, Gustave Doré].[44] Cerboni had previously exhibited his art in *Second Life* so, unsurprisingly, his virtual gallery blends a range of audiovisual elements (including the readings from Dante's *Divina commedia* which accompany the paintings).

The De Carlo Virtual Space is another such example, born not of necessity but certainly benefiting from the traffic of COVID-19's many sofa surfers.[45] It was created by a Milanese start-up in 2017, and resulted in this private Milan gallery becoming the first real-time virtual art gallery in Italy. While visitors can get into it from a laptop, it is its use of immersive VR, on the Oculus platform, which is especially interesting from our perspective. The Oculus technology, which requires viewers to wear a helmet and gloves to interact with the digital world, takes the gallery well beyond a Google 360° experience, which was already familiar to most through Google Streetview. A 360° gallery visit is firmly grounded in photography, and ultimately entails navigating 3D hyperreal photographs. It somewhat clumsily allows visitors to navigate a space, homing in on art works by means of zooming. Oculus technology, by contrast, positions the De Carlo Virtual Space as a complexly intermedial 3D experience. Its first frame of reference is videogaming, but this is fused with film, photography, and art, as well as drawing in user interaction and performativity through the embodied nature of the VR experience.

Only time will tell what becomes of virtual galleries, with their ability to showcase all forms of art — whether created digitally (Cerboni) or in the material world (the Uffizi gallery). For now, we can observe how virtual environments such as *Second Life*, which had their golden age in 2007–08, are suddenly snatched from obscurity and propelled into new life. Meanwhile, the rapid rise of the NFT (non-fungible token) during 2020 has enabled artists to create online art, which is unique and collectible, and cannot to be transferred between people. This new, digitally produced intermedial art has given shape to a thriving art market, which is likely to grow in the future, especially if artists expand into the metaverse. Digital art is already big business.[46]

However, the transformation of artistic media during the pandemic was not just about accessing galleries from the sofa, which ultimately remained a minority pursuit. One of the cultural forms to undergo the most significant transformation during COVID-19 lockdowns was cinema, an industry which was temporarily put on pause. Here, again, the changes that occurred during the pandemic largely accelerated trends that were already in place, rather than marking a new departure.

In 2020, filmmaker Daniele Vicari made a film that brought the COVID-19 experience to our screens, albeit allegorically. Unlike a second film on COVID-19 made in 2020 — a rather predictable comedy entitled *Lockdown all'italiana*

[*Lockdown, Italian Style*] (dir. Enrico Vanzina) — Vicari's *Il giorno e una notte* [*A Day and a Night*] was made *during* one of Italy's lockdowns. It describes the lives of four couples during an imaginary chemical terrorist attack on Rome which forces everyone indoors for twenty-four hours. Three of the couples are thrown suddenly and awkwardly together during COVID-19. The fourth couple is separated by the attack. Before looking at the film itself, it is worth pausing to consider the way it was made and then distributed, as it signals the radical transformation that cinema is undergoing as well as the forging of new relationships across the arts and media. COVID-19 is inscribed both on the film's subject matter and into the very texture of its making.

Let us start at the end, with the film's distribution, as this raises important questions. With Italy's cinemas either shut or at constant risk of closure, it made good business sense to use a streaming platform, the only guaranteed way of reaching an audience. Vicari chose one of Italy's national platforms, *RaiPlay*, to distribute the film online. Born in 2016 from the longer-standing web portal Rai.tv, *RaiPlay* took charge of the lion's share of distribution; the idea was that if the film were released in cinemas, it would be for a short additional run only. This seemingly innocent switch of platform from cinema to streaming catapulted Vicari into the galaxy of post-cinema, about which there has recently been renewed discussion.[47] His film has been viewed not on a large cinema screen in a darkened movie theatre, but on a variety of electronic devices, from smartphones and tablets to domestic television screens. In so doing, Vicari has surrendered any control over how the film will be viewed — the quality of sound, size of the image, the way that his film may jostle for the spectators' attention with news websites, social media messages, and other audiovisual material on their devices, are all out of his hands. While some viewers may turn off the lights and try to regain the cinema experience in their own homes, others have presumably watched his film distractedly, 'transitory spectators [...] localis[ing] transitory images'.[48]

Film critic Darren Paul Fisher contends that it is unlikely, after COVID-19, that things will return to normal. For Fisher, we are entering a period of hybrid distribution, where streaming and cinema releases will have to find new ways of co-existing, as films are likely to be released simultaneously at home and in the cinema.[49] This has enormous consequences for two media that were once well-differentiated: television and cinema. The old, hierarchical view of their relationship was recently expressed by the director of the 2018 Cannes Film Festival, Thierry Frémaux, who ruled out giving awards to films that would be distributed solely on streaming platforms like Netflix. In this way, Frémaux divided cinema and streaming into well-sheared sheep and noisy goats: cinema was art and television was 'media'; television series were industrial, but films were poetry.[50] The polemics at Cannes, triggered by Frémaux's position, shone a spotlight on a process already in place. In Italy, the boundaries between television and cinema had already been blurred by works like Paolo Sorrentino's high-profile and highly 'cinematic' series, *The Young Pope* (2016) and *The New Pope* (2020), both made for Sky Atlantic's streaming service. While Sorrentino himself described the projects as 'a long film',[51]

they were consumed by many, if not most, as a series, and they sit in the peculiar in-between space that streaming represents: an ambiguity most marked by Netflix, whose very name embodies cinema, even as it screens what would once have been categorized as television series.[52]

Any discussion of *Il giorno e la notte*, however, must go beyond the argument over the ever-diminishing boundaries between cinema and television. The content of the film itself draws in a larger and more fluid constellation of the post-cinema galaxy, as we can see from the video messages sent between the young couple in the film, Ida (Isabella Rangonese) and Luca (Matteo Martari), whose flirtation is brutally interrupted by the lockdown. Ida's story is simple and dramatic: she has just met a young university researcher, Luca. While she is separated from him during the terrorist attack, she discovers that she is pregnant. To communicate with Luca across a material divide, she sends him sensual creations made on her mobile phone, like a short video showing an intense close-up of a flower blossoming between her lips. These creations, which have all the poetry and abstraction of amateur videoart, are Isabella Rangonese's own, made prior to shooting. So, Rangonese emerges as an amateur artist in her own right, having, like many, turned to filming (and watercolours, which also feature in the film) to kill the boredom of lockdown. Her appropriation of her mobile phone's camera as an artistic device makes her a co-creator in the film.

In one film segment, we see the neo-couple exchanging video messages almost like love gifts: Ida's are artistic and poetic; Luca's comedic and naturalistic. He takes his mobile phone and pans across the rural Veneto landscape, videoing a braying donkey, which seems to give voice to a kind of wordless howl, an expression of what so many felt during the isolation of lockdown. That these two young people communicate so naturally through amateur filmmaking is testimony to the rapid technological journey which has taken us from the birth of the Super8 film cameras (used in the early 1970s by UFO, as discussed in Chapter 5) to the first digital videocameras at the end of the 1990s, through the birth of YouTube (2005), and to today's powerful mobile phones and attendant editing programmes with their advanced videomaking capacity. In just a few decades, digital filmmaking has been democratized, emerging as a mainstream creative pursuit. This has made amateur filmmakers or photographers of almost everyone.

A little later in the film, we see a series of still photographs of Luca, presumably also (supposedly) on his mobile phone, as well as split screens, emulating Zoom, which show both Ida and Luca concurrently. This play with diverse parts of the post-cinema galaxy — from home video to photography to videoart and filmmaking — is made self-consciously explicit from the outset of the film when Luca approaches a camera positioned in front of him. His first words are 'registrazione audio partita' [sound recording on], as he holds up a slate in front of the camera. He begins the film as both actor and filmmaker. Like every actor in the film, he must set up his set, camera, and lighting himself, with Vicari present only to direct via Zoom. Italy's social distancing requirements at the time of filming meant that the actors had to assume various aspects of the filmmaking process normally assigned to designated members of a troupe. The actors effectively become artists and are

credited with their work in the film's titles. The heightened importance of the artist as polymath is obvious here. The polymath is a figure which has emerged at various points in this book already (Edoardo Sanguineti, Mario Ricci, Carlo Lizzani, to name just a few), and draws together into a single person multiple modes of art, often becoming a catalyst for the creation of multimedial and intermedial art. As such, the polymath is an important part of our story in this book. It is a story that began with the mediatic and interdisciplinary versatility of the Futurists, with their heady mix of craft, fine arts, design, and technology, including the much-revered designer-architects of post-war Italy, and now encompasses design as a practice that touches all aspects of the everyday.[53]

Vicari's film reveals a slice of the post-cinema landscape in which images are ubiquitous — on mobile phones (both moving images and still photographs), on computers (Zoom calls), and on the television, where the news of the imagined attack unfolds. It is a highly screen-orientated ecosystem, and as such it is flexible, mobile, and easy to use. When we looked at the expansion of cinema in our discussion of Carlo Lizzani's *Global Stage* (Chapter 7), cinema, which is a highly intermedial form, was already interweaving itself into various media — satellite, DVD, multimedia, television, and videogames — and an infrastructure to support this was developing. Fast-forwarding to 2020, what we are seeing is a further dissolution of the boundaries, as well as a confirmation that if, in 2007, it was still uncertain whether the digital would really turn out to be more democratizing or elitist, it has now, on many levels, become user-friendly and easily accessible. Rangonese can try her hand at home with watercolours or videoart equally. While we may already take this flexibility for granted, it is a result of very recent digital transformation.

The critic Francesco Casetti draws on the galaxy metaphor in Marshall McLuhan's renowned *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) when he entitles his book on post-cinema *The Lumière Galaxy* (2015). This is how he expresses what has happened to cinema:

> I was interested in retrieving the idea of 'galaxy'. It synthesizes perfectly the image of an experience no longer localized in a single point, ready to assume different forms, at the crossroads with other kinds of experience and yet still characterized by its own identity. Along the full arc of the twentieth century, cinema has been a brilliant and immediately recognizable star shining over our heads. This is no longer the case. A cosmic deflagration has taken place, and that star has exploded into a thousand suns, which in turn have attracted new celestial material and formed new systems: These new suns govern new planets. The stuff cinema is made of is still present in these heavenly spheres, but what we now face is a configuration of a vast and differentiated array of celestial bodies.[54]

With these words as a guide, we can step into another part of that post-deflagration galaxy. During the 2020 lockdowns, we saw an explosion of video-mapping across Italian towns and cities. On many occasions, it was used to express public gratitude towards hospital workers for their extraordinary efforts in combatting COVID-19. It was also used by individuals sitting in their rooms, just to break the boredom and to project themselves beyond their four walls. Alessio Chinni, for instance, a

young man from Foggia living in Barcelona, lit up the buildings surrounding his home with a light and music show that attracted a curious audience in the streets below. With museums and galleries shut, some galleries, like Palazzo Biscaccioni in Jesi, projected their artworks on the outside of the buildings, for all to see. Video-mapping, which is closely tied to street art and VJ-ing, has long been linked to cinema, as we see in Giuseppe Tornatore's *Nuovo cinema paradiso* (1988), where in one scene the projectionist turns a lens around so that the people gathered in the square can, to their delight, see a film projected onto the houses of the piazza. Through its animation of architecture, video-mapping plays with the interface between two-dimensional art (the film) and three-dimensional volume (architecture), reshaping them both into new forms, and providing a new form of public storytelling — whether that is telling the Christian nativity story, as we see in many Italian towns in December, or thanking people for their sacrifices during COVID-19.

Daniele Vicari's film and Palazzo Biscaccioni form part of a new galaxy of intermedial dialogues that has been highlighted by digital technology. *Il giorno e la notte* points to the dismantling of boundaries of television and cinema, photography, and videoart, as well as revealing the diminishing barriers between professional and amateur filmmaking on mobile phones. The video-mapping by Palazzo Biscaccioni and others, which accelerated during COVID-19, on the other hand, plays with the interface of moving images and silent, unmoving (but textured) architecture. Both demonstrate that moving images have long left the cinema frame, which held them during the interwar period, and are roaming across wide canvases like castle walls, as well as tiny mobile phone rectangles. This roaming opens an ever-changing, fluid world of artistic inter-play.

Marshall McLuhan sees the genesis of a medium as critical — a genesis is forged in its DNA. He believes that cinema's DNA is the big screen, big actions, huge human images. While his claims ring true for both cinema in the early and mid-twentieth century and for contemporary video-mapping, Grusin's alternative understanding of the genesis of cinema — born not on the big screen but in a myriad of often privately viewed, pre-cinematic modes — is perhaps more accurate for the galaxy of screens we have been discussing here. If cinema on the big screen was a paradigmatic medium for the first half of the twentieth century — the most important intermedial medium of that time — it no longer stands on that pedestal in the collective imaginary. The so-called 'death of cinema' 'goes hand in hand with the proliferation of the filmic image'.[55] We are inside 'a post-cinematic landscape where film can no longer be disconnected from other art forms and media'.[56] When we look at cinema in 2020, it emerges that there is no longer an 'in-between' at play, a term that implies the space between two solid disciplines. Instead, we are firmly in the world of the post medium, where the filmic image moves fluidly from vast projections on castle walls to intimate and personal videoart.

8.4. Thinking Forward

COVID-19 has acted as an accelerant in a constantly mutating process of virtualization and intermedial connection that was already well established before 2020. Even where artworks remained material and local, this mixing can be clearly seen. From our current position, there is almost no sense of a medium or art form 'that exists in itself', but rather only media that exist 'in relation to or in collaboration with other media'.[57] This loss of art and media boundaries might appear on the surface to be swift, recent, and radical, but its roots are complex and intriguing, and stretch back a long way, as we have shown in this book. In our introduction, we looked to a chart created by Fluxus artist and critic Dick Higgins (1995, Fig. 1.1), in which he visualizes the overlapping of various artistic media. Each medium is bounded by a neat line, even where media intersect with others and are overlapped by them. This approach is rooted in patterns of thinking that we considered in Chapter 4, in our discussion of Gruppo 63. From the perspective of 2020, however, Higgins's approach appears limited and dated. Contemporary experiences of aesthetic encounter and art practice are no longer adequately captured by his territorially 'grounded' metaphors. Where Higgins invites us to think of zones of influence and places of encounter and transgression that are imagined to be as stable and reliable as pastures, many contemporary artists imagine their engagement with different artistic media in terms of currents and flow. Instead of situating their intermedia practice at the intersection of clearly circumscribed fields of creative expression, they move offshore to disorient and re-orient critical thinking. As literary critic Steve Mentz points out, we might conceive of this new attitude as a shift towards oceanic thinking: 'Rethinking movement as flows and circuits rather than progress or retreat can revivify intellectual communities. Thinking in terms of cyclical flows rather than linear progress makes historical narratives messier, more confusing, and less familiar. These are good things'.[58]

Mentz's interest in messiness is apt for a book like ours. What we have presented in this volume does not amount to a neat, or complete, story of intermedial practice in Italy since 1900. Our narrative is full of gaps, and it could never have been otherwise. This is not to say, however, that our approach has been eclectic. When shining our critical spotlight on specific years — and on arts and artists, institutions, and theoretical approaches — we have kept our focus firmly on those zones where multiple arts and media meet and overlap. We kept a watchful eye on the emergence of new forms, observed contradictions between theory and practice, and remained alert to the fact that, if we were to focus away from these superimposed areas, we would still encounter arts and media with no ostensible intersection with one another. The danger for any large, ambitious project, we suggest, lies in the pull of a single, unifying progressive narrative. The work of the literary and cultural critic is often said to consist in the systematic pursuit of specialist expertise and comprehensive knowledge. Specialism is imagined, from the critic's perspective, as a gradual homing in on an object of study: a progressive approximation that is ultimately rewarded by complete and definitive understanding. In our book, we have sought to disrupt this approach through our engagement with the fragment,

and with what Rosalind Krauss sees as the decentring of physical spaces and interpretive frameworks, as discussed in Chapter 6. In other words, our volume wants to strike a difficult balance between creative speculation and sustained critique. It both maps and complicates cartographies of knowledge practice and creative expression. We find the same tension between progressive and disruptive practice in many of our case studies. Here, the breaking down of traditional barriers between arts and media is linked to processes of re-thinking the arts, both from within and in relation to one another. Often, this has resulted in the creation of new artistic media and new art forms. At times, creative innovations were spurred on by major technological turns which also impacted on and transformed the way we access, interact with, and consume arts and media. At other times — for example in the early 1970s — the re-thinking of media boundaries took place in the context of a critique of technology and complex systems.

The contemporary, post-medium condition that we face at the end of our intermedial journey can be understood through Richard Grusin's work on 'networks or systems of technologies, practices, and social formations that are generally stable for the most part, but that in the process of circulation and exchange tend to fluctuate or perhaps overlap at various nodes or crossings'.[59] Grusin's image of the rhizomatic network somewhat resembles the metaphor of the galaxy, which McLuhan and Casetti have favoured, but it urges us to think beyond the idea of closed, axiomatized cultural systems. In fact, the problem with the metaphor of the galaxy is that it brings to mind shards of material bobbing in dark skies. In reality, this material is constantly finding new ways of merging, new networks, and points of contact. In our book, we have sought to convey this by conjuring heterogeneous assemblages of diverse voices and practices, across time. We have also argued that the rhizomatic nature of cultural exchanges has become more evident during the period mapped in our volume: from art which still had recognizable disciplinary and technical boundaries, at the start of the twentieth century, to something that is networked and interlinked, fluid, and perhaps even oceanic, both in terms of media boundaries and in terms of geographies.

Our findings pose numerous questions, not only for the arts but also for the academic field in which we, the authors of this book, are positioned: Italian Studies. How will accelerating intermediality impact on research in Italian Studies? To put this question in perspective, Dudley Andrew (who, like McLuhan, enjoys cosmic metaphors) notes that 'post-Galileo we realize we are hurtling through the heavens ourselves, unable to quite locate a fixed star, as we observe everything visibly shifting — and we do so from our own continuously shifting positions'.[60] In an era of 'permanent transition', most cultural critics in our field have become sensitive to the intermediality of their objects of study.[61] Younger scholars, in particular, are incorporating intermedial methodologies into their work to deal better with the ontological complexity of artistic products. But how will greater intermediality change research into the novel or into cinematic film? This is a question that filmmaker Peter Greenaway raised when he said that 'we are forced to confront this new medium [interactive cinema] that will make Star Wars look like candlelight reading in the sixteenth century'.[62] More recently, Dudley Andrew, when

discussing post-cinema, has built on Greenaway's comment to ask 'has interpreting and historicizing films become quaint?'[63] Can we still find the 'organized ways', that Andrew mentions, of studying, say, a novel or a poem — cultural products which continue to provide the backbone of Italian Studies research at the start of the twenty-first century? Or do we need orientations and new ways of organizing our research?

We pose these questions especially for researchers who, like ourselves, work across intermedial borders and who attempt to fix in place this slippery fluidity. Are academic monographs (including this present book), with a few, still, unmoving illustrations, the best way of sharing our research findings? This question was raised in one of our early Advisory Board meetings by Leonardo Sangiorgi, the co-founder of the Milanese art collective, Studio Azzurro. He asked why our research website relied so heavily on words, with images just an illustrative add-on, and other media an afterthought. Our website <www.interdisciplinaryitaly.org> changed in the wake of Sangiorgi's provocation, but the challenge that he laid down remains. Sangiorgi asks if words are the best way to approach research on intermedia and whether we — as researchers who increasingly push back boundaries — need to question our own methodologies. What does it mean to research intermediality through the written word? What would it mean to research it, for instance, through music or photographs, virtual reality, or film? These are not simply rhetorical questions. They are questions that we have not foregrounded in this volume, but which we believe require greater, detailed attention. Happily, the debate in Italian Studies has begun to tackle them, as shown recently by fascinating and innovative work done by Massimo Riva, Emanuela Patti, Derek Duncan, Alan O'Leary, and Nicola Camerlenghi to mention just a few.[64]

Related to this is the question of teaching. What does the history we have sketched in this book mean for the teaching in our discipline (or rather multi-discipline)? Students who are entering Italian Studies programmes in the early 2020s were born after intermediality became normalized in the 1990s. They do not have any direct experience of a world in which the arts were *not* converging. As digital natives, they grew up with YouTube, tablets, and smartphones. To use Andrew's cosmic metaphors again, some of the brightest objects in the Italian Studies curriculum — novels, plays, poetry, cinema — may no longer be the most luminous and densest stars in their skies. How do we teach students for whom the traditional objects of our undergraduate curricula may be dimming, or might 'twinkle on many kinds of screens', 'shar[ing] time and space with other applications'?[65] Do we encourage them to speak a critical language that was designed for analogue and much less intermedial forms of art, or do we make an effort to re-invent this language? COVID-19 lockdowns have already modified our teaching: we record lectures, curate recorded talks, learn to produce high-quality video essays, and ensure that knowledge is easily accessible online. We expect to see more of this over the coming years.

The changes we have mapped in this book also raise questions for the gatekeepers of artistic disciplines (art fairs, galleries, cinema critics, literary critics) who risk losing their footing in the intermedial environment which is under such rapid

development. Indeed, the survival of art as a separate sphere is put into question by the digital proximity of everything. Eleni Timplalexi writes provocatively about traditional critics as mere tenants of the web. The internet, she claims, belongs instead to 'prosumers' (digital natives who produce and consume material of their own making, often collaboratively, on platforms).[66] Professional gatekeepers, in this context, may have no more say or prestige than these creative web users and their amateur content. So, what happens to these professionals, and if professional gatekeepers were to disappear, what difference would this make?

Intermedia in Italy offers no ready answer to these questions, but provides a solid basis for further exploration, for those who wish to embark on it. We close this book in full recognition that our project remains, in Umberto Eco's terms, an *opera aperta*.[67] Over many months, our collective writing sessions have been accompanied by vibrant exchanges with colleagues, doctoral and postdoctoral researchers, and creative artists. Our workshops, blogs, summer schools and conferences have given us a profound sense of the questions that our discipline must answer, well beyond the scope of this book. We do not emerge from this project with a single, definitive description of the relation between media. Despite our many, intensive discussions — and perhaps because of them — we continue to hold different views and our theoretical positions are not perfectly aligned. This diversity is important to our project. We consider it a bedrock for reasoned, open-ended, and respectful dialogue, in academic criticism and in wider cultural and political exchanges. In our book, nuanced attention to diversity has served to open up new spaces for thinking with and through the complex interplay between arts and media. A great deal remains to be said about how these relations develop, expand and contract, how they occur, and under what circumstances. Many exciting stories remain to be told. In this spirit, we invite our readers to amend and continue our work, with further reflections and spin-offs, keeping these important debates open and alive.

Notes to Chapter 8

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3. Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov' [1936], in his *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968).
4. See Michael Cronin, *The Expanding World: Towards a Politics of Microspection* (Winchester and Washington: Zero Books, 2012).
5. Latour in Watts.
6. Bruno Latour, 'Where to Land after the Pandemic? A Paper and Now a Platform', 29 March 2020, <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/node/852.html> [accessed 20 September 2022].
7. Latour, 'Where to Land'.
8. Bruno Latour, *After Lockdown: A Metamorphosis*, trans. by Julie Rose (Cambridge: Polity, 2021), p. 13.
9. Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Polity, 2018), pp. 85–86.
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11. Tassoula Ephtakili, 'David Wallace-Wells: It Is Worse, Much Worse, Than You Think', *Ekathimerini*, 28 September 2020 <https://www.ekathimerini.com/society/257409/david-wallace-wells-it-is-worse-much-worse-than-you-think/> [accessed 19 July 2022].
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13. Filippo Milani and Davide Papotti, 'Il pedone trasgressore: pratiche proibite del camminare durante il lockdown', in *Lasciate socchiuse le porte: mobilità, attraversamenti, sconfinamenti*, ed. by Beniamino Della Gala and others (Rome: Armando Editore, 2021), pp. 41–62 (p. 43); original emphasis.
14. Caterina Serra and Giovanni Cocco, '*Displacement*: a che ora chiude Venezia?', in *Lasciate socchiuse le porte*, pp. 100–16 (p. 110).
15. Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (London: Repeater Books, 2016), p. 12.
16. See Rosi Braidotti, '"We" Are in *This* Together, But We Are Not One and the Same', *Bioethical Inquiry*, 17 (2020), 465–69 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11673–020–10017–8>.
17. In Italy, the most articulate and controversial critique of these health and safety measures was expressed by philosopher Giorgio Agamben. See especially Giorgio Agamben, *A che punto siamo? L'epidemia come politica* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2020), English translation by Valeria Dani, *Where Are We Now? The Epidemic as Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2021). For a critique of Agamben's position, see Edoardo Acotto, *Contro Agamben: una polemica filosofico-politica ai tempi del COVID-19* (Rome: Scienze e Lettere, 2021).
18. A research collaboration between UCL and Res Artis, beginning in April 2020, has shed light on the global scale of the problem. This project was focused on two consecutive surveys of artists and art residency providers in more than fifty countries. It yielded alarming results about the financial and mental health impact of the pandemic, and the dearth of support available for arts organizations and individuals. As was revealed by the first survey, one in ten arts residency providers was forced to close indefinitely. 65% of artists surveyed between November 2020 and January 2021 said they had been forced to pursue work outside the arts sector to support themselves, and 68% said they had not been able to access emergency financial support. At the time of the second, most recent, survey, 12.2% of artists said they had considered leaving the arts sector permanently. See 'Analytical Report — September 2020 COVID-19: Impact Survey on the Arts Residencies Field', <https://resartis.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Res-Artis_UCL_first-survey-report_COVID-19-impact-on-arts-residencies.pdf> [accessed 13 July 2022].
19. See Eugène Atget, *Paris*, intro. by Wilfried Wiegand, trans. by Anne Heritage (Krefeld: teNeues, 1998). Giorgio Agamben has described the eerie stillness of the first daguerreotypes as the symbolic birthplace of the modern apocalyptic imagination. See Giorgio Agamben, *Il Giorno del Giudizio* (Milan: Nottetempo, 2001).
20. Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), p. 11.
21. On the poetics of the city-without-us, see Florian Mussgnug, 'La città senza di noi', in *Metropolis*, ed. by Anna Masecchia (Florence: Le Monnier, 2010), pp. 36–45.
22. Serra and Cocco, p. 110.
23. Beniamino Della Gala and Lavinia Torti, 'Ai margini della società, ai margini dell'inquadratura: i senzatetto nelle foto del lockdown di primavera,' in *Lasciate socchiuse le porte*, pp. 117–35 (p. 118); original emphasis.
24. Michele Smargiassi, 'Lo spiro di Dante dietro le nostre mascherine', *La repubblica*, 22 September 2020, <https://smargiassi-michele.blogautore.repubblica.it/2020/09/22/giampiero-corelli-data-mi-fu-soave-medicina-COVID-19-ravenna-fotografia/> [accessed 12 July 2022]; cited in Della Gala and Torti, p. 119; original emphasis.
25. Antonio Scurati, *La fuga di Enea: salvare la città in fiamme* (Milan: Solferino, 2021), p. 76.
26. Ibid., p. 75.
27. Scurati, pp. 76–77.
28. Michele Cometa, *Cultura visuale* (Milan: Raffaello Cortina, 2020), p. 27.
29. Paolo Giordano, *Nel contagio* (Turin: Einaudi, 2020), p. 5.
30. Ibid., p. 36.

31. Giordano, p. 61.
32. Paolo Rumiz, *Il veliero sul tetto: appunti per una clausura* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2020), pp. 10–11.
33. Ibid., p. 46.
34. See Francesco M. Cataluccio, *In occasione dell'epidemia* (Bellinzona: Casagrande, 2020); Chiara Gamberale, *Come il mare in un bicchiere* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2020); Antonio Moresco, *Canto degli alberi* (Sansepolcro: Aboca, 2020); Giulio Di Meo, *Anticorpi bolognesi*, preface by Roberto Morgantini, afterword by Cristiano Capuano (Bologna: Pendragon, 2020); Zerocalcare, *Rebibbia Quarantine* (La7, 2020; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pybGuLoU13w> [accessed 21 September 2022]); *Strappare lungo i bordi*, Netflix, 19 November 2021. As novelist Igiaba Scego has pointed out, the large number of contributions reveals a disconcerting similarity between authors, in terms of class, age and citizenship. Very few autobiographical narratives of the pandemic, in Italy, give direct or indirect voice to the experiences of the homeless, or of migrants and refugees. See Igiaba Scego, 'Chi resta fuori dai diari degli scrittori in quarantena,' *Internazionale*, 5 April 2020 <https://www.internazionale.it/opinione/igiaba-scego/2020/04/05/scrittori-quarantena-coronavirus> [accessed 5 July 2022].
35. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993).
36. According to theatre critic Eleni Timplalexi, Elleström's argument about stored theatre provides it with a very different modality, that of filmed theatre, and so it circulates in a different way, 'entering the commercial cyber-spatial terrain of influencers, youtubers, and social media'. Eleni Timplalexi, 'Theatre and Performance Go Massively Online During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Implications and Side Effects', *Homo Virtualis*, 3.2 (2020), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12681/homvir.25448>.
37. See 'Playwriting Europe: Fabula Mundi: Beyond Borders?' <http://www.fabulamundi.eu> [accessed 27 September 2022]. For further information, see Margherita Laera, *Playwriting in Europe: Mapping Ecosystems and Practices with Fabulamundi* (London: Routledge, 2022).
38. Mark Zuckerberg, 'Founder's Letter, 2021', *Meta* <https://about.fb.com/news/2021/10/founders-letter/> [accessed 1 November 2021].
39. On 23 April 2020, one of Italy's most time-honoured, traditionalist cultural organizations, Fondazione De Sanctis, teamed up with the Italian Ministries of Education, Foreign Affairs, and International Cooperation, and with the Italian Court of Audit (*Corte dei Conti*) to celebrate World Book Day with a day-long online literary marathon, 'Capolavori della Letteratura', which saw the participation of more than one hundred writers, television personalities, actors, literary critics, and politicians, who read live from their homes.
40. Christian Caliandro, 'La crisi come opportunità: cosa ci sta indicando il coronavirus?', *Art Tribune*, 7 March 2020 <https://www.artribune.com/arti-visive/2020/03/crisi-coronavirus-opportunita/> [accessed 21 September 2022].
41. Mario Gerosa, 'Che fine ha fatto l'arte su Second Life?', *Art Tribune*, 26 March 2021 <https://www.artribune.com/progettazione/new-media/2021/03/mostra-arte-second-life/> [accessed 2 May 2021].
42. In the UK, for instance, there are already plenty of examples of virtual commercial exhibitions which aim to be immersive, such as exhibitions on Van Gogh, e.g. 'Van Gogh: The Immersive Experience' <https://vangoghexpo.com/london/> [accessed 21 September 2022] and on Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, e.g. 'Mexican Geniuses: A Frida & Diego Immersive Experience' <https://mexicangeniuses.com/london/> [accessed 21 September 2022].
43. A great deal has already been written about the metaverse. For an analysis of its possible evolution, see Janna Anderson and Lee Rainie, 'The Metaverse in 2040', *Pew Research Center*, 30 June 2022 <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/06/30/the-metaverse-in-2040/> [accessed 21 September 2022].
44. Mario Gerosa, 'La Divina Commedia ai tempi del COVID-19', *Wired*, 13 January 2021 <https://www.wired.it/play/cultura/2021/01/13/divina-commedia-dante-bruno-cerboni-covid/> [accessed 21 September 2022].
45. The De Carlo Virtual Space can be seen at <https://www.massimodecarlo.com/vspace/> [accessed 21 September 2022].
46. For example, American graphic designer Beeple's epic digital artwork, *Everydays: The First 5,000 Days*, sold in March 2021 for nearly 70 million dollars.

47. The first discussions of post-cinema coincide with the rise of digital cinema in the late 1990s. The seminal work is Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998; repr. 2011), which looks at cinema's relationships with DVD and video. Other key works include Jacques Aumont's short book, *Que rest-t-il du cinéma?* (Paris: Vrin: 2012); Raymond Bellour, *La Querelle des dispositifs: cinéma — installations, expositions* (Paris: POL, 2012); André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion, *The End of Cinema: A Medium in Crisis in the Digital Age* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2015); Francesco Casetti, *The Lumière Galaxy: Seven Key Words for the Cinema to Come* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film*, ed. by Shane Denson and Julia Leyda (Falmer: Reframe Books, 2016); *Post-Cinema: Cinema in the Post-Art Era*, ed. by Dominique Chateau and José Moure (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020). Dudley Andrew's 'Announcing the End of the Film Era', in *Post-Cinema: Cinema in the Post-Art Era*, pp. 45–66, provides an insightful critical overview of the post-cinema debate.
48. Casetti, p. 177.
49. Fisher envisages three possible scenarios post-COVID-19: (1) that there are day and date releases simultaneously at home (with a large premium) and in cinemas; (2) that, if cinema chains fail, they might be bought by the streaming companies, leading to the old studio system of vertical integration, where cinemas run at cost as loss leaders, to showcase film; (3) that there is a return to 'business as usual'. Fisher thinks that scenario 3 is very unlikely. See Darren Paul Fisher, 'Picture This: 3 Possible Endings for Cinema as COVID-19 Pushes it to the Brink', *The Conversation*, 5 October 2020 <https://theconversation.com/picture-this-3-possible-endings-for-cinema-as-COVID-19-pushes-it-to-the-brink-146917> [accessed 21 September 2022].
50. Francois Jost, 'What Kind of Art Is the Cinema of Interactions?', in *Post-Cinema: Cinema in the Post-Art Era*, pp. 159–74.
51. Jost corroborates Sorrentino on this when he notes that we can define television series as either post-television or post-cinema, given that a spectator can decide to space the viewing of episodes, remaining therefore 'within the logic of serial broadcasting' or binge watch a series, which results in a kind of feature film. For Jost, it is the viewer who is in charge, therefore, of defining whether something is post-television or post-cinema.
52. 'Flix' refers to 'flicks', a word which conjures the flickering images of early cinema. See André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion, 'Cinema Hangs Tough', in *Post-Cinema: Cinema in the Post-Art Era*, pp. 67–84.
53. In 2020, architect Claudio Larcher and Valentina Dalla Costa played with the much-celebrated 1952 quote of Ernesto Nathan Rogers that design (or in his words 'progettazione architettonica') worked along a continuum 'dal cucchiaio alla città' [from the spoon to the city], in their volume *Disegnare un cucchiaio per cambiare la città* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2020). This continues to evidence the lure of the polymath and the centrality of an expanded conception of design as pertaining to the macro level of the city alongside the micro one of quotidian practices of the individual.
54. Casetti, p. 16.
55. Steven Jacobs, *Framing Pictures: Film and the Visual Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 151.
56. Raymond Bellour, cited in Jacobs, p. 10.
57. Richard Grusin, 'DVDs, Videogames and the Cinema of Interactions', in *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film*, pp. 65–87.
58. Steve Mentz, *Ocean* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), p. xvii.
59. Grusin.
60. Dudley Andrew, 'Announcing the End of the Film Era', in *Post-cinema: Cinema in the Post-Art Era*, pp. 45–66.
61. Ibid.
62. Peter Greenaway, cited in Jost.
63. Andrew, p. 62.
64. Massimo Riva, *Shadow Plays: Virtual Realities in an Analogue World*, available at <https://shadow-plays.org/> [accessed 21 September 2022], is a highly original and challenging digital book which contains eight interactive and explorable simulations of VR, AR, and XR environments (for example, the Mondo Nuovo device and the magic lantern). Derek Duncan, with the

team of the AHRC-sponsored project, *Transnationalising Modern Languages*, has worked with photographer Mario Badagliacca on a co-created book, *Italy is Out* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), where photographs and texts are intertwined, and together explore issues of migration. See also Alan O'Leary and Dana Renga, 'Teaching Italian Film and Television and Videographic Criticism', *The Italianist*, 40.2 (2020), 296–309, and Emanuela Patti, 'Digital Literacy and Modern Languages: How to Make a Digital Video', *Modern Languages Open*, 1 (2020), 39. Nicola Camerlenghi's fascinating and multilayered historically accurate VR reconstruction of the Roman cathedral Saint Paul's Outside the Walls can be viewed at <https://rcweb.dartmouth.edu/CamerlenghiN/VirtualBasilica/> [accessed 27 September 2022].

65. Andrews, p. 52.
66. Eleni Timplalexi, 'Theatre and Performance Go Massively Online during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Implications and Side Effects', *Homo Virtualis*, 3.2 (2020), 43–54 (p. 45) <https://doi.org/10.12681/homvir.25448>.
67. This term is also used by our close colleague, Emanuela Patti, who has chosen it as the title of a recent monograph that was published as part of the Interdisciplinary Italy project: Emanuela Patti, *Opera aperta: Italian Electronic Literature from the 1960s to the Present* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2022).

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